Monster Life

by TobyDanger

Summary

If you thought being a teenage monster was tricky, being an adult one is a whole new coffin of worms. A series following the lives of Frankie and her friends, their relationships and trials, ten years after their graduation from Monster High. Multiple pairings.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Frankie peered through the small window into the examination room, where the small girl was sitting on a metal table. She was hunched over, arms crossed over her lap, and despite the presence of her mother beside her, she looked terribly alone and afraid. She couldn't really blame her, the bare walls of the hospital's exam rooms weren't the most inviting places to be in, especially when you were injured.

She put on her friendliest smile and entered the room. It was time to cheer this kid up.

"Hello there! You must be Monet, right?"

The little girl glanced up at her and nodded.

Frankie knelt down so her face was level with Monet's. "Well, I'm Doctor Stein. But you can call me Frankie. I'm here to make sure your injuries aren't too bad, so you can get back out and about."

The girl shivered slightly, her green eyes downcast. Sensing her worry, Frankie held out her hands.

"Don't worry, it's nothing bad. I'm just going to check to make sure nothing is seriously sore or broken. I'll be really gentle, I promise. And your mom's here, so if I do something wrong she'll tell me off."

Monet glanced up at her mother, who squeezed her shoulder reassuringly. Finally she gave Frankie a small smile and a nod.

"Okay then." Frankie smiled back. "Monet, could you please raise your arms in front of you?"

The girl did as she asked, holding her arms in front of her.

"Great. And could you do the same with your other arms?"

Another set of arms, attached to her body directly below her upper arms, were raised in the same manner. This time, Frankie noticed the slight grimace on her face.

"Does one of those arms hurt?"
Monet nodded and pointed at her lower right arm.

"Okay... I need to touch it to know where exactly it hurts, okay?"

Very gently, Frankie held Monet's arm and began to examine it, carefully pressing with her fingers to find anything wrong.

"So... your mother says you were playing in your garden when this happened." She spoke as she continued. "Were you doing something fun?"

Monet seemed uneasy about Frankie's examination, after a moment, she spoke. "I was climbing the tree in our garden. Papa said I wasn't supposed to, but I thought I would be alright." She shrugged. "I wasn't going to climb all the way up.."

She glanced at Frankie's arms, studying her seams. "Did you fall over too?"

"Oh no. I'm just stitched together, that's all. I need these or else I fall apart. And the bits of me start to misbehave..",
Frankie waved back, a warm smile on her face. Even though she'd been working at Salem General Hospital for almost three years now, she never tired of the joyous feeling of seeing her patients going home in good health.

"Another happy customer, eh doc?" A voice with a rough Brooklyn accent spoke beside her. Frankie turned to see one of the newer nurses, a young gorgon named Duzer following her gaze.

"That's the idea. It's lucky that her injuries weren't worse though. A majority of monsters with insect genetics tend to suffer from weak bones, even if they're hybrids like she is."

She rolled her shoulders, stiff from fatigue. "Anyway, I'm about to clock off. Is there anything that needs to be taken care off?"

Duzer checked a clipboard. "Nah, we're all good Doc. I gave Mr Goatgruff his antibiotics a while ago, he's reacting to them well, and Mrs Creeper just had her dressings changed. I reckon it's gonna be a quiet night."

"Well, that's good." Frankie pulled off her white coat. "Because I really need to have this night off."

"Ooh, got a hot date?" Duzer inquired, grinning.

"Not quite. I'm going to my high school's Ten year class reunion."

"Really? Doesn't sound like much fun."

Frankie looked at the nurse incredulously. "Are you kidding? I've been charged up for this all week. Meeting all my old friends, learning what's happened to them since graduation... I've not seen many of them for years."

"Well, I hope you have fun, Doc." Duzer shrugged. "My high school reunion sucked. All the boys I had crushes on were either married or had become total douchebags, not to mention all the people shoving all their success in my face."

Frankie looked worried for a moment, but smiled again. "Well, I'm sure it'll be fun. If I know my friends, they're as eager to catch up with everyone as I am. I just hope I get to see them all..."

With that Frankie folded up her jacket, bade Duzer goodbye, and started walking to the staff locker room. She had only a couple of hours before she had to go to Monster High, where the reunion was being held. Enough time to squeeze into her little black dress, put on some makeup and generally look fabulous. There was a skip in her step as she headed up the corridor.

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Ilonka pulled herself up through the skylight, the blustering snow pelting her face. It was times like this that she was grateful she was undead, and thus couldn't feel the cold. A thick coating of snow blanketed the roof of the opera house, but this didn't let this impede her from walking to the air conditioner. Sure enough, the backpack was there, just as her handler had told her. Now all she had to do was get off this roof and get out of the city...

"Ilonka!" His rich voice cut through the cold air, stopping her in her tracks. She turned to see him standing by the skylight, a terrified look on his handsome face.

"Tristian..." She murmured, guilt welling up in her. It was bad enough she had to lie to him, but now she had possibly dragged him into her mess as well.
"Illonka, what's going on? Why were those men chasing you?" He moved closer to her. "Please, tell me!"

She avoided looking into his eyes. "I'm sorry darling... but I have to go."

"Go? Go where?! Please, tell me what's going on!"

She wrapped her arms around him and pressed herself to his chest. "I want to explain... there's so much I want to tell you. But not now. There are hundreds of lives at stake... including yours."

She looked at him with pleading eyes. "I will explain everything... in due time. But for now, you have to hide. These men will kill you if they think you're involved. I'll contact you when I get the chance. Until then..."

She leaned in and gave him the most passionate kiss she could muster, as if it were the last time she would ever kiss him. For all she knew, it very well could be.

"... please wait for me."

She pulled away from him and strapped on the backpack. He watched, stunned and alarmed, as she broke into a run toward the end of the roof. Tristian called out for her to stop, but instead she leaped off the edge.

She yanked at a hidden cord, and the backpack split apart, revealing a set of metallic wings with a compact jet engine attached. The engine roared to life, and she flew off into the night sky, grey exhaust in her wake...

Laura stared at the screen, studying what she just written. It had sounded good in her head, but the image of her elegant vampire character escaping via a jetpack suddenly seemed a little silly.

"Clawd? Do jetpacks actually exist? I mean, could you actually buy one?"

Clawd walked out of the adjoining bathroom, buttoning up his shirt. "I think so. I saw one on TV once, but I don't think you could just go out and buy one from a store."

He glanced over his wife's shoulder to read her text. "I'm pretty sure you can't get one that fits in a backpack though. The real life ones are pretty big."

"I thought so.." She sighed. "This is stupid. A proper spy wouldn't use a jetpack. She'd climb down the side of the building or something... no, that wouldn't work either! Everyone in the skyscraper would see her."

"It's a spy story, babe. I don't think everyone's expecting realism."

"But a lot of spy stuff is realistic these days. Remember that normie movie we rented, Quantum of something...?"

She threw up her hands. "Auugh.. why did I agree to do this story? This spy stuff is totally out of my league!"

Clawd wrapped his arms around her shoulders. "Because you wanted a challenge, and your publisher wanted something a little different. And I thought a story about a sexy vampire spy was pretty cool..."

"Yeah, I'm sure you did.." Laura smirked.
Clawd planted a small kiss on her cheek. "You're gonna be fine. The stuff you've written so far is
great, and the publisher is gonna love the final draft."

He pulled back and grabbed his suit jacket. "But we'd better put Illonka's adventures on hold. We
need to head out if we're gonna get to Monster High in time."

"It's that time already?!!" Laura jumped as she checked her watch. She got up and smoothed out her
dress. "Give me a moment to touch up!"

She rushed to the bathroom to apply some makeup, not letting her lack of reflection in the mirror
slow her down. "Ooh, I can't wait to see everyone again! We have got so much to catch up on.. and
our little announcement."

She poked her head out the door and stared at Clawd. "You haven't told anyone, have you? You
haven't said it by accident?"

"Relax honey." Clawd smiled back. "The only ones who know about this are you and me."

"Great.." Laura sighed. "I really want to surprise the ghouls, and I definitely don't want Spectra
blogging about it to the whole town."

She got excited again as she grabbed a fur shawl to wrap around her shoulders. "I wonder how
they're going to react?"

"Can't be any worse than how our parents reacted." Clawd replied, taking her arm in his.

"Dad wasn't that upset." Laura recalled. "Heck, most of the night he was really happy."

"Yeah sure, when he wasn't glaring at me and willing for my head to explode." Clawd shivered
slightly, memories of Dracula's disconcerting stare playing in his mind.

Laura giggled and snuggled up to him as they walked out of the room. "Well, this night will be
more fun, I'm sure."

In the back room of a small boutique known as House of Fierce, Clawdeen was focused intently on
her sewing machine, stitching together two pieces of fabric as quick as she could without making
the seam look messy. She had very nearly reached the end of the seam when the smart phone
resting on her design table vibrated. Exhaling a huff of irritation, Clawdeen answered the phone,
frowning when she realized who it was.

"Hello again Mr Pyg... yes, everything's ready for the hearing tomorrow... what?" Her eyes
widened as she listened to her client's suggestion.

"No Mr Pyg, we can not sue Mr Bigbad for blowing down your brother's houses... Why? Because
it wasn't his fault... I'm not being biased because we're both werewolves!"

She fought to keep her voice calm and controlled. "It's a simple fact of physics. Your brothers built
their houses with cheap materials and incompetent contractors, that's why they fell down. And as
tough as Bigbad is, not even he can physically knock a house down by blowing at it. Trust me, I
got several little brothers who have tried it and failed."

She rolled her eyes as Mr Pyg continued his rant. "Yes... okay... don't worry, I promise we'll get
everyone a fair settlement... I gotta go now.. see you tomorrow."
She hung up and slammed the phone to the table, a low growl of annoyance rumbling in her throat. Thanks to the call, she wouldn't be able to finish the dress before she had to leave for the reunion. It was times like this that she wondered what lunacy possessed her to practice law in the first place. Surely there were less aggravating ways to supplement her boutique's income. Like trash collecting, or working as Cleo's assistant.

"You alright, love?" A soft, French accented voice spoke. Clawdeen looked up to see Catrine enter. The white-furred werecat wore a set of paint smeared overalls, a clear sign she'd been busy painting in her studio next door.

Clawdeen moved over and embraced her, sighing deeply. "Yeah, just frazzled. I got to get all the Spring Line outfits done by the end of the week, and Mr Pyg's case has really been a pain in the ass."

"Uhh, not that fat fool again." Catrine sighed. "I don't know why you took his case, that Mr Bigbad has the right idea about wanting to kick him out."

"Hey, he's pays well. And he might be a jerk, but he's got a right to build his home on the land he bought from Bigbad." Clawdeen replied. "Still, I'll be glad when we finally get this resolved so I don't have to put up with him anymore."

Catrine kissed her forehead. "Well, let's forget about him. We have to get to the reunion of yours, right?"

"Sure do." Clawdeen stepped back to grab her purse. "Are you sure you really want to come, though? I know these kinds of events aren't your thing...

"It's alright. I have nothing better to do, and I would love to see how our old classmates have fared in the last few years." Catrine sniggered. "Perhaps they have saved the Monster World yet again."

"Wouldn't surprise me." Clawdeen chuckled as she looped her arm around her.

The penthouse office was large, but sparsely furnished. A couple of couches, a large set of storage drawers, and some large pieces of Egyptian artwork displayed on pedestals. It all served to direct attention to the massive, gold plated desk in the center of the room, where the editor and owner of Eternal Ghoul magazine presided over the production of her latest issue.

At the moment she was looking through the final page drafts, scrutinizing every article and picture for anything out of place. So far, everything pleased her. The latest fashion reports, Spectra Vondergeist's gossip column, a showcase of the best getaway spots in Scaris, an article on preventing sexual harassment in the workplace...

It was when she got to the health and beauty pages that Cleo's elegant eyebrows were raised in surprise.

"Tanis!" She called out for her loyal assistant. "You have a boyfriend, right?"

Tanis, a young mummified woman with linen bandages partially wrapped around her face and body, and weaved into her hair, put down the diePad she had been working on and stepped towards the desk. "Yes ma'am?"

Cleo held out a page. "Read this and tell me.. do these tips sound like anything you would do with your boyfriend?"
Tanis quickly scanned the page. Her pale face blushed red as she read a certain paragraph. "N... no way, ma'am! I could never ask him to do these... I don't even think they're physically possible."

"Yes, I thought so..." Cleo frowned. She switched on an intercom on her desk. "Catherine, could you come into my office please?"

Cleo then clasped her hands in front of her, waiting patiently for the writer to appear with a calm expression on her face. Only Tanis looked slightly nervous. She knew what was coming.

Shortly, a blonde leggy succubus named Catherine entered the office, smiling as if expecting good news. "You called, ma'am?"

"Yes Catherine.. sit down." Catherine took a chair, and Cleo pushed the draft of her article toward her. "I just finished reading your article, '25 Amazing Positions to excite your Manster."

"Ooh, I'm so glad!" Catherine giggled. "I worked my butt off to get it finished in time. I think it's one of the best things I've written for the magazine yet."

"Yes..." Cleo spoke dryly. "That said, I think there need to be a few revisions."

"Erm.. like what?"

"Well for starters, I wouldn't title it '25 Amazing Positions to excite your Manster."
"Cleo's eye's narrowed. "I would call it '25 Insipid, Insane and Impossible ways to traumatize your Boyfriend and break your back!'"

Catherine's eyes were wide with shock. "W..what?"

Cleo's voice rose in anger. "Several of these 'positions' of yours are simply variations of things we printed in previous issues, and some of these you've obviously borrowed from other writers! And the new ones you came up with are ridiculous!"

She held up the draft page and pointed at a rather suggestive diagram. "Not even the most flexible shapeshifter could bend themselves into these positions without hurting themselves. And this one! 'Surprise him by lightly whipping him on the butt with a riding crop'?!

She glared at Catherine. "What are you trying to do, make every single one of our readers single?!"

"I... I didn't.."

"I don't know what crummy rag you used to write for before coming here. Probably that sorry waste of pulp the normies call Cosmo. But at *Eternal Ghoul*we hold ourselves to a higher standard! Our readers want real, factual content, something that every monster can relate to and understand. Not this phoney garbage which sounds like something ripped off from an awful romance novel."

Catherine seemed ready to burst into tears as Cleo leaned forward and clasped her hands. Her voice was now even. "However.. I'm in a charitable mood tonight, so I'm giving you a chance to redeem yourself. You have two days until we go to print to rewrite this article, with some proper, factual advice. If its up to scratch, you get to write more articles for us. If not...

She trailed off.. but Catherine got the message loud and clear. She got to her feet, trembling. "Ye.. yes Ma'am. I'll get right on it."

She walked out of the office, sniffling slightly.
"If you don't mind me saying ma'am... that was a bit harsh." Tanis spoke up.

"Call it tough love." Cleo replied simply. "If this encourages her to improve her work, then it'll be worth putting the fear of Ra into her."

"I don't think it's Ra she's afraid of..." Tanis muttered.

"Anyway.." Cleo snapped her fingers. "What's my schedule for tomorrow?"

Tanis checked her diePad. "You have a interview with Michael Booble at eleven, a meeting with the fashion photographers before one, then there's the party for the Egyptian Wing opening at the museum at seven."

Cleo sighed. "Ah, so much to do. I don't know why everyone thinks a person in my position has it so easy."

Tanis rolled her eyes at that.

"Well, I think we're done here. Tanis, you're free to go home. Just tell my driver to have the car ready on your way out, would you?"

"Sure thing ma'am. Going anywhere tonight?"

"Just to my school reunion to meet a few old friends, bask in the adoration of everyone I've ever associated with." Cleo replied gaily.

"So, the usual then?" Tanis sighed. "See you tomorrow ma'am."

Tanis left the office, leaving Cleo alone to gather her thoughts. After a few moments of quiet, she took a deep breath and picked up her phone, selecting a certain number on her speed dial.

"Hello.. yes, it's Miss DeNile... Oh hello Harry! How are you... yes I'm just finishing.. I was just wondering if anything had turned up in the Nefera case..."

Her smile faded as she listened. "Oh, nothing new then. No no, I appreciate your efforts. Please let me know if you discover anything... thank you."

A long sigh escaped her lips as she put down the phone. She looked across her desk at a group of picture frames. Some of her and Deuce, her friends, and most prominently one of her, Nefera and her father, smiling together. The last picture of them together.

Brushing aside her melancholy, she dialed on the phone again, this time calling the Copperhead Restaurant.

The Copperhead was packed with diners, a usual occurrence for a Friday night. With orders coming in thick and fast, the staff were rushing about the kitchen preparing meals, under the close scrutiny of their head chef.

Deuce finished up seasoning two orders of finely seared devilcow steaks, then swiftly moved to a large bubbling pot to take a sip of the soup within.

"This needs a little more mandragora in it." He ordered a nearby chef. He hadn't finished talking before he moved to another chef's station, checking on the cockatrice breasts sizzling on the stove.

"Those look crispy enough, get them ready to go out." He turned to the center prep area, where a
man with three heads was swiftly preparing several meals at once. "Freddie, you got that party order ready yet?"

"Almost done Chef!" "Chef presque terminé!" "Chef casi listo!" Freddie's three heads replied in unison, each in a different language.

Deuce nodded, a pleased smile crossing his face as he observed his kitchen crew working away. They were a pretty tight knit group since the restaurant had opened two years ago, and he could always count on them to get the job done.

Well, most of them anyway. His smile faded when he spotted Edd, one of the young trainee chefs they had brought in recently, standing in a corner groaning on a cell phone instead of watching the steaks he was meant to be grilling.

"Edd! What the hell?!" He bellowed as he stepped over, causing the zombie to jump. "You know you're not meant to be calling people in here! And why aren't you watching the steaks?"

"Urrrrgh..." Edd pointed to his phone.

"I don't care if you have a timer on the phone! You watch them to make sure they cook properly! These were meant to be medium rare, not well done!"

"Errrgh!" Edd half-heartedly apologized.

Deuce's eyes narrowed. "You know, I have had it up to here with your bad attitude pal. If you're not gonna take your job in here seriously, then maybe I should put you somewhere where you'll be more useful."

Edd just shrugged, clearly not worried.

Deuce sighed. "Alright then... hold your arms out."

Confused, Edd extended his arms in front of him. Deuce lowered his rimless shades and hit the zombie with a mild blast of petrifying rays. Edd was instantly encased in stone, a surprised look on his face.

Another trainee chef, a catgirl, ran up to Deuce. "Chef! Your wife's on the phone..."

She trailed off when she noticed the frozen zombie. "Oh my..."

Deuce faced her. "It's okay, it'll wear off by tonight. Could you put him by the door for me? I'll take the call in my office."

Leaving the trainee to drag the petrified Edd out of the kitchen, Deuce headed to his office to grab the phone.

"Hey babe... yeah, everything's fine... I was just about to get ready... Cleo, relax, I got my best suit out. I promise, we'll make a real splash when we enter the party... yeah, I'm not my way, I'll pick you up in thirty minutes.. love you too babe."

Hanging up, Deuce grabbed a garment bag hanging from the back of his chair. Minutes later he emerged from the office wearing a finely cut green suit.

"I'm off to my reunion! Freddie, you're in charge!"

"Have fun!" "Amusez-vous!" "¡Que te diviertas!"
Deuce made his way out the kitchen and through the restaurant. As he exited through the front door, he passed by the petrified Edd, who now wore a sign around his neck proclaiming 'Please leave your coats with me.' An entering patron draped her fur coat across his frozen arms.

New Salem Municipal Airport was fairly quiet as night approached, with only a few flights taking off or pulling in for arrival. One such plane, for Nightmair Airlines, was parked as it's passengers made their departure into the airport.

Only one couple didn't immediately enter the building, instead walking slowly towards the rear of the plane where the cargo hold was being unloaded.

A vampire attendant unloading some bags noticed the two, one a tall zombie whose muscular body seemed too large for the Hawaiian patterned shirt and shorts he wore, the other a petite zombie with blue hair wearing a flower patterned dress who linked arms with him.

"Can I help you?" The attendant spoke.

"Errrgh." Moe pointed at the cargo hold.

"You here for your luggage? You have to pick it up in the arrivals lounge."

"Guuuugh, Errrah." Ghoulia spoke up, holding up her and Moe's passports, as well as some papers.

"You brought a large container, and want to make sure it got here okay?" The attendant repeated, glancing at the passports. "Okay, I guess I can let you stay... give me a moment, I'll bring it out for you."

Ghoulia and Moe stood quietly for several minutes as the attendant searched the cargo hold. Eventually he wheeled out a large plastic pod, the shape of an egg and the size of a small couch.

"Well, here you go." The attendant patted the side of the pod. "Man, this is some souvenir. What's in here anyway? I gotta ask.. customs and all that."

"Errrgh." Ghoulia replied, smiling.

"Some old friends?" The attendant blinked, puzzled.

Suddenly, the pod's lid opened slightly, allowing a hiss of trapped air and several liters of water to escape from the opening and spill onto the tarmac. The attendant nearly fell over in surprise as the lid fully opened, revealing two monsters clad in swimsuits resting inside it, partially submerged in a pool of water.

Lagoona sat up and stretched her arms. "Awww, that feels better. These things are so cramped."

Gil rubbed his stiff legs. "That's the price you pay for getting a submersion pod at the last minute, I guess. Least we didn't dry out during the trip..

Lagoona turned to Ghoulia. "Oh hey. How was your trip love?"

"Uhhhhh," Ghoulia shrugged.

"Yeah, a bit boring. Me and Gil were asleep most of the time." Lagoona and Gil stepped out of the pod, Gil checking on the aluminum collar he wore around his neck. It stored and provided water to his gills, allowing him to breathe without wearing his old glass helmet.
Gil pulled out some waterproof suitcases. "Sweetheart, which one had the towels in it again..."

Moe reached into his carrybag and produced two towels for the aquatic couple to dry off with.

"Thanks bro... so, when does the reunion start again?" Gil asked.

"Guuuagh." Ghoulia pointed at her watch.

"Not long then." Lagoona noted. "We'd better check into the hotel and get ready."

Moe took their suitcases, and the four started walking toward the airport, leaving the stunned attendant to stare at the pod.

"Gosh, I can't wait to see everyone again. There's so much I want to catch up on..." Lagoona gushed.

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The air over the mountain was clear and crisp, with no clouds obscuring the view of the stars. Abbey could have happily stayed atop the cliff all night just to watch them.

But tonight was not that night. Tonight, for the first time in months, she would be making her trip down the mountain, back to Salem and Monster High.

Adjusting her winter coat, She wandered over to her trusty mammoth Shiver, the small baby she had raised now a full grown, massive woolly beast. As Shiver rose to his feet, she checked on the harness securing the saddle to his back.

"You ready to go?" A deep, gruff voice spoke.

She turned to see a huge yeti, powerfully muscular and just as tall as her, standing nearby. Sitting on his shoulder was a small yeti child, clutching his fur jacket.

"Yep." She moved closer to her husband. "You sure you don't want to come?"

Yakov shrugged. "Is fine. Have met your friends already and besides, still have lots of crops to package for sale tomorrow."

Abbey smirked. "So serious. You must learn to let hair down once in while."

Yakov gave a hearty laugh. "Hah, give me some real ale and good food, not that weak stuff those Salem guys drink, and I will show you how I party!"

Abbey smiled and kissed him on the lips, then kissed her son's forehead. "Behave for your papa, alright?"

"Will you come back mama?" The child replied.

"Da, Ivan." She ruffled his messy white hair. "I'll be back in the morning, and we'll all go to the market together."

Ivan hugged her. Happy that her family was well, she turned to Shiver and clambered atop his back. With a command from her, the mighty mammoth began lumbering down the hill. Yakov and Ivan waved to her as she began her descent.

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Salem was relatively crime free, but even a small country town had it's share of vandals, drunks
and troublemakers. And on weekends, they all seemed to be causing disturbances all at once. Hence, the sheriff's office was full of noise as deputies pulled in various offenders and answered calls.

"MRRRROOOOWWWWW!" A large minotaur bellowed as he was led into the main office. "Gimme mah phone call! I'm nae drunk!"

The deputy leading him in sighed. "Horace, you are one drunk, sorry son of a heifer, you know that?"

"I wasnae even doing anything! I was just walking along!"

"Yeah, walking along, screaming obscenities at passerbys.. and I believe you took a piss on some poor shopkeeper's front entrance. You know, people frown on that kind of thing."

He led Horace to the nearby cells. "Now why don't you sit down, sleep it off, and when you wake up I'll have some nice shiny fines for you to pay..."

Horace suddenly bolted forward, breaking free of the deputy's grasp, and spun to face him. Steam flared from his nostrils.

"Ye dinnae tell me what to do, ye ginger bastard!" He charged forward to gore the deputy with his horns.. And stopped abruptly when the deputy's hand suddenly burst into flame.

Heath stared down the drunken bull. "You gonna calm down now? Or am I gonna have to set something on fire? With the amount of booze you've got in you, you'll probably go up like a roman candle."

Horace quivered and help up his hands in surrender. "I'll be good!"

Heath maintained the flame until Horace walked himself into a cell, then blew it out and locked the door. "Thanks for being so cooperative."

"BURNS!" A deep voice boomed behind him. Heath paled and turned to face the huge, hairy form of Sheriff Growler.

"What have I told you about using those flames of yours at headquarters?!"

"I'm sorry Chief! I was just trying to subdue the perp!" Heath pleaded, intimidated by the large werewolf towering over him.

"Yeah, and the last time you used your damn powers to do that, you started a fire fight with two dragonmen and almost burned the whole damn building down!" Growler barked back.

"Hey, that was ages ago! And I didn't know they were gonna fight back with fire breath!" Heath retorted. His resolve was weakened by the steel eyed glare of his boss. He lowered his head. "Sorry."

"Don't be sorry, just don't do it again." Growler replied. "Anyway, you'd better get changed."

Heath blinked. "Changed? For what?"

"For your damn school reunion. You've been goin' on about it all week."

Heath slapped his forehead. "Aw damn, you're right! I gotta suit up!"
He rushed to his desk and hastily scribbled out a arrest report. "Man, I am so pumped for this! All those hot chicks who wouldn't go out with me when I was a kid.. I bet most of them will be scrambling to be with me once they see Heath Burns, former loser is now Heath Burns, badass officer of the peace!"

"Badass? Hah!" Growler laughed. "Word of advice kid, that badge ain't exactly a chick magnet. In fact it tends to scare people off."

"Yeah, well I'm different. I've been cultivating the image of the approachable, charming, yet rugged lawman around town.."

Growler laughed again. "Ha! Rugged?! Kid no offense, but the last thing anyone thinks when they see you is rugged."

Heath scowled. "Huh, you'll see. The future Mrs Burns is probably at that reunion, and I'm gonna meet her!"

He grabbed his coat from a chair. "And if you're lucky, I might give you a wedding invite."

"If by some miracle you do get hitched, I'll eat my hat."

"I'll hold you to that, Chief." Heath smirked as he jogged out the office. "See you tomorrow!"

Growler chuckled as he watched Heath leave. "Good luck kid. You're gonna need it."

After parking her old muscle car, Frankie stepped out and checked herself in the side view mirror. Hair looked good, her make-up was perfect, and her black dress with a blue lightning strike running down the side looked freaky fab.

Well, almost. She frowned as she looked at her midsection. Despite it's best efforts, the dress couldn't quite hide the small potbelly she had developed over the years, or how wide her hips and chest had gotten. She couldn't understand how, despite being on her feet most of the day at work, she put on so much weight. She hoped her friends didn't make too much fun of her size.

As she walked out of the parking lot, she looked up at the towering building of Monster High, and was hit by a wave of nostalgia. The school had hardly changed in ten years, still looking as creepy and mysterious as the day she graduated.

She could still see that day in her mind...

"We did it ghouls! We graduated!"
"I know, it's incredible! I actually have a diploma for the first time in hundreds of years!"
"Yeah... it's great.. real great.."
"What's the matter Frankie?"
"My father got a call.. I've been accepted into the Ingolstadt academy of Monster Medicine"
"Well, congratulations! That's what you were aiming for, your father's old school right?"
"I know, but it means... I have to leave to go to Germany in a few weeks.""

"Oh..."
"I want to be a doctor.. but I don't want to leave here! I love this town, I love you ghouls..."
"For the love of Ra, it's not like we'll disappear the minute you leave. We'll still keep in touch."
"Da, easier than ever nowadays. They still have internet and phones in Germany, no?"
"Yeah... but it won't be the same as being here."
"It won't be the same as before, but we'll still be friends.. we'll just be apart."
"Yeah, and we can always meet up whenever we get the chance."
"You.. you mean that?"
"Sure. I'll spring for the flights to Germany myself."
"We said we'd be best ghoulfriends forever, right? Well, we meant it!"
"You guys... you're amazing. Now I really don't want to go..."
"You better! When we're all rich and famous we'll be coming to the best doctor around for treatment, and that'll be you!"

Frankie smiled at the memory. She might not have been able to stay close to all of her friends, but there were still many she had kept in touch with over the years, and a few who had gotten ever closer since coming back to Salem. She wondered if she'd ever get the chance to meet them all.

"Frankie! Frankie! Over here!" A voice with an unmistakable Romanian accent called out to her. She looked at the school entrance to see Clawdeen, Draculaura, Clawd and Catrine standing by the steps. She broke into a quick step towards them, careful not to break her heels.

Clawdeen hadn't changed much in the ten years, save for completely removing all traces of colouring dye from her hair to maintain a smart appearance for her two jobs. She was dressed in a daringly cut purple and gold dress, no doubt her own design, which clung to her curvier figure. She stood close to Catrine who looked very stylish herself in a Scarisian style grey and purple dress.

Draculaura and Clawd looked a lot different from when they had graduated, though it was understandable given the lifestyle changes they had taken on in the last few years. Laura was now slightly plump, her curves filling out her dark pink victorian-style dress, and Clawd wasn't quite as muscular as before, but he still cut a fine figure in his dark suit.

"Oh it's so good to see you!" Laura cried as she and Clawdeen hugged Frankie simultaneously. "It's been so long!"

"We only saw each other a few days ago, over coffee remember?" Frankie replied.

"I know, but we've been so busy lately, it feels like forever."

"How you been, ghoul?" Clawdeen asked.

"Oh you know, business as usual." Frankie replied. "It's the calm before the storm though. Once summer hits we're bound to get lots of patients coming in with the usual summer aliments. Dried up sea creatures, vampires with heatstroke..."

"Ugh, I know what that's like." Laura sighed.

"I sympathize, it is not easy to work during the summer when you have a coat of fur." Catrine added. She stepped toward Frankie and offered her hand. "Bonjour Frankie, it has been a while."

"It certainly has." Frankie replied, shaking her hand. "I think the last time I saw you was at that charity art auction for the hospital."

"Ah yes, I hope the painting I sold was able to help fund your new ward."

"Yeah, that, plus all those children's face paintings you offered really helped us beat our goal. The guy who bought your painting actually donated it to the ward, so it's hanging up there for all the patients to see."

"That is wonderful to hear." Catrine smiled. "It is a shame I have not had a chance to see all your hard work in person. I have been so busy with my latest works and running my gallery..."

"And helping me with prints for my clothes." Clawdeen finished proudly, taking her hand.
"I merely help with a few atheistic touches, the main designs are all her talent." Catrine interlaced her fingers with Clawdeen's.

Frankie giggled under her breath as she watched Clawdeen blush slightly from Catrine's comment. They were genuinely such a cute couple.

Suddenly, there was a loud roar of a motor engine. Everyone turned to see a red cruiser motorcycle racing up the driveway, slowing to a halt near the group. The rider got off and removed his helmet, revealing a familiar head of flaming red hair.

"Hey hey, Heath's in the house!" Heath cheered as he approached. "Clawd! Looking good!"

"Heath! Good to see you bro." Clawd moved to give Heath a friendly hug.

"Good to see you too!" Heath flashed his best smile at the girls. "And it's really good to see you fine ladies again. Need me to warm you up?"

The girls chuckled and rolled their eyes. Despite the years, Heath's come-ons were as cheesy as ever.

"Watch out man, that's my wife you're hitting on there." Clawd warned jokingly.

"Yeah, and I'm taken too." Clawdeen indicated Catrine, who was glaring at the fire elemental.

"Relax everyone, I ain't out to break your hearts. I know you've all gotten over me, as tough as it was." Heath smirked. "I'm just here to party, have fun and let everyone bask in my general awesomeness."

"Well, I certainly hope this... 'awesomeness' you speak of includes behaving a little better." A refined voice spoke up.

Heath jumped in fright as he realized Headless Headmistress Bloodgood was standing right behind him. Clad in a dark green dress, the head of the school looked as classy as ever.

"Headmistress, it's so good to see you." Frankie spoke.

"Please Doctor Stein, it's just Mrs Bloodgood now, you're not a student here."

"I know, but I can't help it. You're always going to be the Headmistress to me."

"Well tonight, I am merely here to chaperone and catch up with some old friends, so please don't feel the need to be formal." She cast a wry glance at Heath. "I do hope you don't plan to make my job difficult, Mr Burns. I want this night to be enjoyable for everyone."

Heath swallowed nervously. "Er... no problem ma'am!" The girls giggled.

"Well then.." Bloodgood beckoned the girls to follow her. "Tonight is your night, so let's get to the party already. It's in the Hall of Halloween, I'll lead you down there."

The former students followed the Headmistress as she led them inside the building, taking them into one of the long paths through the Catacombs. It took them several minutes before they reached the Hall of Halloween, which had been converted into an all purpose event hall when the girls had graduated.

Frankie was wide eyed as she admired the hall. The Jack-o-Lantern fireplace was in full blaze, and
the walls were decorated with streamers and large, blown up pictures of various students and events from 2013. The head of the reunion committee had certainly done a great job of designing this event... and said head was approaching them right now.

"Ghouls! How delightful to see you!" Cleo held her arms wide as she drew nearer for a hug from her old friends. She looked every inch the woman of power she had become in her shimmering gold dress, decorated with Egyptian symbols. Deuce was by her side, looking smart in his suit as he approached Clawd to shake hands.

"Cleo, this place looks amazing!" Frankie exclaimed as she and the others hugged Cleo.

"Oh, it was no trouble really." Cleo spoke smugly. "The photos were my idea, a nice way to remind everyone of everything we did in that year."

"I see you made sure everyone was reminded of you." Clawdeen spoke dryly, pointing to several photos of Cleo dominating one part of the far wall.

"Well, I was rather remarkable that year.." Cleo fawned. Her friends just rolled their eyes. Clearly Cleo's ego hadn't deflated too much in the last ten years.

"Er.. Anyway, look who made it here!" Cleo gestured toward two familiar friends who were approaching the group with their significant others.

Apart from her blonde hair now cut in a short bob, Lagoona seemed to have hardly changed at all, her fit figure displayed wonderfully in a silk turquoise dress. Next to her, shuffling as elegantly as she could in her red and white dress, was the recently wed Ghoulia Mortavitch.

"Oh ghouls, it's so good to see you again!" Lagoona exclaimed, tears in her eyes. She and Ghoulia hugged the newcomers warmly.

"I know.. it's almost been a year since I last saw you." Frankie replied. "Since you and Gil left for Hawaii."

"Did you just arrive from there?" Laura asked.

Lagoona nodded. "Yep. we got some time off from our research there, but we had a devilfish of a time trying to get a flight out. Luckily, Ghoulia and Moe were returning from their honeymoon, so they offered to let us come along with them."

"Well, we'll certainly want to hear all about your time over there..." Cleo replied, but was interrupted by a loud yell.

"MY FRIENDS! SO GOOD TO SEE YOU!" Before she could react, Frankie felt a pair of strong arms wrap around her and grasp her in a powerful hug, lifting her off the ground. She yelped in surprise before she was put back down.

"Abbey!" She exclaimed, turning to face her. Abbey was a little thicker than before, but she was still as tall and statuesque as ever, and looked fantastic in a dress patterned with black ice crystals. These facts weren't overlooked by Heath, who immediately began preening his hair and freshening his breath with some spray.

"My friends, I've missed you so!" Abbey declared.

"We've missed you too ghoul." Frankie replied. "You look great."

"So do you. Am glad to see some of you have finally put on curves."
Frankie and Laura blushed slightly. "Is it that noticeable?"

Abbey laughed. "Don't be ashamed, you look good!"

"You got that right." Heath sidled up to Abbey, flashing his best grin. "So Abbey, how about we catch up on old times..."

Deuce grasped Heath's shoulder and spun him around. "Hey, let's go talk to Moe and Gil! I bet they've got some stories to tell!" He began dragging Heath away.

"'Dude, what are you doing?' Heath struggled to break free of his grip.

"You know she's married, right?" Deuce hissed at him. He smiled at Cleo. "We're gonna meet with some of the guys, catch up with you later babe!"

Cleo waved good bye as Deuce and Clawd dragged Heath with the, toward the other males. Abbey shook her head. "Heath still not changed much, I see."

"He's actually a pretty good cop. I see him during some of my cases, he really takes the job seriously," Clawdeen spoke. "When he's off duty though.. it's classic Heath all over again."

"I have a feeling he still feels strongly about you.." Laura murmured.

"Well well, look who it is!" A deep Southern accent boomed. Everyone turned to see a familiar red haired ghoul with a scarred face. "Only the craziest bunch of ghouls to ever grace this fine institution."

"Operetta! "Clawdeen exclaimed. "Wow, I haven't seen you in years!"

"Same here! Been too busy running my damn bar to come down here and see you ghouls" She smiled. "Reckon I rushed down here faster than a greased toad when I got the invite." "Well, it's good to see you too." Clawdeen hugged her. "Man, we have so much to catch up on..."

"Well, what y'all waiting for? Let's git a table, grab some booze and start talking! I got a ton of tales to tell."

"And I want to hear them." A soft, whisper like voice spoke up. A glow appeared at their feet, and everyone stepped back to witness Spectra Vondergeist float up through the floor, dressed in a sheer evening dress.

"Spectra!" Laura exclaimed. "Oh, I wish I could hug you, but I'd probably pass right through you."

Spectra chuckled. "That's okay, it's wonderful just to see you all again."

"Still running that gossipy blog of yours?" Lagoona asked.

"Of course, when I'm not writing for Cleo." Spectra replied proudly.

"Uh huh. And I suppose you want to hear about all the embarrassing things we've done in the last ten years to fill your latest post, right?" Frankie spoke, smiling knowingly.

"Why, I would never post personal, potentially juicy stories about you ghouls... honest." Spectra pouted. "Although, I would like to let everyone know how everyone's been doing in the last few years. I've already interviewed several monsters and gotten their stories."
"Ooh, any interesting ones?" Laura asked, eager for gossip.

"Tell you what, let's get a table and I'll tell all... settle down ghouls." Spectra indicated a large round table in the corner. "It's story time."

It took a few minutes for the ghouls to grab some drinks from the bar, during which they ran into a few old acquaintances who stopped to say hello, but eventually they were all crowded around a small table, where Spectra floated overhead while pointing out various former student bodies.

"No way!" Clawdeen exclaimed as Spectra finished her latest bit of gossip. "I cannot believe... not him!"

"See for yourself." Spectra pointed across the hall at Manny Taur, who looked surprisingly dapper in the tuxedo he wore. He was standing next to a tall, muscular gargoyle while he talked to someone, and it was pretty obvious the two were holding hands.

"Isn't that one of the guys from the Granite High SKRM team we beat? Gary something..." Lagoona asked.

Spectra nodded, and Clawdeen shook her head in amazement. "I'll be damned.. the way Manny kept being a jerk to everyone, I would have never imagined he was into guys."

"I think that was the point. He acted that way so no one would ever suspect." Spectra spoke. "But he's completely out in the open about it now, and he's been apologizing to people he pushed around ever since he got here."

"He certainly looks happier." Frankie commented, noticing that Manny didn't have the perpetual scowl he'd worn all through his school year.

"Good for him." Laura said. "It's nice to see that so many people found someone after school. There are so many couples here.." She looked across to see Bram and Gory Devein, the couple lavishly dressed and looking every inch the sophisticated vampire couple. Gory was currently nattering to some other vampires about her pregnancy, occasionally rubbing the swell of her stomach for effect, while Bram watched her proudly.

"And some really unexpected ones too..." Frankie added. She cast her gaze over to none other than Hoodude Voodude, the living cloth doll cutting a surprisingly dashing figure in his stitched together suit. He stood arm in arm with his partner, a rather adorable human sized wooden puppet in an 20's style dress named May O'Gany. The two were talking to Headmistress Bloodgood, occasionally looking at each other adoringly. Frankie smiled, thinking of how Hoodude and May had taken over Mrs Kindergrubber's foster home after she had passed away. She was pleased that the boyfriend she had accidentally created had found happiness after experiencing a lot of bad luck in his life.

It made her think of the other men in her school life. Were Jackson and Holt attending the reunion? She had always regretted how things had ended between them, and had never got the chance to patch things up before he had left Salem.

Maybe she would be able to rekindle their friendship if she got the chance to meet him... them. And after that.. who knew where things could go.

It would be nice to have that feeling of being in a relationship again.

"...and Ivan rode mammoth with his father for first time. He was so happy!" She returned to the conversation Abbey had now started about her family. "Will not be long before he is hunting yak
"Aww, that's so sweet." Lagoona cooed.

Cleo raised an eyebrow. "Isn't he like, four? Isn't that a little young for hunting?"

"Is not unusual. I was hunting jackrabbits before I learn to read." Abbey shrugged.

"That explains a lot." Cleo looked disturbed. "Still, I must commend you Abbey. I thought you were crazy for wanting to go back to the mountains after spending time here, but it seems you've done well for yourself up there."

"Well, always meant to return to village. Wanting to modernize my home and make life better for my people was reason for going to Monster High in first place."

"And who has that been going?"

"Has been slow. My people very resistant to change. But we have internet and phones now to talk to people, a few machines to help with making clothes and food to sell, and more girls are copying modern fashion styles. So, we are doing okay." Abbey spoke proudly. "I am still sad I never became pro snowboarder on the side, but I am happy with how life has turned out."

"Yeah, I know that feeling." Clawdeen said. "I always imagined I'd be famous and owning a huge fashion line with shops all over the world by this time. Now I got one small shop and I do law on the side to help keep it afloat. The most exciting thing I've done this month was pick out new materials and colours for my spring line and help some families get back some money they were cheated out of."

She smiled wistfully. "But you know, I couldn't be happier. I'm making clothes and I'm helping people out. Can't ask for more than that."

"Me too honey." Operetta smiled. "I still remember when I first got signed to DeadHead Records. I thought I was finally gonna be living the life of a rock star."

She frowned. "Instead I spent most of the time being pushed around by yes men tellin' me how to dress, what my songs should sound like, ruining my creativity and sucking the fun out of the whole thing.. is it any wonder my first single only got to number twelve in the charts?"

"I thought it was a great song." Laura consoled.

"Ah, would have been better if I hadn't gone through all that damn rigmarole just to get it released." Operetta shrugged. "Still, least I made some money out of it. Thanks to that I was able to open my bar. Now I can sing what I want, how I want, and my customers keep coming back for more. And that's all I need."

Frankie sighed, resting her head on her hand. "It's funny how things turn out sometimes. You set out for one goal, but you end up with something completely different. And sometimes, that thing is better than you ever expected."

Operetta and Clawdeen nodded in agreement, while Cleo suddenly frowned as she noticed a certain figure. "Speaking of the unexpected.. look who's shown up."

Everyone followed her gaze to see a orange furred werecat, clad in a red evening dress, talking to some female alumni.
"Is that Toralei?" Frankie exclaimed.

"What's she doing here?" Cleo spoke disdainfully. "I thought she finally got expelled our graduating year."

"No, she was just suspended after she beat up that student. She missed the ceremony, but she still graduated." Lagoona recalled.

"I wonder why she's here.. I recall she was never fond of the school." Catrine asked.

"Perhaps planning another of her stupid pranks." Abbey growled.

Laura blinked as she noticed Toralei turn and walk towards their table. "Oh my Goth, she's coming this way! What do we do?"

"Tell her to piss off, what else?" Clawdeen shrugged.

"Come on ghouls, let's be polite." Frankie admonished. "We're adults now, lets act like it."

The ghouls watched Toralei warily as she approached the table. She looked remarkably different from her high school days, her once lithe figure now thicker, her hair longer and thicker, and a slight, weary look in her eyes. Despite that, she still had her familiar smirk on her face as she gazed over the groups.

"Hi there... should have known I'd find you ghouls all together again." She purred.

"Toralei! It's er... so nice to see you." Frankie said lamely.

"Nice to see you too.. though I don't think everyone shares your sentiment." Toralei replied, glancing at everyone's accusing stares.

"Toralei." Cleo said bluntly, hands clasped under her chin. "Must say I'm surprised to see you here."

"I could say the same for you. I figured you'd be too busy being Queen of the World to hang out with ordinary plebs like us."

"For your information, I helped organize this event." Cleo replied smugly. "What reason do you have to be here?"

"I wasn't going to come, but Bloodgood asked me to keep an eye on things, and make sure no one acts like an idiot." Toralei sighed.

Cleo's eyes widened. "Why would Headmistress Bloodgood ask YOU of all people to chaperone?"

"Well, I do work here now. I'm the Clawculus teacher."

Everyone's jaws dropped at that revelation.

"You teach here?!" Clawdeen gasped. "Willingly?"

Toralei just shrugged. "Well yeah. I did pick up a few things from that math camp you sent me to, might as well use them."

She tensed up. "Speaking of which... you remember how that happened?"
Laura scowled. "You mean when you tried to get us expelled so you could become a fearleader again? Yeah, that kinda stuck in our minds."

Toralei took a deep breath. "Well.. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for doing that, and for doing all the other awful crap I did to you."

The group's eyes grew even wider.

"Di.. did we just slip into some bizarre alternate universe, or did she actually apologize to us?" Cleo spat out.

Toralei looked very annoyed. "Really? Is it that much of a stretch to believe I might have matured in the last ten years?"

She glared at their incredulous faces. "I guess so.. sorry to bother you." She turned to walk away.

"Toralei, wait!" Frankie called out, stopping her in her tracks. "We're sorry!"

She turned back to see Frankie's apologetic look. "It's just... we never heard anything about you for years after we left school, and after the way you acted.. we kinda assumed the worst, you know."

The werecat sighed. "Yeah.. guess I can't blame you."

"But if you say you've changed, then we're willing to give you a chance, right guys?" Frankie looked at her friends, who all gave wary nods of agreement. Even Cleo managed a shrug.

"Would you like to join us?"

Toralei seemed hesitant, but she then broke into a smile.

"Ah, why not? I'm kinda curious to know what you losers have been up to."

"Back at you." Frankie grinned. "Take a seat."

"..And then, he started charging at me with a knife! Instinct kicked in. I grabbed his arm and tossed him over my head and onto the ground!" Heath enthusiastically waved his arms as he told another story from his days on Salem's police force. "It was totally epic, like something out of Stalker, Texas Ranger!"

Deuce, Clawd, Moe, and Gil stared at Heath with skeptical and incredulous stares.

"You know, I'm pretty sure that guy could sue you for that.." Clawd spoke.

"Ah no worries!" Heath waved it away. "The guy was selling drugs to teens, no lawyer around here is gonna stick up for him."

"For your sake I hope not..."

Gil shook his head. "I still can't quite believe it. Heath Burns, lawman. How on earth did you convince them to give you the job?"

"Good looks and charm, old buddy!" Heath grinned. "That, and I studied my ass off to pass the test. Plus, Sheriff Growler gave me a chance to work under him. Said he wanted me to make something of my life."
"Can't say I blame him." Clawd smirked. "I recall he was always locking you up for getting rowdy in the streets after too many beers on the weekends. Guess he got tired of you taking up the drunk tank."

"That only happened a few times!" Heath spat back. "I was young and dumb back then, man! But I've totally changed."

"True, you're not young anymore."

"Hah de fricking hah..."

Deuce patted Heath's shoulder. "We're just joking bro. Seriously, we're all proud of you for sticking with it."

Heath rubbed his hair bashfully. "Thanks guys.. that means a lot."

He noticed two attractive females walking by, and put on a sly smirk. "Only thing that could make this night better would be to go home with one of these fine honeys I've seen tonight. Or win back the heart of a certain ice queen..."

"Oh boy.." Clawd huffed.

"Dude, if you're thinking of hooking up with Abbey, forget it." Deuce warned. "Despite what you think, she's happily married to that Yakov guy. And you really don't want to mess with that guy's wife. I've seen him, he's huge."

"I know, I know.." Heath sighed. "Guy can dream though, right?"

"You gotta move on man. It's not healthy to dwell on the past. For all of us." Deuce cringed slightly, recalling how Heath had been a sobbing wreck when he and Abbey had split up just before graduation.

"You're right." Heath nodded. "Somewhere in here is the woman of my dreams, and I'm gonna find her!"

He took a long swig of his drink and started walking towards the dance floor. "I wonder if Twyla is around, she was pretty cute.."

"Hi Heath..." A whispery voice spoke up. Heath turned around, only to see an empty space before him. Suddenly, Twyla and Invisi Billy materialized just inches before him.

"Gah!" He jumped back in fright, flames leaping off his head.

Billy slapped his knee. "Hah! That one never gets old."

Twyla rolled her eyes. "Ugh, do you ever act mature?" She smiled at Heath and the others. "Hey guys, how are you?"

"We're all doing well..." Clawd spoke, noticing how closely together Twyla and Billy stood. "So, did you two come here together?"

Twyla laughed and wrapped her arms around Billy. "We've been dating for two years or so now. Though I suppose you might not have noticed..."

"Yeah, we just moved in together." Billy spoke proudly. "I pretty much owe my entire career to her. If was wasn't for her waking me up when I need to go to a gig, I would have been out of a job"
ages ago."

"I wouldn't need to if you would just get some sleep at regular hours.." Twyla huffed.

"I'm fine, I get enough sleep."

"I'm a boogeyman, honey." Twyla smirked knowingly. "Don't try to argue with us about how sleep works. You'll lose to us every time."

Billy just sighed, knowing she was right. In the background, Heath sighed and reached for another drink.

"Hey Deuce, guess what? We finally got round to having a meal at your restaurant." He spoke to Deuce. "It was fantastic! I never knew you could fry basilisk tongues with butter and chives. Hell, I didn't even know you could eat basilisk tongues before I came to your place."

"Thanks. Always nice to hear from a happy customer." Deuce smiled.

"Think you can squeeze me and Lagoona in?" Gil asked. "The in-flight magazine raved all about your place. I gotta try it."

"Sure thing bro. Though I have to warn you, we don't have a lot of seafood dishes."

"Heh, I could do with a change from seafood. It's practically all we ate in Hawaii."

"Hawaii, eh? On vacation?" Twyla asked.

"No, research. Lagoona and I work for a company called Oceanic Research and Conservation Association. We travel around studying marine life, clean up the coasts and oceans and make sure people keep it that way."

"ORCA? Isn't that run by er.. humans?"

Gil grinned. "Yeah, but when two water monsters who can swim to tremendous depths for several hours without oxygen apply for a research job, they tend to make exceptions."

"Pretty sweet gig though. You must travel a lot."

"That's a plus, sure.." Gil sighed. "But it's a lot of work, and it gets a little disorientating, never staying in one place for too long. Luckily, Lagoona and I might be working at a permanent location in the near future, so you might be seeing a lot more of us."

He faced Clawd. "So, how's the shoe company going?"

"They're not shoes, they're 'bespoke training footwear."

"Aw yeah, that's right! You make those awesome Beasties sneakers nowadays!" Billy exclaimed. "They're the most wanted shoes right now. Everyone and their mom is trying to get a pair."

Clawd rubbed the back of his head sheepishly. "Well, we're not that popular just yet. That's just those crazy sneaker collectors talking..."

Moe suddenly raised his hands and let out a series of groans. Everyone looked at him with surprise.
"Whoa, big announcement? Heath gasped. "What's up?"

"Mooaaaagggghh. Maaagghnnnd!" Moe groaned proudly.

Heath's jaw dropped. "No way! You're opening another branch of your deli in Portland?!"

Billy's face was euphoric. "I... I can finally buy the famous Mortavitch Cheese Brain Steak sandwiches near my home?" He rushed forward and hugged Moe. "I love you man!"

Moe just shrugged.

It was then that Clawd spotted a head of dark hair with blond highlights mingle through the crowd as it approached them. The person stepped forward, revealing a slim man in a yellow trimmed black suit. He adjusted his glasses before speaking.

"Uh, hey guys." He waved nervously.

Clawd did a double take. "Jackson? Is that you?"

"In the flesh." Jackson smiled."It's good to see you guys again, you look great."

"You too bro." Deuce patted Jackson's shoulder. "Man, it's been years since we last saw you. You still studying all that weird chemistry stuff?"

Jackson nodded. "That's more of a side project these days. Lately I've been working in psychology, helping patients get through mental problems." He smiled crookedly. "Something I know a lot about..."

"Good to hear. And how's Holt doing?"

Jackson sighed. "Still rocking with his friends in the music biz. He's calmed down a little since we moved to Screattle... not much, but..." He shrugged. "At least he's not as bad as he used to be."

"Guess you two have got things figured out, huh?" Gil queried.

"We still disagree a lot on things, but at least we're not trying to sabotage each other's life now. It's not perfect, but we get by. Holt said he'd show up later to meet you guys once the music gets a bit more exciting..."

Jackson glanced around the hall. "By the way.. did Frankie show up at all?"

"Yeah, she's here, she went with the other ghouls to catch up." Clawd replied, grinning knowingly at his old friend. "Why do you ask? Looking to spark things up with her again?"

Jackson blushed slightly. "Well, sort of.. we kinda ended on a bad note when we left school.. I need to talk to her about it."

"I know that feeling.." Clawd sighed, a distant, uncomfortable memory of his relationship with Laura after graduation briefly surfacing.

He shook it off, thinking of a much happier memory he needed to relate to his friends. "But before you go, I need to tell you something. All of you guys."

Jackson adjusted his glasses and edged closer, alongside Deuce, Gil and Moe. "What is it?"

Clawd's smile grew even wider. "Moe's not the only one with some big news..."
Operetta walked to the table, a tray full of drinks in her hands. "Alright ghouls, got yer refills!"

She began handing out drinks. "Lemme see, formaldehyde on the rocks, that's Frankie, Black Velvet for Clawdeen, Bathatten for Cleo, Green Lagoon.. Lagoona, White Russian.. Catrine, Bloody Mary for Spectra, Pink Kitty for Tora, and some beers for me and you." She handed a large bottle of Deadweiser to Abbey.

"Skol!" The yeti cheered, taking a large swig.

"I guess this is yours then." Operetta passed a glass of Crypt Cola, the only non alcoholic drink to Laura.

"Ooh, thank you." Laura reached into her purse and produced a small glass vial, containing a red liquid. She poured a small amount of the liquid into her cola, turning it dark red. Toralei's nose caught a scent of the mixture.

"Is that... blood?" She stared wide eyed at the petite vampire. "You drink blood now?!

"Only in small amounts, and not by choice." Laura huffed. "I had a bad case of anemia a few years ago, and my doctor.." She frowned at Frankie, who grinned back. "..pretty much ordered me to get some blood in my system every day. Fortunately, she said I could mix it with some other stuff to mask the taste. Unfortunately, I decided to mix it with milkshakes and smoothies."

She pointed at her curvier hips. "You can guess where they all went."

Toralei shrugged. "Eh, you look better like that."

Laura giggled. "Clawd certainly thinks so..."

"So.." Toralei leaned closer. "You still writing those cheesy romance novels?"

Laura looked offended. "They aren't THAT cheesy!"

"Really?" Toralei raised an eyebrow. "Wasn't your first book some kind of 'You Got Mail' rip-off with vampires and werewolves?"

"Okay, they were a little cliche, but I've gotten better!" Laura pouted. "In fact, I'm writing a new book right now. It's about a vampire who gets inducted into the CIA as it's first monster spy, and sets off on an adventure to stop an evil mastermind from destroying China. There's action, drama, a little bit of romance..

"Huh, that actually sounds pretty cool." Toralei said. "It's not as racy as your other stuff, is it?"

"Not too much."

"Good. Maybe I could get it to read to my kid, she loves that kind of stuff."

"Yeah, it's not too." Laura stopped. "Wait.. did you say..."

"You have a KID?!" Clawdeen exclaimed.

Toralei rolled her eyes. "Uh yeah. Not exactly a big deal. Lots of monsters here have kids now."

"Yeah but you?" Lagoona spoke. "No offense, but we never took you as the nurturing, motherly type."
"True.. but you'd be amazed how your outlook can change when you actually have your own kid."

Toralei took her wallet from her purse and drew out a small photograph, holding it up for the others to see. It depicted her with a small werecat girl, her red hair tied up in multiple pigtails. Both of them were grinning for the camera.

"This is Nekora." She smiled proudly.

"Awww, she's so cute!" Laura squealed.

"Yeah.. sometimes.." Toralei sighed. "Most of the time however, she can be a real terror. She never sits still, she's always getting into mischief.. I dread to think what Felix and Whiska are going through."

"Who?"

"Meowlody and Purrsephone's parents. They let me stay with them and the twins when I was raising Nekora."

Cleo scanned the room. "Where are your cronies anyway?"

"Eh, they're probably with their husbands, bragging about their kids.." Toralei spotted the two werecat twins at the far end, both of them dressed in identical black dresses. They each stood by the side of two tall broad shouldered men with blond hair, also identical to each other.

"Hey, those are those two goons Lilith van Hellscream had follow her around." Lagoona recognized.

"Yep. Fred and Ted Guunderson. They're actually pretty nice guys, they just had to grow out of that whole fratboy stage.." Toralei spoke.

"Oh my Goth, I heard about those two when I started my internship." Frankie spoke up. "It was in the news! Twin sisters who fell for and married twin brothers, and both couples gave birth to triplets! It was amazing.. the chances of that happening are unbelievable."

"I still can't believe it, and I have to babysit those brats on occasion." Toralei huffed. "I'd rather teach my classes for a whole day."

"So, you teach Clawculus here, huh?" Clawdeen probed. "What's that like?"

Toralei shrugged. "Eh, it's a pretty good gig. The pay's alright, and it's always different and interesting."

She smirked evilly. "Plus, I get to boss around thirty annoying teenagers for several hours."

The ghouls all looked at her with worried glances. Toralei laughed it off. "Oh they're not all bad! Some of them are pretty cool kids..."

"But hey, enough about me." She leaned forward to look the ghouls in the eyes. "So what have you guys been up to?"

"Uhhhhh. Errrghh." Ghoulia spoke up.

"Huh, working at the M.A.D Scientific Institute, should have figured.."

"Guuurgh, errgh buugh." Ghoulia continued. Torelei frowned.
You're researching what? That went way over my head."

"Mine too, and I have a medical degree." Frankie agreed.

"Uhh." Ghoulia shrugged.

"And you?" Toralei asked Frankie. "Must be pretty exciting, being a doctor and all."

"It can be. Why one time..." Frankie paused as she tried to think of a particularly interesting event from the last year.

"Erm.. actually... it's been pretty quiet this last year. Nothing really major, just the usual accidents, injuries and surgeries."

She felt dismayed for some reason. She loved her work dearly, so why couldn't she muster up enthusiasm for it right now?

"Guess it's not all action and drama like on TV, huh?" Toralei said.

"True.." Frankie sighed. She felt bad for saying it like that. As if she should have said something more interesting.

"Well, besides those riveting tales..." Cleo spoke dryly. "Things have been really exciting on my end. The magazine has been doing well, subscriptions to the diePad version have gone through the roof. Especially since we did that interview with David and Icktoria Heckham..."

She smiled as she remembered something. "And there was that Goresachi photoshoot in Scaris with the new spring line we shot before anyone else.. ohh, and coverage of the red carpet at the Grimmeys! That was fantastic. Oh! And the after party with One Resurrection!"

"Yeah yeah, we get it." Clawdeen huffed. She'd heard enough about Cleo's exploits with the rich and famous over the last year.

"And that's not all." Cleo's expression turned smug. "In a few months, I'll be heading to Devilia with my team to cover the biggest event of the year."

"What is Devilia?" Abbey asked.

"A small country somewhere is Europe, ruled almost entirely by monsters. The Crown Prince, Demitri Maximov is getting married to Countess Morrigan of Makai. A veritable who's who of the creme de la creme of the upper crust has been invited, including me!"

"How did you get an invite?" Spectra asked.

"What can I say, the Countess is an avid reader." Cleo shrugged. "It's so exciting! I'll be meeting and greeting all the major players in the Monster Federation, hanging out with royalty for the first time in years, and everyone will want to read about it! It will be the crown jewel of my career!"

She sat back, arms held out wide. "Feel free to be jealous."

Clawdeen rolled her eyes. "Of what, your enormous ego?"

"So, how does Deuce feel?" Frankie asked.

"Oh, he's excited. We've haven't gone abroad together in a long time, not since we visited his Aunt Scylla in Greece. Hopefully we'll have some time after the wedding to sightsee, Devilia is said to
have some wonderful romantic spots."

"Sounds great.." Frankie replied, though there was a touch of unease in her voice.

"You're so lucky Cleo." Laura spoke up. "Clawd and I have been so busy with our jobs, we've had no chance to go on a nice vacation together. I mean, we spend a lot of nights together, which is lovely, but a change of scenery wouldn't hurt. I totally want to visit Goremont again..."

"I know what you mean." Clawdeen sighed. "I want to go somewhere with Catrine for a getaway, maybe New Yuck. But with her schedule and all the work I gotta put in for the Spring collection, we've just got little to no time to spare.."

She looked at Lagoona. "Lucky you don't have that problem. You and Gil get to go to all these exotic locations. Skull Shores, Australia, Thailand..."

"Hey, it's not like we laze about in the surf all day!" Lagoona frowned. "We're busy the moment we're sent in. If we're not cleaning up coasts or searching for research specimens, we're writing up reports and holding presentations and courses to educate other people about what we do. Gil and I have had hardly any time for ourselves."

"Sorry.." Clawdeen apologized. "I guess I forgot how much work it takes to look after the planet."

"Yeah... but you know what they say, it doesn't feel like work when it's something you love. All the work Gil and I have done.. I really feel like we've made a difference, even a small one. And it's really helped out relationship. We've become closer these last few years, especially when we do get a chance to have time to ourselves."

She smirked. "Like, we went on a treasure hunting expedition a few weeks back, found a nice little alcove 200 feet below the sea, and well..."

She blushed slightly, letting everyone know exactly what had happened in that alcove. "In the past Gil would have never dared do something like that. He'd be shaking like a jellyfish and worrying about getting eaten. Nowadays..." She giggled.

"Well, it's great that he's broadened his horizons, so to speak." Spectra chuckled.

"Still, it's a shame you have to travel so much. We've really missed having you guys around." Frankie said.

"You won't have to worry about that soon. ORCA are setting up a new research center and marine wildlife sanctuary in Astoria Bay near here, and they've asked us to help set it up and run it. It will be specially designed to look after and research some of the more exotic creatures which swim down there from Gloom Beach."

"Wow, that sounds great."

"Well, you can thank our local governor and her ecology platform for that." Lagoona glanced over to look at Venus McFlytrap, who looked like a completely different monster with her full head of hair and immaculate business suit.

"It's a really great opportunity for us, plus it means we get to spend more time in Salem, closer to our families and you ghouls." She flashed a sad smile. "Traveling around the world is fantastic and all, but we've really missed being able to spend time with the people we love face to face. I mean, look at all the stuff we've missed out on. We weren't there when Clawdeen opened her shop, or when Ivan was born.."
She looked at Ghoulia. "And I'm really stewed that we weren't able to come to your wedding. I saw the video you sent us, you looked beautiful."

"Ehhhh!" Ghoulia smiled.

"Still, I wish I'd been there. It was a fantastic ceremony. In fact..."

Lagoona held out her right hand, which she had been holding clasped with her other one throughout the conversation, to reveal a large ring with a shining white pearl embedded in it.

"I was hoping you could give me a few ideas for my wedding."

Simultaneously her friends all squealed loudly.

"Ohmighoul! Gil proposed!"

"Wow.. took his damn time.."

"By Ra, that ring's gorgeous!"

"Congratulations!"

"Thanks.." Lagoona grinned brightly.

"That is so wonderful Lagoona!" Laura gushed. Her happy expression fell suddenly. "Oh, but.. oh, this puts me in a spot."

"Why? What's up?"

"Well, I had this really amazing news to tell everyone.." Laura looked bashful. "But after hearing about your engagement.. the last thing I want to do is steal your thunder."

Lagoona chuckled. "I think there's enough thunder for all of us to go around. Go on love, tell us your news."

"Okay!" Laura shot to her feet, everyone's eyes on her. A nervous smile plastered her face. "Well.. so, I was feeling a little off while on my last book tour in Screattle, so Clawd and I went to a local doctor there and..

She paused for dramatic effect, before finally bursting out. "I'm pregnant!"

Once again, everyone simultaneously squealed.

"Oh my.. that's wonderful!" Frankie hopped up and hugged her.

"Congratulations!" Lagoona cheered. "How far along are you?"

"Oh thank you.." Laura's eyes were teary. "It was such a surprise, the doctor told me I was about a month or so along. I wasn't even aware until I started feeling a little nauseous."

Clawdeen stepped up to hug her sister-in-law. "I'm so happy for you guys.. but man, now I got another niece or nephew to buy presents for. My family is gonna bankrupt me."

Laura giggled. "We'll try not to spoil her.. or him too much."

"This is joyous news!" Abbey raised her arms. "You know what we must do? We must have
knocking up party!"

"Excuse me?"

"Is tradition is my village. When someone is with child, we throw huge party to celebrate new life." She grabbed Laura's shoulders and pointed towards the bar. "Come, we already have music, we must get more drinks!"

"Sounds like my kind of celebration!" Toralei grinned.

"Erm, I don't think I should be drinking alcohol in my condition.." Laura said.

"No problem. You will drink mead instead! They serve mead here, right?"

"No wait.." Before she could protest, Abbey was carrying her toward the bar, Toralei and Operetta following close behind. The other ghouls chuckled at the sight of the protesting vampire.

Frankie's laughs were quieter than the others though. She was lost in thought, thinking about her life.

Sometime later, the ambient music was replaced by more uptempo dance songs, and many of the guests were on the dance floor, dancing alone or with another. Frankie stood near their table, sipping from a drink as she watched her friends.

Laura and Clawd, Gil and Lagoona, and Ghoulia and Moe were currently jiving away on the dance floor. Abbey sat at the table, happily swigging away at a large jug of beer while singing a loud Yetish shanty with Toralei and Operetta. Clawdeen and Cleo were chatting away about fashion, occasionally laughing at each others jokes. Deuce and Catrine sat near their loves, having a conversation of their own. Spectra floated overhead, typing away on a tablet.

Her friends were all here, together and happy with their lives and each other. So why did she feel so blue?

This strange feeling had come over her ever since the others had told their stories. Was it jealousy? It couldn't be that, she'd never felt happier or prouder of her friends. They had all worked hard to achieve their goals, just as she had.

So why did thinking about her life give her this cold feeling inside?

"Hey Jeckyll!" A loud voice boomed out. She turned to see Manny Taur standing before a lanky man in a suit. She did a double take when she realized it was Jackson. He had actually come!

"I've been looking for you!" Manny boomed, a frown set on his face.

"Y..you have?" Jackson replied nervously. Frankie wondered if she would have to step between them.

"Yeah, to tell you this!" And before Jackson could react, Manny had his broad arms wrapped around him. Tears fell from the minotaur's eyes.

"I'm sorry man! All that crap I put you through in school.. I was going through some bad stuff in my life, and I was always pissed off and.." He sniffled. "Can you ever forgive me??"

"Um.. sure Manny." Jackson replied humbly.
Manny looked delighted, and hugged Jackson once again. "Thanks man! If there's anything I can do to make it up to you, I'm your monster."

Jackson just smiled and gave Manny a warm handshake. The minotaur walked back to his partner, giving Frankie a chance to approach him.

"Jackson.. hi."

Jackson audibly gasped as he looked at her. "Frankie! Wow.. you look incredible."

Frankie felt her cheeks heat up at the compliment. "Thanks.. you look great yourself."

He certainly did. His lanky frame had filled out with a bit of muscle over the years, and he looked quite dashing in his expensive looking suit. But the dorky, yet kind expression on his face was still there, along with those deep blue eyes.

"It's great to see you again. I must admit, I was a little worried you wouldn't show up."

"Hey, I didn't hate the school that much!" Jackson replied. "Sure, this place drove me up the bend sometimes, but some of my best memories are also here."

"Mine too.." She smiled. "A lot of great things happened here.."

"Including the first time we met." Jackson added. Frankie blushed even harder as the memory of their first meeting rushed through her mind. Was he flirting with her?

The music suddenly shifted to a slower R&B tune. She noticed a few couples were closing together for a slow dance, including Draculaura and Clawd.

"Care to dance?" Jackson extended a hand toward her.

"S..sure!"

They stepped towards each other, Jackson taking her hands and leading her in to a gentle shuffle around the dance floor.

Several moments passed in comfortable silence, though Frankie felt herself growing more excited and anxious at the same time. It felt wonderful to be dancing with the man.. men she had cared so much about in school once again, but she knew one of them would have to bring up the past eventually.

"This takes me back.." Jackson spoke softly after a while. "Reminds me of when we danced at the prom."

"Yeah.. that was a wonderful night.." Frankie sighed. "Though it was a shame you had to keep skipping out so Holt could dance with Operetta."

"Yeah.." He frowned in annoyance. "I wouldn't have minded so much if he had at least told me about Operetta. Every time the music switched I kept waking up in her arms instead of yours."

"And boy was she mad when she found out why Holt kept leaving her so you could dance with me." Frankie chuckled.

"I got that when she started flinging drinks at us."

They both laughed at the memory, though Jackson didn't seem quite as amused.

"..the day after wasn't so great though."
Frankie nodded. That had been the day when they had decided to stop dating and remain friends, two weeks before they graduated and Jackson left town for college. It had been an amicable split, with no hurt feelings between them... just a lot of regret.

"I know... I felt so bad about breaking up after that night. We were both so upset." Frankie sighed. "I should have tried harder to keep us together, find a way all three of us could be happy."

Jackson held her shoulders and looked her in the eyes. "Hey, none of it was your fault. It was me... us. After that night, Holt and I realized we would only keep hurting you if we kept trying to sabotage each other's lives. We had to really figure out a way to live together without driving each other up the wall."

"And have you?"

"More or less. First thing we did was agree to a schedule so we could both have time to ourselves, and to promise not to intrude into the others life unless it's important. Fortunately we've got flexible schedules at our jobs, so he can work without dragging me away from my job and visa versa. I do my medical work some days, he produces music during the others. As long as we keep talking to each other and stick to our schedules, we get by alright. And there's also this."

He reached into his pocket and brought out a small vial full of a yellow liquid.

"It took a bit of research into Henry Jekyll's old formulas and our own genetic makeup, but I was able to come up with this. It acts as a sort of inhibitor to... well, whatever the heck in in our blood which makes us able to transform. I can drink it and instantly convert into Holt, or vice versa. We... well, Holt calls it, 'Switcheroo Juice'."

"So now you can switch back and forth without having to rely on music. That's fantastic!" Frankie applauded.

"Yeah, it's handy if we need to switch over in a hurry for whatever reason." Jackson sighed.

"Though sometimes Holt forgets to take some whenever he's hanging out too late with his music industry buddies. The next thing I know, I waking up late for work after he's been up all night."

"He's a producer, surely he has to mingle with people he works with."

"Yeah fine. But did he really need to spend an entire night partying with Catty Noir and her entourage when I needed to hold a presentation in the morning?"

Frankie chuckled again. "Other than that, I guess you guys have got everything sorted out."

"I guess so.." Jackson smiled, and to Frankie it was one of the most heartwarming things she had ever seen. She'd seen Jackson and Holt go through a lot of grief and confusion over their dual nature, Jackson especially. She had tried her hardest to accommodate the both of them during their brief time dating, but ultimately learning to co-exist was something they would have to do themselves.

And they had finally achieved it. And maybe now, she could finally have the relationship they had never had back in high school. If nothing else, it would be nice to truly reconnect with him after so long.

Frankie gulped. It had been a very, very long time since she had asked someone out on a date, and she just prayed she didn't spark out and say something stupid. "Jackson..." She spoke carefully. "I'd love to hear more about what you and Holt have been doing. Would you like to... meet for lunch tomorrow and catch up?"
Jackson's eyes widened. "Oh.. well, sure, I've love to catch up."

Frankie mentally jumped for joy. He said yes!

"But it would have to be another time." Jackson continued.

"Oh?"

"Yes, you see tomorrow I'm..."

It was at that moment that the DJ decided to switch from a r&b song to some loud techno dance beat by Skullex. Monsters took to the dance floor as Jackson covered his ears.

"Ah man! Seriously?!" A flash of flame washed over him, and he was replaced by Holt Hyde, wearing a white version of Jackson's suit.

"Hoo, finally! I get a chance to strut my stuff!" He raised his arms in the air. "Hey everybody! Nice to see y'all! You miss me?!"

A few people clapped and cheered, others just glanced at him, rolled their eyes and went right back to what they were doing.

Holt's face fell. "Huh. Guess I was away longer than I thought."

He turned back to Frankie, his wide grin returning. "Wow.. Frankie Fine, looking even finer than ever."

Frankie blushed a little. "And you're still a big flirt."

"Hey, just calling it like I see it." Holt smiled. "Guess Jackson filled you in on what we've been up to."

"Some of it. He certainly had some tales to tell about your exploits." Frankie replied, humour in her voice.

"Ah, he makes it sound worse than is is." Holt waved off. "I'm in the music biz, those guys love to party. Who am I to say no? Helps me keep the people I work with close. And I only broke from the schedule like, twice."

"It's hard to picture you keeping a schedule at all." Frankie said. "I remember you were late to half your classes."

"Yeah, but then we went to college, and I found out lecturers reallllly frown on that kind of thing. Plus having to share a home with Jackson and working meant having to learn a bit of discipline."

He shrugged. "But hey, I got no complaints. We still argue from time to time, but life is better than ever! We got jobs we love, a sweet apartment and a fine ghoulfriend!"

"I know.. I'm so proud of you guys." Frankie smiled.

Then his words sunk in. "Wait.. ghoulfriend?"

"Oh, didn't Jack say? Sometime after we settled in Screattle we met Clair. You remember Clair, right? From that whole bust up at Halloween?"

She certainly hadn't forgotten Clair, the human who had helped them save the school so long ago.
but she hadn't kept track of her. Clair had left New Salem for college about the same time she had.

"Yeah, we bumped into each other. She runs a small clothes store. We, well Jackson mostly, started hanging out and hey, before we know it, we're dating."

"What.. all three of you?" Frankie spoke, stunned.

Holt looked quite proud. "For sure. It took us a while to figure out a way we could all spend time together, but it's working pretty well so far. And Clair is totally cool with it. She's been really supportive of both of us."

A lewd grin crossed his face. "And she knows how to 'share the love' if you know what I mean."

"Um.. yeah." Frankie said, suddenly feeling uncomfortable.

"But seriously, being with Clair is one of the best things to ever happen to us." Holt looked off in the distance, a wistful look in his eyes. "I think this could be something serious, you know? Like, moving in together serious."

Frankie struggled to answer, a heavy feeling in her heart had suddenly taken hold.

"That's... wonderful. I hope it works out for you."

"Yeah. For both of us."

He looked at her again. "Hey, are you okay? You look a little upset."

Frankie forced back a smile. "Yeah yeah! I'm fine, just thinking."

"You sure?" Holt asked, concerned.

"Yes, really." Frankie covered. "Er, give me a moment, I think I see someone..

She turned away, walking quickly as she could without looking like she was running away. She didn't feel fine at all.

The night went on, with much revelry, camaraderie and dancing spent among the visiting former students. But even creatures of the night could only stay up so long. It was past midnight when the guests begin to file out.

"Goodbye everyone, thanks for coming!" Cleo bade farewell to each monster as they left the hall. "Make sure to catch the next issue of Eternal Ghoul, I'll be covering the reunion in it!"

"Not if I beat you to it." Spectra replied smugly as she floated away. Cleo glared at her.

Deuce approached her, supporting a rather sozzled Heath in his arms. "Hey babe, you mind driving yourself back home? I gotta get Heath back safely, he had a little too much to drink."

"...s'not fair no one wants to date me. Heath slurried unhappily. "I'm an officer of the law, I'm a good catch..."

"If you must." Cleo huffed. "Honestly, this guy is responsible for our safety?"

"Feel sorry for Heath." Abbey commented as she watched Deuce pile Heath into a taxi. "He tried so hard to find date. Never seen anyone hit on so many ghouls before."
Clawdeen rolled her eyes. "The fact he struck out with every single one should have been a hint to quit when he was ahead."

"He was getting pretty desperate near the end." Lagoona chimed in. "He was claiming he'd taken down an entire army of drug dealing demon ninjas."

"Heath like old yak trying to outdo tractor on farm. Needs to stop trying so hard and act like himself more." Abbey sighed. "Foolerly like that reason we broke up in first place."

"Well, maybe he'll learn... one day." Lagoona sighed.

Abbey then walked over to Shiver, the huge mammoth sitting patiently in the parking lot. She clambered up onto his back.

"You need lift back to hotel before I head to mountain?"

Lagoona paled at the sight of the hairy beast. "Er.. thanks love, but I think Gil and I will walk back..."

"This was such a wonderful night." Laura said as she cuddled up against Clawd. "Thanks for throwing this party, Cleo. It was so fangtastic to see everyone again."

"My pleasure. It was delightful to see how everyone was doing after graduation."

"Especially now you know you're doing better than everyone else, right?" Toralei snuck up behind Cleo, smirking.

"Oh, how I've missed that blunt wit of yours." Cleo rolled her eyes.

Toralei checked her watch. "Damn, I gotta get back and put Nekora to bed."

"Wow... scary to think I'll be doing that in a few months." Laura giggled.

"Enjoy those months while you can, shorty. Trust me, raising a kid is no catwalk."

The werecat hailed a taxi. "It was nice to see you ghouls again, seriously."

"Yeah.. it was really great to see you again too." Frankie admitted.

Toralei gave the ghouls a grateful smile as she got into her taxi.

"Man, I still can't believe it." Clawdeen spoke as she watched the taxi drive away. "Who'd have thought Toralei would have become nice? Well, nicer than she usually was."

Catrine wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "Well it happens. People grow up, stuff happens to them, and they change from the experience. I know what it's like, trust me."

Clawdeen looked at her lover curiously. "Oh, and what do you mean by that?"

Catrine looked wary for a moment. "Er... let's just say I was very different when I still lived in Scaris. I doubt you would have recognized me."

"Hmmm." Clawdeen snuggled up against him. "One of these days you have to tell me about this childhood in Scaris."

"Yes.. One day." Catrine replied absently.
"Still, you're quite right." Laura spoke. "We're always changing, even if we think we're not. And before you know it, your life is completely different."

"Yeah... different.." Frankie spoke quietly, lost in thought.

After many warm hugs and promises to meet again to all her ghoulfriends, Frankie returned to her car and drove back to the small single story house she called home. The house was silent as she entered, even her beloved dog Watzit was fast asleep. The lack of noise and activity only served to make the melancholy she felt even worse.

It was times like this she wished her parents are still around. Her father had recently been chosen to be the head of Internal Medicine at Union Hospital, a new hospital on the outskirts of Salem which catered to both monsters and humans. With his new responsibilities, Viktor and his wife Viveka had decided to move to a new home situated nearer the woods, which brought them closer to their respective workplaces. It was the dream home they had always wanted, and Frankie was supportive of their move. But it meant she saw less of them, and it was times like this, when she felt alone and discontent, that she wished they were closer so she could ask for their advice.

She wasn't even sure why she felt like this. She'd had a great time at the reunion, and had felt nothing but pride for her friends when she had heard of how their lives had turned out. But when she thought about how her friend's lives had changed, and how her own life had turned out, she felt this feeling of.. emptiness within her.

Why? She loved her work at Salem General, she had great friends and close family, she.. Surely that wasn't all she had in her life? She poured herself a quick drink of cold formadahyde, then moved to to her bookshelf to pull out a certain tome. It was a large scrapbook containing several photographs taken by her and her friends over the years.

Sitting down on the couch, she began flipping through the pages, glancing at pictures of her and her ghoulfriends at various memorable events from her school days.

The joint Halloween dance with New Salem High, the class president election, the Mashional fearleading competition where they had won for a second year.. She paused when she found a large picture of her and her other ghoulfriends in their graduation robes from ten years ago. Next to it was a picture of the ghouls wishing her goodbye on her move to Germany. More pictures over the page depicted her friends congratulating her on completing her residency, and helping her move into her house. A smile crossed her face as she recalled those days. She had felt so grateful to be able to experience all of those important milestones with her loved ones.

But as she looked at the photos taken after that time, she noticed that they were all about events from her friend's lives. There was the grand opening of Clawdeen’s boutique, the launch party of Cleo`s magazine, the ghouls trip to the Scarier Reef to help Lagoona on her first research trip.. and everything else that had happened afterwards.

There were parties, from Cleo’s lavish celebrity shindigs to intimate cosy dinner parties with Laura and Clawd. There were big events like Operetta performing her music live in town, Ghoulia unveiling her latest invention for translating zombie speech, and traveling to the mountains to see Abbey and her newborn son.

There were weddings. Cleo and Deuce`s ridiculously extravagant ceremony, Laura and Clawd’s wedding at her father's summer castle in Goremont, Abbey's traditional wedding in the mountains where everyone had to wear yak fur coats, Hoodude and May's ceremony where she had attended as Mother of the Groom, and of course, Ghoulia and Moe's recent wedding.
And tonight her friends had revealed more happy events in their lives, with Laura's pregnancy and the revelation that Toralei was a mother forefront in her mind. But the more she thought about it, the more she realized that was the problem.

Everyone had such amazing, exciting things happening to them. Family, relationships, careers...

Except her.

Ever since she had finished her residency and become a full doctor, working in medicine had become her whole life. Most of her time was spent at the hospital managing her patients or writing up journals and essays. Aside from days off and spending what free time she had with her ghoulfriends, her personal life was virtually nonexistent.

She sat down, trembling as her mind absorbed this realization. She loved her job. She loved helping people in need, and couldn't imagine doing anything else. But what had she sacrificed in the process? Everyone around her was moving to to new things, starting families.

She didn't have anything like that. Not even a relationship with someone. The last time she had been on a date was with some gargoyle from university she could barely remember. After that, relationships had gone out the window once she returned to Salem.

She sighed miserably. The only true relationships she had ever had where her dates with Jackson and Holt, and that brief infatuation with Andy Beast. Sure, they hadn't been perfect, but those times spent with those boys were among the happiest she has ever had.

And now Jackson and Holt were with Clair, and Andy hadn't been seen in years, not since he had left Salem to discover his missing past. What chance did she have of ever experiencing a relationship like that again?

A part of her knew it wasn't necessary. She had a good life, she didn't need a man by the side to complete it. But she did want someone, she realized. Someone to come home to, someone to spend her days with, someone to teach and learn from. Not just a friend or parent.. someone closer than that.

And now it seemed she'd missed her chance to have what everyone else had.

A sense of crushing loneliness came over her, and she felt tears falling from her eyes. She wasn't sure how long she spent just sitting there, quietly sobbing, but it felt like forever. She felt so numb, the prospect of being alone more frightening than any of the threats she had encountered in her adventures at school.

Eventually, after what felt like an eternity in the dark, she found the strength to pick up her scrapbook and stand up. She felt tired, and since she had arranged to work a late shift tomorrow she could sleep in. Maybe a good, long sleep and power recharge would improve her mood. She doubted it though, things would still be the same when she awoke.

She moved back to the bookshelf to replace the scrapbook, wiping her eyes with a free hand. As she did, her gaze came upon the rest of her bookshelf, specifically the books next to the space where the scrapbook lived.

They were mostly large medical books, including a couple of large volumes dedicated to the upkeep of individual limbs. She look at them, then back at at scrapbook, thinking of the pictures of her friends and their new lives.
And then suddenly, it hit her.


It was at once the craziest thing she had ever thought, and yet it was also the most logical solution to her problem. As she rolled it over in her head, the more it seemed to make sense. It was something she had never considered wanting before, but the more she thought about it, the more she wanted it.

She shook her head, letting rationality take hold. She wasn't serious, right? There was no way she could actually do this? Surely the level of skill involved, not to mention the time and money needed, and the investment needed afterwards.. could she really do it?

Curiosity gripped her. There was only one way to find out.

She pulled out some medical books and dropped them on her desk, pausing to switch on her laptop before returning to grab a couple more. As she flipped through one tome to find an article on organ transplants, she moved to a cupboard to find some old bills..

She went back and forth like this for some time, until she was finally sat before the laptop, surrounded by dozens of books, magazines and slips of paper.

Medical journals describing methods for attaching and harvesting organs and limbs. Bills and receipts for all her recent expenses and how they affected her income. Issues of Good Tombkeeping open on articles about new families. Books on psychology and pediatrics.

And two large, leather bound journals, considered two of the most priceless items owned by the Stein family, and entrusted to her by her father when she left for her studies in Germany so long ago.

One was an old book, its pages yellowed and fragile with age, containing the original notes, theories and diagrams written by her grandfather Victor Frankenstein when he had begun creating her father.

The other book was far newer, and was filled from start to finish with all of the research and descriptions her father had written when he and her mother had created her.

She studied all of this information, glancing from one article to the next, studying facts and copying them down on a spreadsheet on her laptop, which had browser windows open to even more articles. Numbers and knowledge were all compared, added and subtracted, reasoned and compromised.

Until finally, almost at the crack of dawn, she came to a conclusion.

She could do it.

It would take a lot of time and resources, but she had enough money in the bank to afford the needed items, and she could negotiate with Salem General to change around her shifts to give her enough time during the day. It would take a long time to complete, months at most, and she would need to find a large space to put everything in...

But she could actually do it.

And she wanted to do it. More than anything she had ever wanted in her life.

For the first time that night, a bright smile crossed her face. She felt giddy and excited, the prospect of the work ahead of her, and the wonderful result it would bring lifting her up.
She could hardly wait to begin.

Sleep beckoned however, and after taking a few minutes to hug Watzit and take him for a walk, she headed to bed. Her happy smile remained as she drifted off into a peaceful sleep.

A heavy curtain of rain was falling over the city of Fanghai, the dark clouds blocking much of the light and casting a gloomy grey pallor on the usually vibrant streets.

Such days were both a blessing and a curse for Jinafire. While the rainfall and general quiet atmosphere provided a tranquil environment for contemplation or creating a new piece of art, it was annoying that she could not take her students out onto the temple's large courtyard for a calligraphy lesson, or practice her martial arts. Such activities always felt better when you could do it in the fresh air of the mountains overlooking the city.

She refocused her attention to the small clay statue she was working on, breathing out a thin jet of flame from her mouth to more accurately shape the soft material. She cut the flame off when she heard a soft knocking at the door.

"Please enter."

The door slid open, and a young dragonman entered, kneeling respectfully before her.

"Master Long, I apologize for interrupting you."

"It's quite alright. What's troubling you Qui-lang?"

"Well, I don't want to sound like a nuisance.." Qui-lang took a breath. "But you have to talk to that foreigner. He's driving us crazy."

"Hmm?" Jinafire raised an eyebrow. She knew of the person Qui-lang spoke off. He was a traveller who had journeyed long and far across several countries, and had sought refuge after finding himself in Fanghai with no money or place to stay. Jinafire was happy to let him stay in one of the temple's spare rooms, and he was eager to repay her kindness by helping out with the various odd jobs and repairs the temple needed.

"I appreciate all the help he's given us, but lately he's been fixing stuff which didn't need to be fixed." Qui-lang continued. "The day before last, he was scrubbing the walls of the calligraphy classroom, even though we had cleaned it already. Then he rearranged every single tool in the metallurgy room. It took us ages to find everything we needed. Last night he came in at the dead of night to do all our laundry. And right now he's outside, banging away on the roof of our dorm to fix some tiles."

"In this weather?" Jinafire was surprised. She wouldn't even make her worst behaved student perform labour on a night like this.

"None of us can concentrate with all this racket he's making. I'm worried he's either going to hurt himself, or someone is going to snap and take it out on him."

Jinafire nodded in agreement. While she respected their guest's work ethic, this need to keep busy seemed to be a symptom of something else.

"I shall certainly talk to him about it. Thank you for bringing it to my attention."
She bowed to Qui-lang and exited the room, pausing to grab an umbrella from a closet before she stepped outside the cozy confines of the temple into the downpour outside.

She only had to walk across the courtyard to find their guest perched on a ladder outside the student's dormitory, hammering away at the rooftiles seemingly unperturbed by the rain.

He was a tall monster, the raincoat he wore doing little to hide his broad shoulders and muscular arms. As he noticed her presence, he turned his head to glance at her, revealing a handsome face framed with a deep purple beard, and two large antlers protruding from the top of his head.

"Master Long. Can I help you?" He asked politely.

"I'm curious as to why you're out here in this dreadful weather."

"Oh! Well, I noticed a few tiles were loose, and I thought I'd better replace them before they slipped off. I'm sorry, should I have cleared it with you first?"

"No, I'm glad you spotted it Andy. Though, you didn't have to do it right now. You could have waited until this weather passed."

Andy rubbed his head sheepishly. "Well, I thought it was best to get it fixed as soon as possible, and I didn't have anything else to do."

"Yes, I gathered." She replied dryly. "Andy, you are our guest here, not our servant. I do appreciate you going to all this trouble for us, but there is really no need to do so."

"I just want to show my gratitude for letting me stay here."

"Is that the only reason?" Jinafire frowned. "This constant need to find something to do.. Is there something troubling you?"

Andy tried to reply, but he could think of no passable answer, and looked at her with a forlorn expression.

"Would you like to talk about it?"

Moments later they were sat in Jinafire's study, Andy gratefully sipping from a cup of hot green tea.

"It's just..." Andy took a deep breath. "For a while now, I've been unsure as to what I'm meant to do with my life. I left school and set out to find out more about myself. I wanted to find out who I was, if I had any family, if there were more monsters like me. And so I started traveling."

He stared out of the window. "It's been ten years since then. I've traveled to virtually every country in the Monster Federation, and a few places monsters don't normally go. I've seen some amazing sights, met some great people and had a few adventures. But now.. I don't know where to go from here."

He sighed. "I haven't found any leads about what kind of monster I am for ages. I still don't know about any other family I might have. And lately, I've been thinking that I could live without knowing about my past. That I could stop looking, and I would have no regrets about it. But without that driving me on, what am I meant to do?"

"You feel lost." Jinafire spoke.

"Huh... that sounds about right." Andy huffed. "I just want to find something to live my life for. 
Not just traveling around. I want something... meaningful, you know. To do more than just sightseeing and meeting people only to leave them to go somewhere else. But I just... I just don't know where to go, or even what I'm looking for."

There was silence, save for the patter of the rain outside. Andy continued staring out the window, as if hoping to divine an answer from the falling water.

"My grandfather once told me this." Jinafire spoke up. "Even the highest birds in the sky must eventually come down to their roosts to rest."

Andy's brows furrowed. "Er.. I'm not sure what that means."

"You have spent most of your life on a journey, seeking out new experiences and exploring as much of this world as possible. It is a noble pursuit, and it has taught you many things. But even the most verdant traveller cannot keep walking through the world, merely observing. A time comes when we must plant our feet, become a part of the world around us, and share our being with the people around us, especially those we care about." Jinafire explained. "Perhaps, the time has come to find a place you can call home."

"Home..." Andy looked thoughtful. "That's a word I haven't thought about in a while... but you might be right. I like travelling, but it gets pretty lonely going from place to place. I haven't really gotten close to anyone in a long time... though how do I find somewhere to call home?"

"Well, you are always welcome to make your home here."

Andy shook his head. "No disrespect Master, but I don't think a life of quiet meditation is one for me."

Jinafire merely smiled. "It is alright, our way is not the path for everyone."

"Then, what do you think I should go?"

"Only you can answer that question, Andy. But if you are having trouble finding that direction, I know of a way which may help."

Andy nodded his assent. Jinafire moved to a drawer in the corner of the room used to store her art supplies, and took out a small lump of clay.

"I want you to close your eyes, and mold this into something."

"Um.. okay. Anything in particular?"

"Don't think about what to make. Don't concentrate on moving your hands. You must create this object not with your mind, but with your heart."

"My... heart?"

Jinafire nodded. "Think about every experience you have had, everything you have seen, heard and felt in your life. Those memories shape and define us. Let those memories you hold in your heart guide you..."

"Okay..." Andy murmured. He wasn't quite sure how this would help, but it was worth a shot.

He closed his eyes and fell silent, blocking out as much outside noise as he could. Moments passed until only the sound of his breathing could be heard.
In his mind's eye he could see the various places he had visited in his travels. Exploring the streets of New Yuck, scaling the mountains of the Grimilayas, helping with relief efforts for struggling villages in Africa, witnessing the Day of the Dead in Mexico. He had met dozens of monsters in his journey. Families, fellow travellers, locals with a wealth of life stories.

But among all of the places he could remember, there was one place which kept popping back to the forefront. The first place he had visited, the second place he had called home after Skull Shores.

It was only a small town, but it had given him so much. He had received hope that he could live a normal life, a chance to make something of himself, and friends who had treated him as an equal for the first time in his life.

And there had been one in particular, a ghoul with incredible beauty both inside and out. Who had opened her heart and home to him, spurring him to finally leave that cursed island and live his life.

He thought of her sometimes, but now it seemed the memories were stronger than ever. The first time they had gone on a date. The joy of spending time with her as they studied together. The guilt he had felt when he had left on his travels with only a brief goodbye.

He'd left because he felt the town was too small, and offered no clues to his past. But now he wanted to see that town... and that ghoul again, more than ever.

"Do you have it?" Jinafire's voice whispered.

The darkness faded as he opened his eyes, revealing Jinafire staring at him with a triumphant expression. She indicated the clay in his hands. He looked down at it with surprise, he could barely remember his hands molding it at all.

It was crude and misshapen, but he could recognize the shape.
It was the shape of a steel bolt.

A smile crossed his face as he realized what this meant.

He looked back up at Jinafire. "Master Long, are there any newspapers with classified ads around here?"

"I'm certain one of the students would have one. Why do you ask?"

"I think I know where I'm meant to go." He stood up. "But if I'm going to get there, I'm going to need some money for the trip... and for a place to stay."

He bowed respectfully. "Thank you Master."

Jinafire smiled. "I wish you the best of luck."

Andy stepped out, walking back through the courtyard on his way to the student's rooms, back out in the rain. He barely noticed it, his mind focused on this new goal he had set for himself.

It would take some time, but he would return to Salem, and see Frankie again.

END OF CHAPTER ONE
1: Apologies to any fans of certain pairings, but not all pairings as presented in the webisodes/movies will be present in this story. Realistically, not every couple who met in high school would still be together several years down the line.

2: There are a few mentions of characters from other monster based cartoons/movies in this chapter and future chapters. Can you spot them.
Chapter Summary

What did happen to the students of Monster High ten years after graduation? Spectra reveals all!

Monster Life

By Toby Danger

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Chapter 2: The Graduates

Greetings Ghouls and Guys. Hope you all had a fun weekend. Mine was spent delving into the past and looking to the future as I attended the Class of 2013 Reunion held at Monster High.

Being my graduating year, I still have fond memories of the many adventures, disasters and stories which occurred during that time. I even got to cover some of them in the earliest incarnation of this blog. In all of these events, I got to meet an amazing bunch of monsters.

Some become close friends and still are to this day, some are a bit more distant, and some were simply intolerable, but that's a different story. Meeting all of these students, now grown up and living their own lives, some with children of their own, it was amazing to hear about how much their lives have changed in the last ten years.

For any of the Class of 2013 wondering what happened to their friends, or missed someone at the reunion, allow me to fill you in on where many of Monster High’s most well known students ended up.

One of the most infamous students was Frankie Stein, the daughter of Salem's top local medical professional Dr Stein. Despite entering school at the tender age of fifteen days, Frankie nevertheless threw herself into the student life, getting involved in many activities such as fearleading, and somehow getting mixed up in major events like the great Halloween revival of 2012 and the first all-female Skulltimate Roller Maze team. Frankie’s determination and courage served her well in her adult years, as she followed in her parent's footsteps and became a doctor herself, graduating from the Ingolstadt Academy of Monster Medicine. Taking over her father's position at Salem General Hospital after he departed to run a brand new clinic for humans and monsters, Frankie has been taking care of Salem's sick and wounded for three years now, and many happy patients attest to her lovely bedside manner and brilliant surgical skills.

Frankie checked the chart Nurse Duzer had given her. Her patient was a young vampire (well, young by vampire standards, being 100 years old) who had lost control of his motorcycle and taken a spill into some roadside cones. While an infusion of blood had helped him recover from his skin...
wounds, there was one injury that needed particular care...

"Good morning Mr Stoker."

The pale, leather clad vampire smirked at her. "Eyyy, I told you to call me Vinnie, doc. I can't stand that 'Mr' stuff, makes me sound like my old man."

Frankie chuckled. "Alright, Vinnie. Your wounds are healing up nicely, but I want to make sure your wing is healing properly. Have you been resting it like I asked?"

"Sure thing." Vinnie raised his arm to reveal a thin membrane of skin, much like a bat's wing, attached to his the underside of his arms. A row of stitches ran down one wing.

"I've been changing the dressing regularly, like you said."

Frankie leaned in and examined the wing gently. "Yes, it's looking good. Another week of rest, and I think you'll be able to use it again."

"Sounds great doc." He flashed a toothy smile at her. "Kind of a shame though. I'm gonna miss visiting you for all these checkups..."

"Well Ah'm glad!" A voice with a Southern accent cried out. Frankie turned to see Vinnie's wife, a green skinned banshee with long dark hair glaring angrily at Vinnie. "Ah'm gettin' mighty sick of you dodging out of the chores!"

"Whoa, Blanche, baby!" Vinnie raised his hands. "You know I gotta rest the wing.."

"Yeah, the wing. Your arm's just fine! Ain't nothing stopping you from helping with the dishes! And you need to clear those dirty bike parts out of the living room..."

Vinnie looked even paler than usual as he withstood his wife's rant. Frankie smiled to herself. There was never a dull moment in this job.

Despite being one of the shortest members of the student body, Laura Dracula, aka Draculaura, was undoubtedly one of the most eager to be heard, renowned for her outgoing personality, occasional crybaby moments and complete rejection of traditional vampire tropes. Shortly after graduating, Laura decided to expand upon her hobby of writing stories and began publishing her work in teen magazines. But it was her first romance novel, Under the Crimson Moon, which really launched her career into the stratosphere. Today, she is a hugely successful author with several books in her name, including stories for teens and adults alike, and with several published articles in magazines. Also, after a rather tumultuous relationship, she married her first true love, Clawd Wolf.

Speaking of Clawd, the legendary captain of the football team who helped both the football and casketball teams to glory in the regional championships, was tipped to become a great sports success after he was accepted into the National Casketball League team the Washington Wraiths. But the dream was cut short after only a year when he was injured in a terrible bus accident. Clawd turned disaster into success though, using the time during his recuperation to start up a company designing special sports shoes for different monster species. Today, 'Beastie' shoes are one of the most popular new brands trending today. Time away from sports also helped him rekindle his romance with Draculaura. The two are still happily married, and expecting the birth of their first child.

Clawd smiled as he made the final pencil stroke on the picture before him. With all of the work
involved with the business end of Beastie Shoes, it was nice that he had a chance to design something once again. He gathered up his sketches, eager to show them to Laura. He found his wife in the study, frantically typing on her laptop with her eyes locked on the screen in fierce determination. Several bottles of sugary cola littered her desk.

"Hey sweetie. I got something to show you..."

"Can it wait?!" She snapped at him, glancing angrily at him for a moment. Her expression softened. "Oh I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap. I've just got so much work to do before the end of next week."

"Is this about 'Illohnka the Dark Widow'?"

"No, that's almost finished. I've got to write three short stories, two articles for the Monster Now! blog, and I have to edit a script for that TV show 'Beverly Hills Monsters'.

Clawd raised an eyebrow. "Why all the extra gigs? You don't normally do these things on the side."

"Duh, because we have a baby on the way!" Laura sounded strained. "We need to sort out a nursery, and toys and clothes, and a college fund... do you know how much college will cost in eighteen years? It's a lot!"

Clawd wrapped his arm around her shoulders. "Hey hey, I get it. But you're not doing yourself or the kid any favours by burning yourself out like this. You need to relax a little. You don't have to do everything all at once."

"I know, I know." Laura huffed. "But I can't calm down. There's so much to do..."

She blinked as Clawd held up a sheet of paper before her. It was a picture of a squat, tiny sneaker, patterned with different coloured stripes.

"What's this?"

"Well I got to thinking, we've never produced shoes for children, so I came up with some ideas I thought our kid might like. What do you think?"

Laura's eyes grew wide and seemed to sparkle. "Oooh, that is utterly adorable! I can picture her walking around in them right now! So cute!"

She looked up at him hopefully. "Do you have any more designs?"

Clawd grinned. "I'll show them to you, but only if you take a break."

"Oh fine..." Laura got up, rubbing her slight belly. "You worry too much sometimes, you know that?"

Clawd held her close to his side. "I'm going to be a dad. I think it's my job to worry."

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When it came to fashion, no one knew the trends better than Clawdeen Wolf. Her amazing outfits and fashion savvy ensures her reign as the most stylish student in school right up to graduation. But after a certain incident in Scaris, she found a new passion for the law, and a desire to help those in need. Shortly after graduating from college with degrees in business, Clawdeen achieved her dream of starting her own fashion line. Her boutique the House of Fierce is hugely popular
with the locals and fashion fans from around the world. When she's not creating the coolest fashion around, she can also be seen at the local courthouse, taking on small court cases for her local community.

**Catrine de Mew** transferred into Monster High from Scaris during her junior year, but wasted no time in bringing some of her artistic flair to the halls. She could often be seen camped out in the art room, or sat in the courtyard, creating dazzling portraits and incredibly detailed sketches and landscapes, many of which won several local contests. While she returned to Scaris after graduation, she has recently moved back to Salem, where she runs a small art gallery, giving local artists a place to display and sell their work. She still creates her own artwork, and seems to have found a new muse in the form of Clawdeen Wolf.

Clawdeen stepped back and looked over the dress her model was currently wearing. She carefully studied the patterns and lines she had drawn on as a guide for stitching later. This particular style of dress wasn't her area of expertise, but she had been requested to make the dress along with a matching tuxedo for a certain couple of friends, and she was determined to make sure it was as perfect as possible.

"Sacre Vert, is this going to take much longer?" Catrine whined. "My arms are getting stiff."

"Hey, hold still. You're gonna crease it up." Clawdeen spoke, frowning. Maybe asking Catrine to act as her mannequin wasn't the best idea. But she needed a female figure a similar size to Lagoona to make sure the dress fit right.

"Besides, you offered to volunteer. You got no right to complain." She picked up a needle and thread and began threading some stitches onto the sleeves.

"I know, but you never said it was going to take this long!"

"Hey, perfection can't be rushed. Besides, these outfits are for Lagoona and Gil. I want them to look nothing less than fabulous when they dance at their wedding reception."

"Alright, alright.." Catrine huffed. "Just do it before I lose all the feeling below my neck, okay?"

Clawdeen smiled sultrily, and ran a finger down Catrine's chest. "Aw, poor baby... maybe once we're done here, I'll give you a rub down..." She leaned in closer "...loosen up aaall that tension."

"Oooh, I'd love that..."Catrine grinned, craning her head forward for a quick kiss.

Clawdeen smirked and pulled back. "But first, I got a lot of stitching to do, so don't move!" She resumed placing stitches on the dress' sleeves.

Catrine sighed in frustration. "You are an evil woman, do you know that?"

Clawdeen sniggered. "Just keeping you on your toes, baby."

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*The captain of Monster High’s swim team and a fiercely devoted surfer and sea life enthusiast, Lagoona Blue seemed destined to a life in the water. After graduating from San Die-ego University, Lagoona set out on her quest to help improve the oceans, working for several volunteer groups. She was eventually picked up by the Oceanic Research and Conversation Association for her deep sea diving skills and knowledge of the stranger creatures in the Ocean. She can often be found traveling to research sites all over the world, but luckily she's not alone.*

*One of the swim team’s top athletes, Gil Webber shared a close relationship with Lagoona, though*
they were forced to put in on hold when the two went to separate colleges. Gil had been expected to settle into his family’s business, but a huge fight with his parents resulted in him leaving the state and taking up a different career with an oceanic salvage company. His diving skills and unexpected talent with mechanical devices made him a rising star in his field, and he was eventually hired by ORCA, where he was reunited with Lagoona. The two have been working together ever since, and are planning to finally tie the knot at the end of the summer.

Gil looked around the underwater cavern, the small lamp strapped to his head offering the only light in this long forgotten place. All around him were barren walls of rock, jagged stalactites covering the ceiling and piles of junk and debris resting on the seabed below him. It was incredibly eerie, and if Lagoona wasn't swimming alongside him, he would have probably hightailed it out of there ages ago.

But they had a job to do, and there was no backing out now.

He looked over at Lagoona, who nodded at him before she swam down to the seabed, circling around the junk on the far side. He followed suit, covering the rest of the debris. He looked over everything carefully, pointing his light to make sure nothing was missed. Having done this kind of thing for most of his life as a salvager, this was second nature to him.

He suddenly spotted it. A large wooden chest with ornate carvings on the lid, almost buried under a pile of sand and other wooden boxes. He signaled for Lagoona to join him.

Together, the two grasped the handles and lifted it, swimming in tandem to carry it towards the exit of the cavern. Moments later, they were out and carrying the chest towards the surface of the water.

They broke through the surface... into the sunken basement of their house, which was connected to the ocean via a tunnel.

"Remind me again whose bright idea it was to use that cavern as a storage area?" Gil huffed as he heaved the chest out of the water.

"It was you, I recall. You thought it would be a great place to put that rowing machine you hardly ever used." Lagoona replied dryly.

Gil raised an eyebrow. "Yes.. I stowed it next to that underwater hair styler you used for two days before it blew up."

Lagoona looked sheepish, before she returned her attention to the chest. "Well, at least we were able to find this beauty..."

She opened the chest, which had a waterproof seal surrounding it. Inside were several old photo albums. She picked one up and opened it, smiling as she gazed at the pictures of her high school days.

"Aww.. here's us on our third date. Mum will love this one."

Gil glanced over her shoulder "Do we really need to dig out all these old pictures?"

"Mum and Dad want to make a photo montage of us for the wedding, so yeah." Lagoona answered."Come on, it will be a great touch at the reception."

"I guess.. but aren't you worried they're going to find the most embarrassing pictures and put them up for all our guests to see?"
Lagoona shook her head. "They wouldn't do that."

Gil raised an eyebrow. "Really? I've met your dad. Do you really think he's going to pass up a chance to show everyone this?" He held up a photograph of a baby Lagoona, smearing tuna all over her body.

Lagoona blushed and took the picture from his hand. "Er... I'm sure dad won't use that one..."

She then promptly shoved the picture under a pile of books in the chest. "Won't use it at all."

The valedictorian of the 2013 class, Ghoulia Yelps' incredible intelligence and quick wits had helped many students and teachers, and even saved the school from certain disaster a few times. Naturally, she was determined to put her smarts to good use, and after graduating from MIT, took a place at Monster Advanced Discoveries, a scientific think tank dedicated to solving various problems facing monsters today. She's already created a device which translates zombie speak, and is said to be working on a cure for Skuliosis.

Ghoulia's long time boyfriend and three time winner of the regional school chess championship, Moe 'Slow-Moe' Mortavich has become a bit of a local celebrity after becoming the assistant manager of the Mortavich Delicatessen. This family run eatery has been serving fresh meat and other delicious meals to the community for years, and Moe's new recipes and savvy business sense has made the place even more popular than ever. Only a couple of weeks ago Moe and Ghoulia finally got married. The couple say they're happier than ever.

Moe watched as his wife checked the apparatus she had set up inside their kitchen. making doubly sure everything was in order. A mass of glass tubes and plastic piping, connected to bunsen burners, tesla coils, mixers and a dozen other devices he barely recognized.

"Sweetie, do we really need all this? It all seems a little much."

Ghoulia turned to look at him, her eyes wide and a wide, creepy smile stretched across her face. He was very familiar with that expression, it was the one she always wore when she got into her experiments.

"Of course it is. If this experiment is to be a success, we can't afford half measures. This is science, we have to go big or go home."

"Okaaay.." Moe replied, worried. "Its just.. this all looks really complex, and you're doing it in our kitchen. Are you sure nothing will go wrong?"

Ghoulia approached her husband, standing on tiptoes to kiss him. "How long have you known me? You know I would never do anything to put ourselves at risk. We'll be fine, I promise."

"Still.. you should put these on." She pulled out a pair of safety goggles from her pocket and handed them to him. "And stand behind that screen." She pointed to a large fibreglass screen on a trolley.

Moe sighed and put on the goggles. "Oh man... We're going to lose our house deposit, I know it."

Ghoulia joined her husband as they shambled over behind the screen. Once ready, she pulled out a remote control, and pressed the single button on it.

Instantly the quiet room was abuzz with noise as the apparatus came to life. Liquids of different colours flowed through the tubes, whizzing around in intricate twists and turns. They ran through
different machines, all whirring and groaning as they did... something to the liquid as they passed through. Steam hissed from kettles, beakers bubbled violently, glass tubes rattled.. Moe clenched his muscles, convinced something was going to explode at any moment.

Finally, all the liquid poured through one final tube, mixing into a brown substance which ended up in a mug.

Once all the noise stopped, Ghoulia shambled over to the mug, and took a sip from it.

"So.. how is it?" Moe asked.

Ghoulia replied with a triumphant groan. "Yes! We've finally done it! We've created the perfect coffee for the deli!"

She offered Moe the mug, and was rewarded with an ear to ear smile when he tasted it.

"Wow... the customers are gonna love this! Only..."

He glanced at the twisted apparatus which created the coffee. "How are we going to fit all this behind the counter?"

Ghoulia smiled and held up a spanner. "Well, I'm sure I can condense it all down. That's just part of the fun, isn't it?"

She approached her equipment, that creepy smile back again. "Don't you just love science?"

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**One of Monster High's most infamous students, Cleo de Nile became known all over the campus for her spoilt, snobby attitude and diva tendencies, but her tireless work supporting school events, and leading one of the school's most successful fearleading teams showed that she possessed more of a heart than many monsters believed. Shortly after graduating from Scarvard, Cleo worked in the publishing arm of her father's business empire, and became a rising star in magazine and fashion circles. Today, she is the owner and editor of Eternal Ghoul, one of the most popular magazines for female monsters today.**

**Captain of the casketball team and boyfriend of Cleo de Nile, Deuce Gorgon was one of the most popular boys in school, with several admirers vieing for his attention. Ever faithful, Deuce remained a firm fixture at Cleo's side, the two eventually marrying a few years later. Many tipped him to become a sports star, but Deuce surprised everyone by turning to the world of cooking. Several stints in top restaurants later, he is now the owner and head chef of the Copperhead restaurant in Salem, serving up fine dining so delicious, people are rising from the dead to try it.**

Deuce looked around the large central office of Eternal Ghoul as he entered. Several desks were scattered around, each one occupied with a monster working away on a laptop, talking on a phone, or examining clothes or some other kind of beauty item up for review for the magazine. He spotted Cleo's assistant Tanis, and waved to her.

"Oh, Mr Gorgon!" Tanis walked over. "I didn't expect to see you here today."

"Well, things are quiet at the restaurant for now. Is Cleo about? We had plans for today."

"Ooh, anywhere special?"

"Deuce shrugged. "Nah, just spending some time together. We've been so busy lately, we thought we should have a day to ourselves."
"Good idea." Tanis glanced at her diePad. "Cleo's been really high strung lately, what with preparing for the Devilia wedding shoot and all... she should be down soon, she always stops by at this time to check on our progress."

Suddenly, several of the staff began to mutter to themselves in hushed, frightened tones.

"Oh God, it's that time already?"

"No.. I'm not finished yet!"

"I'm gonna die.. I'm undead, and I'm gonna die!"

The reason for their fear was soon apparent, as Cleo made a dramatic entrance into the office, swinging the doors wide and sashaying in, her face set in a serious expression. A few of the staff visibly cringed in terror.

"Alright people!" She spoke in a loud authoritative voice that even Headmistress Bloodgood would have trembled at. "It's two weeks before we go to print! What have we got?" She pointed at a random writer. "You, impress me."

"Er..." The worker fumbled with her laptop. "I've got a two page article on Vera Fang's new collection."

"That's all? Make it five pages, Vera deserves the best." Cleo ordered. She pointed at another worker. "Next!"

"I've almost finished writing up my interview with Aaron Martyr about his comeback single."

Cleo gagged. "Ugh, no one cares about that has-been anymore. Cut it down to a page. You!"

"Um.. I have an article of sex tips inspired by Fifty Shades of Greystone."

"Hilarious.. you're fired."

The writer barely had time to cry before Cleo pointed at another. "And you?"

"Please don't hurt me.. I mean, my story on how to combat cyberbullying is almost done."

"Good, make sure it's correct and factual." She reached the other end of the office and gazed over her employees. "And I want EVERY article this week to be worthy of an Puslitzer! Vanity Scare is meant to have an exclusive with Catty Noir this month, and we are NOT going to lose out to them! Understood?"

The writers all nodded meekly.

"Yikes.." Deuce murmured as he observed the scene. "Its like watching her fearleading practices all over again..."

"Good, I'll expect everything ready to be checked by me at the end of the day." Cleo spun round and faced Deuce, her stern demeanor instantly fading away at the sight of her husband.

"Darling! I didn't keep you waiting long, did I?"

"Er, not at all babe." Deuce kissed her. "Looks like you're busy."

"Oh, not really.. just keeping things in order as usual." She replied breezily. "So, where are we
going today?"

Deuce took her arm and led her out the room. "You're gonna love what I got booked..."
The couple walked out of the office. The moment they were out of sight, the entire staff let out a
long sigh of relief, some even crying tears of joy.

Hailing from the mountains surrounding Salem, Abbey Bominable was one of the first members of
her yeti tribe to attend a modern school, and despite some difficulties with cultural and language
barriers, became one of the most respected and dependable students in school. After graduation
she returned to her home in the mountains, where she used her new found knowledge and influence
as daughter of the village chief to improve the living conditions of her home and bring her people
into the 21st Century. Besides her duties as a tribal elder, she runs a small yak farm with her
husband and son.

Abbey yanked on the reins, urging Shiver to carry on up the hill. The snow which had settled over
the hills and mountains last night was thicker than she expected, and it was taking longer than it
usually did to reach the grazing fields.

Fortunately, Ivan didn't seem to mind. Sat in front of his mother, the young yetling delighted in
watching the last few snowflakes fall, and would cheer on Shiver as he powered through another
snow drift. It felt nice to be able to share moments like this with him.
Finally, the mammoth reached the top of the hill, allowing mother and son to gaze out at the
grazing fields. A think blanket of snow covered the entire field.

Ivan looked confused. "Mama, where are the yaks?"

"Sleeping, under the snow." Abbey replied. "Yaks are tough, will not let a little snowfall disturb
their rest."

"And their coats keep them warm too, right?"

Abbey nodded, pleased Ivan was taking an interest in the animals her family farmed at a young
age. She suspected he would help out with the farm once he was older.

"So how do we wake yak up?" Ivan asked.

"Oh, that is easy. Hold on tight..."
She wrapped one arm around Ivan's waist, and used her free hand to yank Shiver's reins sharply.
The mammoth let out a bellow and raised up on his hind legs, eliciting a cry of surprise from Ivan.
Shiver fell back to the ground, his mighty feet crashing into the earth. The loud tremor echoed all
around, so loud that it roused the yaks sleeping under the snow. They popped out all over the place,
large lumps of shaggy hair and horns leaping out of the snow and running as fast as their stubby
legs could carry them.

"They're getting away mama!" Ivan declared excitedly.

"Now comes the fun part!" Abbey grinned. "We herd them toward farm."

"Yay! Lets go!" Ivan hopped on her lap.

"Yah" Abbey yanked the reins, and Shiver started into a thundering run after the yaks.

The catacombs of Monster High were never silent thanks the school's very own musical diva
Operetta Dessler, who regularly rocked the halls and was a constant presence in many after school clubs, including dance and Skulltimate Roller Maze. After graduation, she immediately chased after her dream of becoming a rock star, and was signed to Deadhead records. Sadly, her music career didn't last as long as she hoped, with only two hit songs to her name before she quit. She now lives in Portland, where she runs a popular music club. Locals say her live performances pack everyone in every weekend.

Johnny Spirit was one of the most coolest students around, his bad boy attitude and rebellious streak earning him many admirers, while also making him the bane of many of the school faculty. (And earning him countless centuries worth of detention) While Johnny has toned back his attitude a bit and settled down into a relationship with Operetta, he can still make any event cooler just by showing up. He currently runs a motorcycle and auto repair shop in Portland.

Johnny frowned as he looked under the hood. He was used to examining complex engines and machinery, but this was a little out of his league. Still, he had promised he would give it a shot.

He phased his hands through the side, and began fiddling with the valves and wires. One advantage of being a ghost was that you never had to stretch or twist your arms to reach into awkward places. Just pass your arms through the walls to reach what you wanted, and you had it made.

"How's it lookin' honey?" Operetta's sweet voice cooed in his ear. She was leaning over, watching his hands as he worked. "Think you can get this baby singin' again?"

"Gimme a chance 'Retta. This ain't exactly my expertise, you know." He huffed. "I dunno why you don't just get one of them experts to do this."

"Because they charge a king's ransom, and I'm trying to save up for our anniversary." Operetta replied.

She smiled at him. "Besides, those hands of yours are perfect for delicate jobs like this... and I'm enjoyin' the view." She leaned to the side to take in the sight of her husband's rear end as he bent over to look under the hood.

Johnny returned the favour, taking in a view of his wife's cleavage as she leaned over. "Well, I'm sure my hands could find something better to... fiddle with."

Operetta smirked. "You finish this first, and maybe I'll let you play with me later."

"I'm gonna hold you to that..." He continued working for a bit longer.

Finally, he pulled back and closed the hood. "Okay, I think that does it. Let's give this baby a spin."

Operetta grabbed a stool and sat before the machine... her beloved pipe organ. She pressed the keys, and was delighted when a deafening, brassy sound erupted from the pipes. She pressed more keys to test, before settling into a rhythm and playing a chorus of 'When the Saints Come Marching In'.

"Hooee! She sounds golden!" She cheered. "I'd never thought she'd sound this good again."

Happy that she was pleased, Johnny moved to the side and grabbed a violin case from a shelf, opening it to bring out his prized fiddle.

"Well, how about we really test the pipes on this thing? You up for a duet?"

"Oh honey..." Operetta sighed, touching his cheek tenderly. "You always know how to turn me on."
Even in a school full of extraordinary students like ours, Jackson Jekyll and Holt Hyde easily stood out, thanks to being two people co-inhabiting the same body. Jackson's quiet, geeky demeanor and Holt's loud, excitable nature were complete contrasts to one another, resulting in the two constantly conflicting with each other. Thankfully, time has helped the two find friendship and a balance, allowing them both to live their lives to the full. Both currently live in Screattle, with Jackson a computer programmer working on some of the best selling programs and games on the market right now, and Holt a music producer collaborating with some of the biggest names in music.

Jackson groaned as he awoke, his head throbbing. He felt horrible, his eyes were sore, his muscles were stiff, and there was a strange taste in his mouth. As he sat upright, he wondered why he felt like this, he'd gone to bed at his usual time... hadn't he?

His question was answered when he realized he was still wearing his jeans and shoes, and little else. And it looked like his jeans were covered in confetti.

"Holt.." He growled inwardly. It had to be Holt. No doubt he'd had some wild party with his music biz friends again.

He sighed in annoyance. He understood that as a music producer, hanging out with the artists under his wing was a part of Holt's work, but couldn't he at least given him some warning before he went out to party? Despite all the progress they had made in their shared life, Holt still seemed to forget they had to share the same body, and that body needed rest. Had Holt even remembered that he had work in the morning...

Oh crap... what time was it? He could be late for work already!

He was about to scramble and find a clock when he felt a pair of slender arms wrap around his waist, and a warm figure press against him. He turned to see Clair smiling at him as she snuggled against him. Save for letting her hair grow out to her shoulders and no longer wearing her gothic makeup, she hadn't changed much in the last ten years.

"Hey." She spoke softly. "Just where are you going?"

"To the unemployment line if I don't hurry. Thanks to Holt I'm probably late for work." He sighed, reluctant to leave Clair and his warm bed behind.

"Relax. You don't have to go anywhere."

"I have to be at work..."

"Holt took care of it." Clair reached over her boyfriend and grabbed a sheet of paper resting on the bedside table. She handed it to Jackson, prompting him to put on his glasses to read it. Sure enough, he recognized Holt's sketchy handwriting.

_Yo Jackson! Sorry about last night, but Ozzy Fuzzbourne and Zabel Zarock invited me to an impromptu bash as a local rock bar, and I guess things got a bit crazy... I only meant to stay for an hour, I swear! But I knew you had work in the morning, so once I dragged my ass home, I got on the horn to your boss, and told him that I.. well, you, would be working at home today. (Good thing I can still do that imitation of your voice, eh?) So you got the whole day off. I also got you a egg and bacon muffin for breakfast, you just gotta heat it up. Take it easy bro, and have a good time with Clair.

Much love, Holt!_"
"See?" Clair spoke. "He can act responsibly when he needs to."

"I guess so.." Jackson replied, honestly surprised that Holt had gone to all this effort for him. In the past Holt wouldn't have given a minute's thought to how his antics affected Jackson. But now he was finally starting to think ahead... Perhaps he was more grown up than he thought.

Suddenly, the bedroom door was pushed open, and Clair shrieked in terror as a monster shambled into the room. It was an old, lanky zombie, with long spikey hair and an extremely bedraggled look on his gaunt face.

"Ugh.. what bloody time is it?" It spoke in a ridiculously overdone English accent.

Jackson just stared at the zombie for a moment, then looked back at Holt's note.

"P.S. Zabel Zarock had a little too much to drink last night and I couldn't let him drive home, so I let him crash on the couch. I'm sure he'll be gone by the time you wake up, but if you see him, tell him I said hi!"

"Ere..you got anything to eat?" Zabel Zarock rasped. "All I found in the fridge was a egg and bacon muffin thing.."

Jackson and Clair just looked at each other, sighing in resignation.

"Hoooolt.."

Hoodude Voodoo entered the school quite unexpectedly, after being made from cloth by Frankie Stein as a botched attempt to make a boyfriend. Poor Hoodude had to put up with unpredictable voodoo powers and a unrequited crush on his creator. However, he would eventually overcome both to become a well liked student, and begin a strong relationship with a possessed wooden doll he met at a support group for abandoned artificial beings. Today he runs a small dry cleaning and tailors store in Salem, and also helps Kindergrubber House, the foster home for homeless young monsters once run by the late Gretchen Kindergrubber, who looked after him.

Hoodude whistled the tune of One Resurrection's latest song as he poured a load of blueberries into a blender. He wasn't a fan of the band, only hearing them when he passed by the student's rooms. But their latest song was pretty catchy, and he was in a really good mood this morning, so why not? As he reached for some cream to add it, he bopped his head to the melody.

He was so focused on his music, he didn't register the creature that was slowly shambling towards him. It was a huge hulking monster, its muscles and bones exposed due to a lack of skin. Massive bone claws tipped the fingers of it's four arms, and jagged teeth protruded from its mouth. It towered over Hoodude, staring down at him with a hungry gaze.

Hoodude felt it's presence, and turned to face the inhuman mutant. A smile crossed his face.

"Morning Terry! You sleep okay?"

The mutant replied with a long yawn "Yeah, as well as I could. I was up all night studying for Miss Stripe's Clawculus exam. I don't know how I'm gonna pass, that lady is vicious!"

"She's not that bad." Hoodude replied.

The monster stared at him with a haunted look. "Dude... you've not been in her class. I fear her..."
"Alright, tell you what. How about we go over your notes before you head to school?"

"Cool... thanks Mr V!" Terry grinned. "Ooh! My Little Bonies is on. Catch you later."

Hoodude smiled as Terry stomped off to the living room to watch his favourite cartoon. It was nice to see the mutant living a happier, positive life. When Terry had first moved into the home he had been sullen and distrustful of everyone. Understandable, given that he was a genetically engineered bio-weapon who had been abandoned by his creators...

"You seem cheery this morning." A voice tinged with a Brooklyn accent spoke beside him. Hoodude turned to see the curvacious figure of his wooden wife May step into the kitchen. Like pretty much everything she wore, her dress was a fancy 20's style Art Deco garment, though stitched together from mismatched pieces of cloth.

"Well, why not?" Hoodude replied enthusiastically. "It's a beautiful day outside, the borders are happy, I got no chores to do, meaning I can spend more time with a certain gorgeous ghoul..." May giggled at that.

"And, I'm about to make us some awesome smoothies for breakfast. So yeah, I'm feeling pretty good today!" And with a dramatic twirl, Hoodude spun and jabbed the power button of the blender.

Moments later, the smoothie was splattered all over the walls, and all over Hoodude and May.

Hoodude sighed as he wiped the gooey liquid off his face. "Forgot the lid..."

May chuckled and pulled out a glob of smoothie out of her hair. "Oh dear.. why don't you chuck yourself into the washing machine while I clean up here."

"Aw man.." Hoodude whined as he trudged towards the laundry room. "I hate using that machine.. the spin cycle is brutal..

Robecca Steam was one of Monster High's first robotic students, and proved that being made from metal was no impediment to being a model student. As well as captaining the Skulltimate Roller maze team, leading to two championship cups, she also ran the popular Catacombs Exploration Club, researching the school's past. Today, she is a professional SKRM player for the Salem Shriekers.

Robecca bent down and rechecked her rocket boots, making sure the fuel tanks were full and not leaking, no wires were loose, and the thruster ports were clean. Her rockets were her most important treasure, her lifeblood, and it was vital that they worked to perfection, even if she was just taking a nice, boring run to the park for some fresh air.

Though she doubted it would be boring for long.

"Are you ready?" She called as she strapped on her helmet, calling to her boyfriend Chip Cylacone.

Like her Chip was a robot, thought he had been built in a much more modern era than Robecca had. He looked like an average adult male with dark hair, save for his pale skin, abnormally golden eyes, and round audio receptors where his ears would be. He was currently checking his feet, where small jet engines protruded from his ankles.

"My jets are primed, my safety gear is secure, I am ready to go." He replied in his clipped, even voice. "I have a route mapped to the park on my GPS, it should take us around twenty minutes to get there."
Robecca sidled up to him. "Well, how about we make things interesting and have a race there?"

"A race?" Chip queried. "That seems somewhat unnecessary."

"Oh come on, it's a bit of fun. And good exercise!" Robecca nuded him with her elbow.

"But we already know the result. I am certain to win." Chip responded.

"How so?"

"Your rocket boots are able to reach considerable speed, but the Victorian design means that your turning speed is vastly compromised, and the time it takes to burn fuel means your acceleration time will be slow coming out of the corners." He pointed at his ankles. "My jets offer no such hindrance, meaning I can keep a continuous velocity."

Robecca frowned at him. She knew Chip wasn't trying to be mean, he was merely analyzing and stating the facts as he knew them. He just hadn't quite integrated 'tact' and 'sensitivity' into his programming yet.

"Is that so? Then how about we make a little bet? Whoever gets to the park last, has to do everything the winner says."

Chip raised an eyebrow. "That sounds amenable.. though it seems you have resigned yourself to helping me organize my sheet music."

"Don't bet on it." Robecca primed her jets and bent down in a starting pose. "You ready?"

Chip started his own jets and readied himself next to Robecca.

"3.. 2.. 1... GO!"

The two robots shot off, the jets on their feet propelling them forward at high speed. Chip took the lead early, his high-tech jets easily providing him with constant acceleration.

With his GPS guiding him, Chip was soon racing through the streets, calculating the degrees and speed needed to steer around the corners and dodge traffic while still maintaining his top speed. He wasn't aware if Robecca was still keeping up with him, all his focus was on the race.

At last he reached the park, slowing down to a halt. His internal chronometer registered he had reached the destination in just under 12 minutes...

"Oh. You finally got here then?"

His eyes widened as he realized Robecca was sitting on a park bench, sipping a cup of iced oil. She smiled and waved at him.

"I.. I don't understand." He spoke. "How did you get here before me?"

Robecca stepped toward him, smirking all the way. "I'm a SKRM champion, remember? I'm used to taking shortcuts and alternate routes, and I know every shortcut in this town. You don't need to go fast when you can cut the distance in half."

She leaned in and stared into Chip's eyes. "Now.. I believe the deal was that the loser does anything the winner says."

"That was the agreement..."
"Good.." Robecca stroked his chest, a seductive smile on her face. "When we get home, you're going to give me a nice, long, body wash. With Turtle Wax and everything."

Chip raised an eyebrow. "I think that can be arranged." He leaned in closer. "Would you like me to use... the buffer as well?"

"Ooh, yes.." Robecca cooed, leaning in for a kiss...

Despite not talking much, Scarah Screams was one of Monster High's most outspoken students, regularly leaping into debates and arguments with her telepathic abilities to voice her opinions or offer advice, a trait which led the school to its first Mashional Debate Team championship. Today she works as an investigator and social worker for the Ghoulwill Foundation, which helps monsters still living among humans and who have difficulty adjusting to modern life.

Scarah took a deep breath as she approached the small family house. Her psychic senses could already sense fear and uncertainty from the home's inhabitants. Truth be told, she was feeling very apprehensive herself.

In her time working as a case worker for the Ghoulwill Foundation, she had seen and assisted many monsters, and sometimes humans, in a variety of different situations. She had met vampires and mummies as they rose from their tombs after centuries of sleep to help them acclimate to modern life. She had helped whole families of monsters find new homes after being chased out of town by ignorant normies. She'd given guidance to parents of different races about to have a mixed-race child, and counseled several poor monsters suffering from depression, anxiety, anger and all the various social and mental problems facing modern monsters today.

This case though... was unlike anything she'd encountered before. And she wasn't quite sure there would be an easy answer. But she had to try. These people who had contacted her sounded desperate.

She knocked on the door, which was answered by a human couple in their early thirties. One was smartly dressed, the other was scruffier, but both wore matching white lab coats. They looked very surprised by her appearance.

"Hello, Mr and Mrs Kracken. I'm Scarah Screams, from the Ghoulwill Foundation. I believe you asked for a meeting." She spoke telepathically, though moved her lips at the same time to put the couple at ease.

"Y..yes! Of course!" Mr Kracken stammered. "I'm sorry, it's just... when they said your group was staffed by.. non humans, I didn't quite believe it, but seeing you..

"I get that sometimes." Scarah replied with a small smile. "May I come in?"

They welcomed her inside, and minutes later they were sat on the couch with mugs of tea. Mr and Mrs Kracken related their story, taking large gulps of tea to settle their nerves as they spoke.

They explained how they were scientists, genetically engineering entirely new, simple-minded life forms out of animal matter in the hope of creating a means of biologically curing diseases. How secretly, against the wishes of the company they worked for, they had decided to create a creature using human DNA -their own- mixed with genes from various sea life. And how the being that had emerged from the process was unlike any living being they had ever seen. How this being not only possessed sentience, but as Mrs Kracken put it, a soul as well.

"She's grown up so fast in the year since she was born. Physically and mentally, she's just like any
seven year old girl." Mrs Kracken explained. "She loves to read books, she plays with her dolls in
the bath, she's learning how to draw..." Tears fell from her eyes. "She's not just some experiment...
she's a living person, no matter how she was born."

"And now, the company is shutting down our project." Mr Kracken continued, holding his wife
close. "When it happens, they'll want to take all our research. If they find out about all this... God
knows what they'll do to her."

Scarah nodded, listening intently. She could sense great fear within them, but also an
overwhelming sense of love towards this being they considered their own child. She could hardly
refuse to help.

"Well, we would certainly be able to help, but it would mean a lot of changes. You or your
daughter may have to be moved to a new home. Towns where monsters like me make up most of
the population."

"We're willing to do anything to keep her safe." Mrs Kracken replied.

Scarah smiled. "That's good to hear. It can be a tough transition though... Would it be alright to talk
to your daughter about it?"

The Krackens led her through the house towards a blue door, marked with a cartoon picture of an
octopus.

"Octavia, can we come in? There's someone who wants to talk to you."

They let her into a small pastel coloured bedroom, though instead of a bed there was a large
bathtub installed. Sitting in the bathtub was a small girl with yellow skin, flecked with teal stripes
and spots. Her hair also appeared to be teal coloured, but a closer look revealed her hair was
actually several tentacles, which were curled and twisted to resemble a normal hairstyle.

Upon seeing Scarah enter, the girl shyly hid her face behind her tentacles.

"Hello Octavia." Scarah spoke softly as she knelt next to the tub. "My name's Scarah."

Octavia peered through her tentacle bangs. "Are.. are you going to help my parents? They've been
really upset lately... I think it's because of me."

"Oh sweetheart, it's not your fault." Scarah replied. "I promise, I'm going to do everything I can to
make things better for you and your parents."

Octavia smiled gratefully, giving Scarah a sense of relief and joy in her heart. It wouldn't be easy
for this family, but she was determined to do whatever it took to keep them together.

A former student council president at his old school Fullmoon High, Romulus Silverbane became
the designated Alpha wolf among his fellow students when his school merged with Monster High.
Despite some spats, he helped foster friendship between the vampire and werewolf students, and
became a regular presence in school sports and student debates. Today he works as a banker at
Blud Banking with his old friend and rival Bram Devein, as well as serving as a member of the
Werewolf Civil Rights League alongside his wife, Scarlett Pawson.

The student council president of Belfry Prep, Bram Devein didn't exactly endear himself to the
student body with his superior attitude toward what he deemed 'lesser beings'. But time and some
rather harsh warnings from Headmistress Bloodgood help mature him into a wiser, if still haughty
leader of his coven, as well as instill an interest in vampire history and politics. Today he works as a banker for Blud Banking, alongside his friend and rival Romulus Silverbane.

Bram's long time partner Gory Fangtell wasted no time in establishing herself as one of the school's top students, not only ranking as one of the most knowledgable with top grades in almost every class and a regular leader of the Frightengales club, but also becoming a fashion maven whose style could rival Cleo and Clawdeen. She and Bram finally married shortly after graduation (revealing their engagement had lasted fifty years) and are expecting the birth of their first child. Gory also divides her time between looking after their new home in Salem and running a popular blog.

The gym was dimly lit, with only a large spotlight hanging over the large boxing ring in the center providing the only light. Bram stepped into the ring, clad in sweatpants, a vest and padded body armour on his chest and head. He wore boxing gloves on his hands, which he thumped together restlessly.

"What's taking so long. Not chickening out, are you?"

Romulus stepped into the light, clad in similar clothing and wielding his own staff. "Nah, just giving you time to get ready. I know you old geezers take a while to put your clothes on."

Bram smirked. "I'm getting old? You're the one with the grey hairs all over you."

"At least it's my natural colour. How much dye you got on that hairdo, huh?" Romulus retorted.

"How about we just get on with this?" Bram readied his fists in a classic boxing stance.

"Thought you'd never ask, vamp boy." Romulus raised his fists.

A moment of quiet, then the two rushed toward each other. Their fists jabbed and swung at each other striking their bodies or their arms as they blocked. They weaved around the ring, each trying to get in a punch on the other.

"That the best you got?!" Romulus taunted as he blocked a punch. "My little sister can hit harder than you!"

"It's about technique, not power!" Bram fended off a blow. "And I've seen bloated ticks with more finesse than you!"

The fight became more furious, the two drawing on their supernatural strength to move faster, their fists becoming a blur.

"Come on!" Bram gave a fake yawn in between blows. "Your old bones giving out already?"

"Ha! You're the slow one! Need to take a coffin break?" Romulus responded with body blows.

The two hopped backward, raising their fists and charging at each other for a final blow, yelling in primal fury.

"AHHHHHHH!"

"So there you two are!"

The two suddenly stopped, nearly stumbling over, and looked over at the source of the voice. A very pregnant Gory, and Romulus' equally pregnant wife Scarlett stood by the ring, both looking
very annoyed.

"So this is what you guys do after work?" Scarlett asked, eyebrows raised.

"We're just blowing off steam, baby." Romulus said, pointing at his headgear. "No one's getting hurt, see?"

Gory frowned. "That's fine, but isn't there something else you're meant to be doing?"

"Er.. can't think of anything." Bram shrugged.

"You were supposed to meet me at the maul so we could get furniture for the nursery!" Gory bit back.

"And we have a lamaze class scheduled today, and you are not missing it!" Scarlett pointed at Romulus.

"So get in the shower, get dressed, and lets get going! My ankles are swelling up and I want to get everything done before dinner." Gory ordered.

The two pregnant monsters waddled off, leaving Bram and Romulus to look at each other with sympathetic stares.

"Remember when we used to be the alphas in our packs?" Romulus said.

"I miss those days.." Bram sighed.

---

The right hand wolf of Romulus Silverbane, Douglas 'Dougey' Lycan could often be seen helping Romulus keeping his pack in line, becoming a friendly, if sometimes intimidating presence in the halls. His huge size belied a sensitive soul who loved sappy movies and football in equal measure. Today he works as a construction worker and landscaper, yet still makes time to support his wife - professional dancer Howleen Wolf- at all her performances.

Dougey stepped as quietly as he could toward the door of the Salem Community Center's main gymnasium. The loud hip hop music he could hear indicated Howleen's class was in session, and he didn't want to interrupt.

He sidled through the door and took a seat in the bleachers, the numerous young boys and ghouls in the class not noticing him. All their focus was on their teacher, and following her fast dance steps. She spun and stepped in rapid motion, never missing a beat in the music.

It was always enthralling to watch Howleen dance, and not just because she looked really good in spandex shorts. Howleen was an exceptional dancer. She could have performed with the Cirque de Ghoule or the New Yuck Ballet, and easily become a star. Instead she chose to come here, teaching dance to young kids who needed guidance and ambition. That dedication and selflessness was what truly made her shine.

Suddenly, there were loud shouts from the back of the class. Everyone turned to see two young ghouls, a sea monster and an ogre, hitting and shoving at each other. Dougey was about to move to intervene, but Howleen was quicker, pausing the music and marching over to the two.

"And just what is going on?" She asked.

The sea creature pointed at the ogre. "This fatty bumped into me and threw me off my rhythm,
"It's not my fault!" The ogre retorted. "This stinky drip keeps hogging all the floor!"

"I don't smell!" The sea creature glared at her. "If anything smells, it's you and your ratty clothes. Can't you afford anything decent?"

"At least I'm not freaking everyone out with my ugly face...

"THAT IS ENOUGH!"

The two ghouls nearly fell over from the force of Howleen's shout, and even Dougey jumped in his seat. The students trembled as Howleen loomed over them, the kind expression they were used to replaced with a look of cold anger.

"Let me remind you ghouls why we are here. We're here to learn to dance. We're here to get healthy, get confident, learn patience and discipline, and have fun."

She leaned towards the two ghouls, her face inches from theirs. "We are NOT here to insult and belittle each other. We are not here to act like morons. And we are NOT her to treat everyone else like crap just because it makes us feel better! If that's your attitude, then I suggest you pack your things and don't bother coming back."

The two ghouls looked horrified at the prospect of being kicked out of class. "We're sorry Mrs Lycan!"

"Don't apologize to me. Apologize to each other."

Reluctantly, they turned to each other. "Sorry.."

Howleen's smile returned. "Good. Let's not have anything like this happen again, okay?" She turned to the rest of the class. "Alright everyone, great work today! We'll meet here again at the weekend and I'll show you how to do the back flip properly."

The students began to file out, and Dougey took the opportunity to sneak up behind his wife and give her a hug.

"So, how was class?" He asked.

"Tough as usual." She replied, keeping her eyes on the young sea creature and ogre as they made for the exit. "I think I'm gonna need to keep an eye on those two in the future."

"Gonna give 'em the old 'how I almost destroyed my school' story, huh?"

"If it comes to that..." Howleen replied, a slight look of sadness in her eyes. Dougey immediately regretted bringing up that story. While the legendary 'magic lamp' incident ten years ago had helped shape her into the ghoul she was today, it had also left some lasting scars...

But then she was smiling again, and tugging on his arm like a little kid. "Come on, let's get some lunch. I'm famished."

Dougey grinned. Nothing could keep his ghoul down.

Devoted to the environment and protecting her fellow plantlife, Venus Mcflytrap could often be seen staging protests, stage shows, sit-ins... anything to make her voice heard. Though often branded as that 'annoying hippie' Venus proved she was anything but, after graduating from
Scarvard and entering the world of politics, working up until becoming one of the youngest governors in the Monster Federation. Today she serves as state governor, working to improve not only the environment but living standards as well, with support from her husband and children.

Venus took a deep breath as she approached the table. Her audience was watching her, eager to hear what she had to say, and their gaze was making her a little nervous. Taking a moment to smooth down her suit and take a deep breath, she began her speech.

"My fellow monsters, I come to you today to ask... no demand, that we give aid to monster farmers who are in grave need of our help! For years, our farmers have served us dutifully, providing food to our various communities when human farms wouldn't touch us with a barge pole."

"They've provided us with the special, unique foods many of our races need, such as kelp and coral for sea creatures, fertilizer for plant creatures, and blood for vampires. But in recent years, as monster and human communities have become more integrated, more and more of our farmers are beginning to lose business as human farmers begin to encroach on our territory."

She clenched the table. "Many of you think its a good thing more human farms are opening their business to us. And in some ways, it is. But is it worth the cost to our proud farmers, who have supported us through though times, and still support us in ways humans cannot? I don't think so."

"Many analysts I've spoken to predict that if she don't take steps now, a majority of our farmers will be left bankrupt and unable to supply their communities. It would be a terrible loss, not just for the farmers, but for everyone who has come to depend on them. And so, I ask you all to read my proposal to lend financial aid to our farmers, to help them through this difficult time and to help them meet the increasing demand we ask of them. We your help, we can save this traditional, and still vital way of life."

She took a breath, and gazed out at the audience. "And this is when everyone cheers."

Her audience, consisting of her husband Dan and her children Cornel and Daisy, all began clapping and cheering. Even their pet man-eating plant Gnasher managed to clap his leaves together.

"That was awesome, Mom!" Cornel cheered.

"I'll say." Dan smiled proudly, stepping up to give her a hug. "If that doesn't get those bureaucrats opening their wallets, I don't know what will."

"Couldn't you just spray your pollen everywhere and make them do what you say?" Cornel asked. Venus smiled and rubbed his head. "It's tempting, but that would be cheating. And cheating..." She prompted her son to finish.

"...never gets anyone anywhere. I know." Cornel replied with a smile.

Venus gathered her family together for a big hug. "Thanks for hearing me out guys.. Now I know I'm gonna do great at the hearing tomorrow."

Reliable as the stone she was born from, Rochelle Goyle served as the school's hall monitor for almost her entire school term, such was her dedication to keeping the school populace safe. Aside from up-keeping the rules, Rochelle was also a regular in Monster High's fashion clubs. Shortly after graduation, she moved back to her native Scaris to marry her long-time boyfriend Garrott DuRoque. The two are happily married with two children, and Rochelle continues to look after others in her role as a policewoman.
Rochelle entered the room slowly, her eyes scanning the room in every direction. She removed her police hat and placed it atop a nearly table, never diverting her attention from the room for a minute.

"I know you are in here." She spoke aloud, stepping further into the room. "You cannot escape from me."

A very quiet creak from the left side of the room caught her attention. Years of police training had prepared her for situations like this, to listen for the quiet noises people made while hiding, to spot things that looked out of place. This one had sounded like wood... her quarry was likely near the table.

She edged toward the dining table at the rear of the room, keeping her back to it so as to look oblivious to her target's location.

"You may think you have found the perfect place to hide..." She continued to speak aloud. "But I have already deduced where you are. You are right in front of me.."

She heard footsteps behind her, emerging from under the table. Her quarry had taken the bait. Quick as an avalanche, she spun around...

And scooped up her nine year old daughter in her arms, tickling her as she did so.

"Mamaaa!" Amethyst cried. "How did you know I was there?"

"You forget cherie, its my job to track people down."

Ame pouted. "I'm never going to beat you at hide and seek."

"You will, you just need to practice." Rochelle consoled, hugging her.

"Ah, you're home." Rochelle turned to see Garrott, still wearing his apron from the flower shop he ran from the front of the house. He held their young son Cobalt in his arms, who reached for his mother with his pudgy arms.

"How was your day, cherie? Garrott asked.

"Yeah, did you catch any bad guys?" Ame asked excitedly.

Rochelle smiled and stepped closer to hug her husband and son. "Ah, today has been quite an adventure..."

Manny Taur didn't have the best reputation in school. Known for regularly insulting and pushing students, he was feared and pitied by everyone. I'm glad to say however, that since then Manny has made a complete turnaround to become a much nicer monster, and was since apologizing to all of his former victims. Today he works as a bouncer and security guard for various employers around Salem.

For Manny, it was a usual night serving as security outside of one of Salem's hottest nightclubs, the Dead of Night. Which of course, meant putting up with the impatient monsters waiting in line to get in.

"Come on maaaaan!" The short, stitched together construct monster at the head of the queue whined. "I've been waiting hours to get into this joint. Let me in already!"
Manny sighed, resisting the urge to dropkick the little pest into the nearest dumpster. "Look pal, we got a policy. I can't let more people in until a few have left. Fire safety laws and all. Besides..." He bent down to look the construct in the eye. "I ain't entirely convinced you're over 21."

"Son of a.. I'm 27!" The construct angrily spat back, pulling out an ID card with the name Frank N. Tyke printed on it. "I'm just short, that's all!"

"Why would anyone create you to be shorter than a schoolkid?"

"Hey, my parents had to work with what they had, okay?" Frank replied. "Now you letting me in or what?"

"Sorry, we're still too full." Manny replied, glaring.

Frank raised a fist. "Don't think I can't kick your ass, man."

Manny was tempted to take up the little pest on his offer, but starting a fight on the street was a quick way to get fired...

"Manny!" He turned to see a heavy-set gargoyle approaching him holding a paper bag.

"Gary! What are you doing here? You on break?" Manny asked his fellow bouncer and boyfriend.

Gary smiled. "Yeah, thought I'd get a snack and say hello on my way back."

"Hey man! You trying to jump the line?" Frank exclaimed.

Gary ignored him. "So anyway, I got you a ham sub. Figured you were getting hungry."

"Aw, thanks!" Manny took the bag. "Just what I needed. The food here is lousy."

"I gotta head back. See you later, okay? He leaned in to peck a kiss on Manny's cheek.

"Whoa whoa! Seriously?!" This came from Frank, who was watching them with a dropped jaw. "Huh, some security. The best this place could hire is a couple of..."

Manny and Gary's response was to lean down and glare at the short monster with threatening faces, steam rising from Manny's nostrils and Gary's neck muscles bulging.

Frank trembled. "Er.. maybe I'll just go somewhere else."

He ran away from the queue as fast as his stubby legs could carry him.

_The constantly hot-headed Heath Burns could always be relied on to liven up the proceedings.. whether he was asked to or not. A true party animal and adrenaline junkie, Heath was a regular participant in the basketball team and could often be seen running, skateboarding, starting impromptu dances, anything to have fun. Though this often resulted in him causing several fires within the school grounds and his carefree attitude extended a little too far into his adult years... Thankfully, he's grown up a bit since then, and now works as a deputy for the Salem Police Department. Locals describe him as a helpful and determined officer who can be counted on... most of the time._

Heath stepped out of the bakery, carrying a tray laden with glazed donuts, a cup of coffee and a can of iced tea. He approached his police car, where the new deputy he had been assigned to look after was waiting, leaning against the hood.
"Here you go rookie, breakfast is served."

The deputy, a young cyclops named Mona Culle, rolled her single eye. "Donuts, really? That is such a cliche."

"Hey don't mock the donuts." Heath took his place on the hood next to her. "Trust me, these things can keep a monster going all day at full energy. They're the secret to being a great cop."

"Considering how many Sheriff Growler puts away, he must be the most awesome cop to ever live." Mona said, chuckling.

"True that." Heath laughed with her. He'd only spent a few days with Mona, but he found her a really fun officer to hang out with. And she was a looker to boot. Maybe once they'd spent a bit more time together, he'd ask her out on a date. Dating a fellow officer wasn't against regulations, right?

"So, I guess we're just patrolling around today, huh?" Mona asked.

"Uh.. yeah, pretty much." Heath took a bite out of his donut.

Mona let out a disappointed sigh. "Thought so."

"Something wrong?"

"Its just..." Mona crossed her arms. "Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful to have this job, but I was expecting it be a bit more exciting. Chasing down criminals and shutting down gangs, you know?"

"Yeah, I know what you mean." Heath replied. "I thought my first day on the job would be like an episode of Scaresky and Mutt. But Salem just ain't the crime capital of the world. Which is nice, even if it is a little dull."

He took a sip of his coffee, gazing out at the small shopping center. "But that doesn't mean nothing ever happens here of course. A lot of weird stuff has happened in this town in the past. Angry normies, a crazy genie.. you gotta be prepared for the unexpected around here."

"Like that?" Mona pointed across the parking lot. On the other side, a plant monster in a hoodie was assaulting a zombie woman, trying to take her purse.

Heath swallowed the rest of his donut. "Son of a.. hey stop! Police!"

He reached for his gun, but in his haste forgot he was still holding his coffee. The hot drink spilled out of the cup, and right onto his trousers."

"YEEEEEAAAAHHHH!" He fell to the ground, clutching his crotch.

Mona rolled her eye, then focused her sight on the robber, who was running away with the purse. She grabbed her can of iced tea and flung it as hard as she could. It flew in a perfect arc before descending and hitting the robber on the head, knocking hm to the ground..

Heath managed to stand up, though his legs were bowed. "Whoa! That was... ow... one lucky throw."

"Luck nothing! I got a perfect score in target practice during training." Mona smirked, pointing at her eye. "Thing with us cyclops is, we're born with great farsight."

"That's... ah.. handy." Heath spoke through clenched teeth.
Mona looked concerned. "Are you okay? I thought fire elementals were impervious to heat."

"We're impervious to flames. Boiling water... not so much." Heath winced.

"Do you need help?"

"No no, I'm good. Go arrest that guy. You need the experience anyway. I'll just be over here... observing, yeah..."

"Okay..." Mona took out her handcuffs and approached the mugger. Heath took the opportunity to sit back in the squad car and turn on the air conditioning, aiming the cool air onto his trousers. A long sigh of relief left his lips.

Toralei Stripe was one of the top fearleaders for Monster High's team, and had even qualified in the Mashional Championships. However she was more well known for pulling pranks and generally being mean to other students, usually to further her own ends. Little is known about what happened to her after graduation, aside from her leaving Salem, but it seems she returned to the town with a complete personality change, becoming a much nicer and respectful monster and single mother, while still retaining much of her independent streak. In a real surprise, she now works at the school she once couldn't stand, teaching Clawculus.

Toralei surveyed her class as she entered and set up her desk. Only a couple of students noticed her, the rest were all chatting with each other, checking their phones and generally goofing off, no doubt looking forward to the weekend.

She smirked. It was always fun to give these kids a little shock.

"Alright class, listen up!" The entire class jumped to attention. "I know you guys have an exciting weekend planned, but I'd like you to come back a little smarter than when you left. So today we're gonna go over some advanced clawculus and geometry methods, then on Monday we're gonna have a quiz. Exciting, huh?"

The students groaned. Toralei smiled and readied her notes. "Oh hush up. You'll thank me for this later. Now, let's start with some multiplication..."

The class continued in relative calm as Toralei demonstrated some clawculus equations on the board, then challenged the students to answer the problems she set up. However, it wasn't long before she noticed one of the vampire students texting away on her iCoffin.

"Alucarda Vein!" She bellowed, causing the vampire to jump in shock. Before she could react, Toralei approached her desk and snatched her phone from her hand.

"Texting in class? For your sake, I hope it's a funny one."

She read the screen. "This class sux, miss stripe duller than a tombstone."

She cast a withering gaze at the embarrassed student. "Well Miss Vein, whether I'm dull or not is a matter of opinion... a lot of monsters here think I'm a hoot. But that's no excuse for slacking off in my class."

"Geez, I'm sorry, okay?" Alucarda spoke back, avoiding Toralei's gaze. "I just don't see the point of this class. I've never needed this clawculus stuff before, and I'm not gonna need it in the future." A
couple of students cheered in agreement.

Toralei frowned and leaned toward Alucarda. "Just how old are you?"

"Eh? I turn fifty in a couple of days..."

"Okay smartypants. Let's say, hypothetically, that on your 1st birthday I give you one dollar. Then on your second birthday, I give you two dollars. On your third birthday I give you four dollars. I do this for every birthday you have, doubling the amount each time. Now, how much money would you receive for your 50th?"

"Er.." Alucarda's brows furrowed as she tried to add it up in her head. "I dunno... $500,000?"

"Nope!" Toralei moved to the board and began writing a long list of numbers, doubling the number each time. At the end of the list, a ridiculously long number stretched across the board.

"$5,629,499,534,213,12! That's almost six quadrillion. Of course, if I had that kind of money to give you every birthday, I sure as hell wouldn't be here all the time."

Alucarda's jaw dropped. "Whoa..."

"See what I mean?" Toralei looked smug. "Something might look insignificant now, but over time, it can grow to become something really amazing."

She narrowed her gaze on Alucarda. "If you're willing to put some effort into it. So, no more messing around?"

"Y..yeah, sure!" Alucarda stammered.

"Good.." Toralei purred. She addressed the rest of the class. "Now then! Let's keep your hands busy - and away from your phones - and work on some graphs. Get your pencils out."

The students groaned again. Toralei smirked. It was times like this that she really loved this job.

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The Jellicle Twins, Meowlody and Purrsephone, were known as Toralei's loyal sidekicks and supporters, often joining in on her antics. After graduation however, the two stepped out from her shadow and moved into very different careers. Meowlody became a food connoisseur and began working for Ghoulish Delights Catering, while Purrsephone got heavily into fitness and ran marathons before working full time as a gym instructor. The two made headlines years ago when they married a set of normie twins from New Salem, and a couple of years later, again when they both gave birth to triplets.

Shortly after their wedding, Meowlody and her husband Fred moved into a house close to where Purrsephone and her husband Ted lived. It enabled the brothers and sisters to remain close to each other, often one couple would spend the days at the other's house. It was extremely useful at times of duress, when the two really needed each other.

Like now.

Purrsephone pulled on a bright yellow raincoat, and watched at Meowlody put on a matching red coat. As she stepped closer to fasten her sister's buttons, Meowlody placed a rainhat on her head.

"Don't you think this is a bit extreme?" She asked.

Purrsephone frowned. "Are you kidding? You know what we're up against, right?"
"I know, I know.." Meowlody sighed, handing her sister a pair of swimming goggles before putting on a pair herself. "I just wish this wasn't so hard."

"I'm sure it will get better.. someday.."

The two sisters gave each other a fierce hug, drawing strength from each other. With heavy hearts, they made their way to the entrance to the bathroom, where a large bath was waiting, filled with bubbly water.

"KIDS! COME HERE PLEASE!!" The two yelled in unison.

Seconds later, the sound of several footsteps racing up the stairs like a herd of buffalo was heard. Six small half-werecat children, three boys and three girls, surrounded the two sisters.

"What's up mom?" Tia asked.

"Why are you and Aunty dressed funny?" Tommy joined in

"Are we playing dress up?" Mia hopped up and down.

"Cool! I'll get my pirate costume!" Donny cheered.

"Are we going out?" Lia asked.

"Can I have a cookie?" Lonny asked.

Meowlody and Purrsephone took a deep breath, and knelt down to address their children. "No kids. It's time for your bath."

All six children noticed the bubbly bath, and took on looks of terror.

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!" They ran for they lives, scattering in all directions.

The twins sighed. "Here we go.."

Ted and Fred entered the house, having just got back from their jobs.

"Hello? We're home! Everyone all... right?" They trailed off as they took in the sight of the living room. It looked as if a hurricane had hit it. Papers, toys, furniture was strewn about everywhere. Even the couch had been overturned.

Purrsephone and Meowlody trudged into the room. Despite the raincoats and hats they wore, both were soaking wet and looked utterly tired. They glared at their husbands with angry stares.

"Whoa, what happened?" Ted asked.

Meowlody snarled. "Next time..."

"...You're giving them a bath!" Purrsephone finished.

They shoved their wet hats into their husband's faces, then stormed off.

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_Hailing from Mount Olympus, Chariclo Arganthone Cupid ran an incredibly popular radio show at Monster High, dispensing romantic advice to any monster who needed a helping hand in love. After a brief stint at a certain school in a far away land, she has now taken her show nationwide._
As well as broadcasting, she also writes her own blog for lovers seeking advice.

Cupid spoke into her microphone "Well Karl, I'm afraid you've only got two choices. You can either get the tattoo removed and move on with your life, or you can spend the rest of your days searching for another soulmate named Deadwina. Thank you for calling."

She cut off the line and slumped back in her chair, letting out a long sigh. As much as she enjoyed working on her love advice show, sometimes it could really drag. There were days when practically every call was either a problem where the solution was ridiculously obvious, or questions that were just plain ridiculous and very, very bizarre.

She nodded at her producer Vesper. "Alright, lets go to our next caller."

"We have Alice on line three." The bee-woman replied.

"Alright.. go ahead, Alice."
Sobs were heard in her headphones. "Oh.. oh thank for talking to me Miss Cupid... I'm at my wits end!"

"Calm down Alice.. I'm here for you." Cupid spoke in her most soothing voice. "Tell me what's wrong."

"I... I'm so lonely..." Alice sobbed. "I turned a hundred years old yesterday, and everyone around me seems to have someone to love in their lives. I feel like I've missed out on a chance for love."

"Oh Alice..." Cupid consoled. "I think we've all felt like that at one time or another. But if you just look around, you find you're not as alone as you think..."

"But I can never find anyone!" Alice wailed. "Every week I go down to my local bar, hoping that I'll finally meet the perfect monster! But all the good guys must be taken, because all I ever meet are jerks who want one night stands, and it's driving me batty! And yet I'm seriously considering one, just so I don't feel lonely for a little while."

"Please Miss Cupid... why can't I find someone? What do I need to do?"

Cupid took a deep breath, giving time for Alice to calm down. "Alice, I do understand what you're feeling. There's nothing worse than feeling that no one loves you. But i have to ask you something... when was the last time you gave someone some love and affection?"

"What? I don't understand..."

"The way I see it, you keep going to this bar because you think that sooner or later, you'll find a monster who loves you and is perfect for you. But finding a special monster isn't like going to a store and finding that one perfect item you need. Love is something that grows over time. When people share their feelings and hearts with each other, those feelings become even stronger. But it can only happen if you're willing to give that love to someone else, and simply offering yourself to some random guy who's not willing to share it back is not going to help you."

"I... I guess... but then what am I meant to do?"

"In my experience, the best way to find love, is to share it as many people as you can. And I don't mean just boyfriends and girlfriends, but everyone in between. Love comes in many shapes and forms, and there are lots of people who need it. The homeless, the elderly, or just people who need a friend.. if you're willing to give care and affection to everyone who needs it, you can't help but draw love back to you."
"That... that sounds a little daunting..." Alice spoke.

"It can be at first, but if you're willing to try, it can open up whole new worlds to you. I can't tell you how long it will take until you find your special monster, but until then, you could make a whole lot of friends and learn a lot about yourself, if you're willing to open your heart a little more."

"I.. I guess you're right!" Alice sounded a little stronger. "I'll try.. I'll really try! I mean, anything's got to be better than this."

"I'm sure it will all work out for you." Cupid replied, smiling. "If you like, perhaps you could call me back on a later date, let me know how things work out for you."

"I will... thank you Miss Cupid." Alice sounded eternally grateful as she hung up.

Cupid smiled as she turned off the line. "Good luck to you Alice. We're all rooting for you."

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*Monster High's self styled comedian Billy Phadin could often be sighted (or not, in his case) plotting brilliant jokes and tricks on both students and teachers, though thankfully his tricks were more of the lighthearted variety, and thanks to filming his antics, he soon became a FrightTube celebrity. Today he is a well renowned comedian, with stand up shows all over the country.*

Billy sighed with relief as he walked through the back door of his home. It had been a long, tiring tour, and the last gig had been particularly rough. But he could finally leave that behind for a few weeks, and spend some time with Twyla.

His girlfriend was standing by the counter, her back turned to him.

"You're back." She spoke

"That I am." He dropped his luggage on the floor and grabbed a seat by the table. "I am beat... I would have got back sooner, but my last show ran a little late. A bunch of frat boys were heckling me the whole time."

He grinned. "I got them back in the end though. I turned on the old stealth mode and swiped their cellphones, then showed the entire audience all the embarrassing photos on them. Man, the look on their faces..."

He paused as he realized Twyla didn't seem to be listening, her back still to him.

"Hey.. is something wrong?"

Twyla's voice was almost a whisper. "Billy.. there is something I need to say. And I need you to listen."

"Okaaaay... what's up? You sound a little down. Did you eat one of those dreams where someone's naked in their high school again?" Billy chuckled.

"Billy!" Twyla turned to face him, her luminous eyes blazing. "This is really important."

"Sorry." He mumbled. He was beginning to sense this was serious. "So what is it?"

"Well... I had an appointment with the doctor today..."

"Whoa!" Billy leapt up and gripped her shoulders.. "You went to the doctors? Are you sick?"
"It.. it's nothing bad!"

"Then why do you look so terrified?"

"Please.. calm down." She pleaded.

"Sorry, sorry.." He looked into her eyes, trying to stay calm in the face of something terrible happening to his ghoulfriend. "Please.. whatever it is, just tell me."

"I will, its just..." Twyla trembled slightly. "Promise me you won't freak out, okay"

"I'm here." Billy assured. "Whatever it is, I'll be here."

Moments of silence passed before Twyla took a deep breath. "I... I'm pregnant."

Billy was stunned. He stood with his eyes wide and his jaw hanging for several seconds. Then just when Twyla thought she would have to prevent him from fainting, he burst into life.

"OH MY GOD! That.. that it... holy crap!"

He wrapped his arms around her tight, causing her to squeak in surprise. "Ah! Billy.."

"Good grief, Twyla! I seriously thought you were dying or something!" Billy exclaimed.

"Don't yell." Twyla tried to shush him. "Do you want everyone in the neighborhood to hear you?"

"Hell yes!" Billy pumped his arms in the air. "We're gonna be parents! This is awesome!"

He slowed down when he saw Twyla's pensive look. "This... this is awesome, right? I mean... you are happy about this?"

She looked away shyly. "Well... yeah. Sure. Of course.."

"Are you scared?"

"Well... a little."

Billy stepped closer and held her tightly to his chest. "Hey, don't worry. We're gonna figure this all out together."

"I know.." She hugged him back. "I love you so much..."

"I love you too..." He kissed her forehead gently.

Then he grinned. "Hey and you know.. if this kid inherits my invisibility and your shadow powers... we could train him to be the ultimate spy. No one would be able to find him or her."

Twyla sighed. "You are such a dork..."

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One of Monster High's first transfer students from Hexico, Skelita Calaveras brought with her her fabulous fashion style and spellbinding tales of her family life. She could often be seen telling stories in history class, and was a regular member of the Catacombs Exploration Club. Today, she works as a fashion retailer, hunting down the hottest fashion designers on the planet of behalf of the trendiest stores in Hexico and around the world.

Hailing from Fanghai, China, Jinafire Long may have looked like a delicate lily, but many soon
discovered she possessed a passionate temper as hot as the fire she breathed. As well as immersing herself in the arts such as sculpting and calligraphy, winning prizes in school contests, she also helped start martial arts and medication clubs. Today she lives in Fanghai as a teacher at her family’s temple and cultural center, teaching the ancient arts to a new generation.

Seated outside a local cafe, Jinafire took a sip of her green tea, and motioned for her companion to do the same. Considering how much the young ghoul was jittering nervously, she probably needed it more than she did.

"Calm yourself, Ming. Everything will be fine."

"How do you know, Master?" The petite, dark haired jiangshi rubbed her arms. "What if she doesn't like my designs? What if she tells everyone I suck online?!" Ming was now shivering so much, brushes and pencils were falling from the huge sleeves of her silk tunic.

"She won't" Jinafire assured. "I've known this woman for many years. Whether she likes your designs or not, she will be nothing but fair and supportive."

"I hope so..."

"Jinafire!" A Hexican accented voice called out. Jinafire looked down the street to see Skelita weaving through the Fanghai crowds to approach their table. The calaca was fashionably dressed in a vibrant business suit.

"Dos mio, it's so good to see you again!" She wrapped Jinafire in a welcoming hug.

"Yes, it's been far too long." Jinafire beckoned her to sit. "There has been so much to do, and so little time to do it in."

"Tell me about it." Skelita sagged in fatigue. "I've taken about seven flights in the last week or so, trying to buy up some new designs for Morgue and Spencer's fall collection. I'm thankful this trip is the last one. I'm worried I won't be able to get back home in time for Bonita's birthday."

"Oh.. how old is she again?" Jinafire asked.

"She turns five, and Maro is almost three." Skelita sighed. "They're growing up so fast... I can't believe how much time has gone by."

"I know what you mean." Jinafire said, a tinge of sadness in her voice. "It seems like yesterday that I took in my first students. Now they've grown up and have set out to start their own lives and families. And speaking of students..."

She turned to gesture at Ming. "This is Ming Zha, the one who wanted to meet you."

Ming had been sitting quietly checking over her sketchbook while the two elders had been talking. When Jinafire addressed her, she jumped in her seat, sending more pencils flying from the sleeves.

"Oh my, forgive me..." She gathered her wits and stood up, bowing to Skelita. "It is an honour to meet you, Mrs Boneasera."

"It's an honour to meet you too. Jinafire tells me you are quite the designer." Skelita replied.

Ming blushed. "I... I have always wanted to design clothes. It is why I came to Master Long to learn how. But I do not think I am that good compared to others..."

Jinafire crossed her arms. "Ming, your work is excellent. You must have more confidence in
yourself."
"I know, I know... I just don't want to disappoint anyone or get their hopes up." Ming said quietly.
"I'm sure I won't be disappointed." Skelita assured her. "May I see what you have?"
Ming handed her a large sketchbook, then began wringing her hands nervously as she watched Skelita leaf through the pages, her eyes widening as she took in Ming's ornate sketches.
"Oh my... these are muy bueno!"
"Erm.. does that mean you like them?"
"Ming, these are beautiful." Skelita smiled at her. "The use of colours.. and these sleeve designs. I haven't seen anything like these."
"Th.. thank you. I took inspiration from clothes my ancestors once wore, but updated them a little."
"Well, I love them. And you know, I'm willing to bet my employers at Morgue and Spencers would be interested in them too."
Ming gasped. "You mean, they might make them into clothes? To actually sell?"
Skelita nodded. "Yes. Eastern and Oriental inspired designs are quite popular at the moment, and we've been looking for clothes such as these for our fall line. If I have your permission, I would love to show these designs to my bosses and see what they think."
Ming turned pale. Jinafire patted her student's shoulder. "Well, that is good news, isn't it? And you thought she wouldn't like them."
Ming suddenly burst into life and wrapped her arms around Skelita, jumping up and down with joy as she hugged her. "Thankyouthankyouthankyouthankyou..."
"Ai yi, calm down!" Skelita pleaded. As the jiangshi jumped, several pens, papers, and other random art supplies like rulers, erasers and crayons flew out of her sleeves, all over Skelita.
"Oh no!" Ming stepped back and bowed. "I'm so sorry!"
Skelita pulled out a pencil which has gotten stuck in her shoulder bone. "It's alright."
Jinafire sighed, but that couldn't stop the look of pride she cast at her student.

Armed with six, well, arms, and endless enthusiasm for all things arts and crafts, Wydowna Spider was easily one of the busiest students to ever grace Monster High, and one of the most helpful and supportive. From art classes to community and charity events, to even getting involved in preventing an attempt by a secret anti-normie league to take over the school, evidence of Wydowna's remarkable handiwork can be found everywhere. Today she works as a freelance seamstress and illustrator, plying her craft in between caring for her family.

Wydowna stood by the stove, humming as she stirred a pot of spaghetti sauce with her lower right hand. Her two upper arms carefully held her six month old daughter Webigail as she fed her a bottle of milk.

A beeping alerted her to her tablet resting on the side. She noticed her FaceSpook page had several new friend notifications, and began sifting through them using her middle left hand.
Suddenly her phone rang. Swapping the spoon to her lower left hand, she grabbed her phone from her pocket with her right and answered it.

"Hello? Oh Clawdeen, so nice to hear from you. What are you up to ghoul?"

She sprinkled some pepper into the pot with her middle right hand as she talked. "Oh, not much, just getting dinner ready. It's the easiest thing I've done today, honestly..."

She noticed Anansi Jr, her five year old son, walking up to her. He held a Masked Monster action figure, still in it's plastic packaging.

"Hey mom, could you help me open this? It's really tough..."

Wydowna deftly swapped Webigail, the spoon and phone to her lower four arms before taking the package in her upper hands. She used her claws to tear the plastic open and free the figure, handing it to Junior. "Here you go, sweetie."

"Thanks mom!" Junior ran off, making blaster noises as he waved his toy about. He ran past Silvia as she entered the kitchen. Unlike the rest of the family, Wydowna's adopted daughter was a young dragongirl with pale grey skin and red hair.

"Wydowna, could you sign this for me?" She held out some papers. "It's for a school field trip to M.A.D Labs. I need to give it to Mr Hack."

"Just a moment Clawdeen..." Wydowna tossed the phone into the air and caught it with her upper right hand, while also transferring Webigail into the crook of her middle right arm. This left her two upper left arms free to take the forms and grab a pencil from a drawer. She looked over the forms and signed where she needed to.

"Okay, you're good to go." She handed the papers back, then used her free hands to place some spaghetti into some boiling water, grab a block of cheese and a grater, and resume browsing on her tablet., all while still holding Webigail, her phone, and stirring the sauce.

Silvia looked at this impressive display of dexterity. "Um... are you sure you don't need a hand with anything?"

"Oh no, I'm fine." Wydowna smiled. She then noticed Webigail was nodding off. "Actually, would you mind putting Webby down for a nap?"

"Sure." Silvia gently took the baby arachne from her mother's arms, and rocked her in her own arms. "Come on, lets give your mom a little rest."

Wydowna smiled as she watched Silvia coo at Webigail, before returning to the stove. With her lower arms free she was able to grab a colander and drain the pasta while grating the cheese at the same time.

She lifted her phone back up. "Hey, sorry about that Clawdeen. You know what's it like, its always all hands on deck around here..."

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Of course, there were a few students who were unable to attend the reunion, but were able to send letters and texts of congratulations and well wishes. And there are some who seem to have dropped off the face of the earth. If any of them out there are reading this, send us a line and let us know how you're doing. We'd love to hear from you.
"So you looking to go overseas eh?" The short werecat dock foreman spoke in halting english as he led Andy towards the Fanghai docks. "You traveling student on gap year or something?"

"I haven't been a student for years." Andy replied, surveying his new workplace. "I'm just trying to move to a new home."

"Oh? Where you going?"

"America. A small town in Oregon actually. But I need some travel fare, so here I am."

The foreman laughed. "America? Ha ha! You're gonna be working here long time to get a ticket. Air fare costs fortune these days. Might be easier to catch ride on boat. We got plenty to go round here."

"Tell me about it..." Andy sighed. "But I'm willing to do what it takes to get there."

The foreman raised an eyebrow. "Why you so eager? Got a girlfriend back there you missing?"

Andy blushed slightly. "Something like that..."

"Well, since you so eager, we start you on work right away!" The foreman pointed towards a large stack of crates piled up several feet high on one of the docks, where a container ship was moored. "You see crates there? We need them loaded up onto ship there! Think you can do it?"

"Sure thing." Andy said confidently. "It might take a while though, that's a lot of crates."

"Well then, better get started! I'm on break if you need me." The foreman slapped Andy's back and walked off towards a small hut.

"Wait. Should I use a trolley or something?" Andy called.

"If you can find one, sure!" The foreman waved back, leaving Andy to glare him with annoyance.

Inside the hut, the foreman opened up a lunchbox and took out a large tuna salad, which he began eating with relish.

He was so focused on his meal, he didn't bother to look out the window at Andy. And thus he didn't see Andy strip down to his underwear. And then transform into a fifty foot tall giant.

The giant began picking up the crates, grabbing two at a time easily with his massive hands. Thanks to his height, he was easily able to reach up and place the crates on the deck of the container ship.

The foreman finished his lunch, and stepped outside the hut. His eyes bugged out when he saw all the crates were now loaded on the ship.

"W.. what the.."

"Sir?" Andy stepped forward, now back to his normal size. "I'm finished with those crates. Do you need me to do anything else?"

The foreman looked back and forth at Andy and the crates, his mind trying to comprehend what happened. Then he gave up and pulled a flask of whiskey out of his pocket and took a long swig from it.
"Take a break." He muttered, walking away in a confused daze.

And what about me, you ask? Well, not much has changed. I still report the local news and gossip around Salem, though this time I actually get paid for doing it. I regularly write articles for local blogs and for Eternal Ghoul Magazine. And I still like to keep an eye and ear open to the goings on of my close friends. What can I say, they're always interesting to watch. And now that they're all grown up, I can't wait to see what kind of adventures they'll be having. Mark my words, if there are any juicy stories surrounding the town's most famous monsters, you loyal readers will be the first to hear about it...

"Wha'cha writing?"

Before Spectra could react, a pair of ghostly blue arms shot through her chest, grabbed her laptop, and yanked it back through her body.

She spun around and glared at the pale white ghost girl with white and blue striped hair who was currently reading her article. "Do you mind?"

Phantasma ignored her and continued reading. "Wow, so these are all the ghouls you want to school with? The ones you were always writing about in your school blog?"

"Yep. save one or two who didn't attend.." Spectra replied.

"And you're seriously going to keep writing gossip about them? They're not that interesting, surely."

Spectra smirked. "Trust me, if you knew half the crazy stuff that happened during my school years... lets just say those ghouls always make life interesting. And what ever does happen, will make a killer story for my blog."

Phantasma put the laptop down and floated closer to Spectra. "Well, that's nice and all..

She wrapped her arms around Spectra. "But you know... I really wish you'd spend a bit less time following other monster's lives and concentrate on your own instead."

Spectra shifted closer, placing her hands of Phantasma's waist. "My life isn't all that interesting."

"Of course it is! It's got me in it." Phantasma's voice turned sultry. "And you know I can always liven things up."

"I guess we have been apart for a while..." Spectra smiled and gave her ghoulfriend a kiss. "We should do something special, just the two of us. Maybe go out, have a night on the town."

"Or we could just stay in and fool around." Phantasma replied, smiling wickedly. "Whatever sounds more fun."

"As long as its with you.. it's always fun..." Spectra breathed as she moved in closer for a more passionate kiss.

The lives and gossip of her friends could wait. For now, there was only one ghoul who mattered to her.

END OF CHAPTER 2
Author Notes

1: My apologies for the long wait, this chapter ended up being a bit more difficult to write than I thought. But I wanted to give every character a bit of development, and there was some fun, and a bit of a challenge in writing them as adults and envisioning careers for them, while keeping them in character and respecting that they may have changed in ten years. The next chapter will see the plot truly kick in.

2: The events mentioned in Wydowna's entry refer to the events of the Monster High Ghoulfriends book series.

3: As before, a few characters from other monster-based fandoms appear in this story. Can you spot them all?
Chapter 3: Draculaura and Clawdeen investigate Frankie's recent absences, and discover she has been keeping a secret which will change their lives forever.

Frankie grunted as she carried another of her mother's carryall bags out to the sidewalk. She dropped next it to the pile of bags already stacked up there.

"Mom, do you really need all these bags? You're not going away forever, you know."

Viveka looked at her daughter incredulously. "We're on a ten day cruise, on one of the most luxurious ships I've ever seen, visiting some of the most glamorous cities on the Caribbean Coast. I would be remiss if I looked less than fabulous every day I'm there."

She smirked. "And how often do I and your father get a chance to let our hair down and really go to town?"

Frankie couldn't disagree. Her parents were usually the most sensible, straight laced monsters around. They had to be, given their work. So it made sense for them to let loose for a little while on their anniversary cruise. After all, it wasn't every couple who reached their 150th wedding anniversary.

Frankie's father Viktor stomped out of the house, lugging two large cases. He was dressed in a light shirt and ludicrously bright shorts, both of which looked a bit too small for his muscular frame.

"Okay, we're good to go. I just packed some extra thread, some packs of plasma, and all the spare car batteries we could ever need."

"Are you sure you have everything?" Viveka asked. "You have the tickets, right?"

Viktor frowned. "Darling, I've spent the last year saving every spare penny I had to pay for this trip. Do you really think I'm going to forget the tickets now?"

Viveka crossed her arms. "So, where are they?"

"Well, they're right here.." Viktor checked his pocket, and was alarmed when he discovered the tickets weren't there. He checked his other pockets, and then began rapidly patting himself over. "Er... I put them somewhere close..."
Frankie chuckled. "Dad, they're in your wallet. You put them in there earlier remember?"

Viktor checked his wallet, and breathed a sigh of relief as he found the tickets. Viveka sighed.

A minivan taxi pulled up, and Frankie assisted her parents in loading their luggage onto it.

"Well, that's us." Viveka declared. "Thanks for seeing us off."

"It was my pleasure." Frankie replied. "Plus I wanted to see you two before you left. I know we haven't talked in a while..."

"I'll say!" Viktor spoke. "You've been really busy with all this overtime you've been doing... you probably need a vacation more than we do."

"Yeah..." Frankie glanced sideways. "Sorry about that."

Viktor looked at his daughter with concern. "Is everything alright, Frankie? You look really tired..."

Frankie shook her head and put on a smile. "I'm fine, really. I'm just a little weary from doing paperwork. Don't worry about me, just concentrate on enjoying your cruise."

"Well, if you're sure..."

"Come on, we have to go to catch the boat." Viveka gave Frankie a warm hug. "You take it easy, alright?"

"I will Mom." Frankie assured. "You two have a great time."

She gave her father a hug before the two piled into the minivan. As it drove off, she waved goodbye until they vanished into the horizon.

Frankie let out a sigh, feeling satisfied, and also relieved. It was wonderful to see her parents, two of the kindest, hard working monsters she knew, finally taking some well earned time for themselves and each other.

But it was also a relief to know she wouldn't have to worry about telling them the truth for another week or so.

As she began walking towards home, her thoughts were of the grand project she had begun. It was four months since that night after the school reunion when she had realized her dream to change her life, and now that dream was edging closer to completion. She had honestly expected the project to take a lot longer, but a combination of medical advances in the last ten years and a few strokes of good luck, she had managed to complete the majority of her work much quicker than anticipated. Which was great, but added the problem that she would have to reveal her project sooner rather than later.

She hadn't told anyone what she had been doing. Not even her parents or her closest friends were aware. She had considered telling them early on, but the fear that they would object to her vision, or even try to prevent it, had kept her from speaking out. They were always supportive of her but she had a feeling their reaction to what she was doing wouldn't be entirely positive...

Still, that was a problem for another time. For now, she had to concentrate on the last few details of the project. She only needed to do a few more things before she could take the final step.
Her iCoffin beeped as she received a text. She smiled as she read it. The antenna was finally ready for pick-up.

Inside the Coffin Bean, two old friends were catching up over coffee and muffins. And one friend had a story to tell.

"...So we invited Romulus, Scarlett, Bram and Gory over for dinner, to chat about baby stuff, you know. Then afterward we decided to have a glass of wine. Just a little though. Only when Clawd poured it, we found out it wasn't wine after all, but blood! The smell was so strong I passed out on the couch, and Scarlett was so freaked out she nearly gave birth then and there!"

Clawdeen's eyes widened as Laura related her disastrous dinner story. "Whoa... that is a mood breaker. How did a whole bottle of blood get in there?"

"Papa snuck it in there on his last visit." Laura huffed. "I swear, every time he comes over he keeps insisting I need to drink more blood to keep the baby healthy. I know he's just concerned, but it's driving me batty!"

"Sounds like my mom when my brother's wives were pregnant. She kept shoving food in front on them, saying they needed to put more weight on." Clawdeen chuckled. "But doesn't he have a point about the extra blood?"

"I do need to drink a bit more blood yes, but I don't need gallons of the stuff every day. I'm just fine with an extra pint of so mixed with a milkshake."

"How is the little guy anyway?" Clawdeen asked, staring at Laura's stomach. In the last few months it had become noticeably swollen.

Laura smiled as she rubbed her belly gently. "Fine. We've had no trouble, apart from me outgrowing my clothes, which sucks. I've been going over to Frankie's to have a regular check up. She says we're both doing fine."

"Really? I didn't know she knew obstetrics."

"She says she's just started studying on the side. She thought I would be a great study aid, and since her place is closer to mine than the hospital, it works out for both of us." Laura beamed. "And on top of all her other studies... I don't know how she does it all."

"Yeah..." Clawdeen frowned, thinking of their friend's recent absences. "You know, I'm starting to get worried about her."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I haven't seen her for weeks. We talk on the phone, but every time I try to talk her into meeting up somewhere, she says that she can't do it, that she's busy with something. I think I've only talked to her in person twice in the last month."

"Other than our check ups, I haven't seen her much either. But she is a doctor, so of course she's going to be busy. Heck, we've all gotten swamped with work stuff recently." Laura shrugged.

"I know, but she's never THAT busy. She always tries to get us together for a coffee break, even if just for a little while. Spending time with us is important to her, you know that." Clawdeen spoke back.
"Yeah, you're right." Laura agreed. "Still, I wonder what on Earth she's been doing lately to keep her so occupied."

"Hmm.. plus, the last time I saw her, she was acting a little weird."

"Weird... how?"

Clawdeen sat back in her chair as she thought back to three weeks ago. "Well, it was at the Maul. I was with my brother Howie at Scythes Toy Store helping him find a birthday gift for his son..."

"Check this out!" Howie held up a box containing five brightly coloured, spandex clad action figures armed with swords. "The new Power Monsters! He would totally love these!"

Clawdeen crossed her arms and glared at her younger brother. "How old does it say those toys are for?"

"Umm.." Howie checked the box. "Eight years and up."

"And how old is Cody?"

"He's.. two." Howie answered weakly. "But he's really smart for his age!"

Howie's ears flattened in shame as Clawdeen yanked the box from his hands. "Go to the preschool section and get him a proper toy. One that'll teach him something, and something he won't choke on."

"Fine..." Howie huffed away towards the far end of the shop.

Clawdeen looked at the Power Monsters figures, sighing as she put it back. Her mother was right, boys never really grew up, they just got taller.

She was about to join Howie when she noticed a familiar figure with white and black streaked hair, pushing a trolley down the isle.

"Frankie? Is that you?"

Frankie jumped in surprise as Clawdeen approached. "Clawdeen! Hi... er.. what are doing here?"

"I'm helping Howie pick something up for Cody's birthday." Clawdeen looked at the trolley full of toys her friend was pushing. "What are you doing?"

"Oh, just doing some shopping.." Frankie spoke, trying to sound casual. Clawdeen couldn't help but notice the nervousness in her voice.

"Sooo... what's with the toys?"

"Oh, these? These are... for the hospital! Yeah!"

"The hospital?"

"That's right." Frankie nodded a little too quickly. "They're for the children's ward. We've been meaning to get some new toys to replace all the old ones, but you know what management is like, it takes them ages to get anything done. So I thought I would cut out the middleman and get some myself."

Clawdeen looked at the toys a little closer. There was quite a selection there, from plush toys to
electronic learning devices, to Lego blocks and the new Screech Valley High fashion dolls which were popular right now.

"Wow... that's nice of you Frankie, but you shouldn't have to pay for all this. It's your bosses' job to get these things, not yours."

"It's okay, I'll make sure they pay me back." Frankie waved a hand dismissively. "I just think it's important that sh.. the kids have something to play with."

She checked her watch, then grabbed the trolley. "I'm really sorry Clawdeen, I have a ton of things to do, can I call you later?"

"Um, sure.." Before Clawdeen could finish, Frankie was already on the move.

"Great! I'll talk to you later! See ya!" She raced down the hall, pushing the trolley toward the checkout as fast as she could.

Clawdeen watched her go, so confused she barely noticed Howie approach her with a new toy...

"Buying toys for the hospital? That doesn't seem too odd." Laura spoke as Clawdeen finished retelling her story.

"It was the way she was acting that bothered me. She was really jumpy and eager to get away from her for some reason. Why would you act like that when you're just buying toys for sick kids? Not to mention she didn't call me until the next day." Clawdeen reasoned.

Laura frowned in thought. "You know... I seem to recall something that was off when I last saw Frankie for my check up."

"Really? What was it?"

"It was about the same week you saw her at the Maul." Laura leaned back in her chair. "I didn't think much of it at the time, but looking back it did seem kinda odd..."

Laura moaned slightly as she walked up the path towards Frankie's front door. At about four months into her pregnancy, her belly was reaching a size where it was beginning to weigh down on her.

"You're definitely going to be as big as your dad.." She sighed, looking down at her bump as she rang the doorbell

It took a couple of minutes before Frankie opened the door, and when she did, Laura was surprised. She expected Frankie to be wearing her trusty lab coat, or some other kind of sensible, yet stylish ensemble.

Instead she was wearing a pair of old, worn in overalls over a ratty t-shirt. Her hair was tied up in a bandana, and there were flecks of paint all over her. She looked surprised to see Laura as she was.

"Laura! How are you? You look great." She spoke cheerily.

"Yeah you look... nice too.." Laura replied uneasily, looking over Frankie's clothes.

"So, what brings you here?"
Laura blinked. "I'm here for my check up. It is today, right?"

Frankie gasped in realization. "Oh my goth! I completely forgot you were coming over! I am so sorry, I was wrapped up in something else!"

"It's okay. We can just reschedule..."

"No, you came all this way. Please come in." Frankie look her hand and led her inside. "Just give me a moment to change, and I'll be right down to start the examination."

Frankie ran off to her bedroom, leaving Laura to stand in the hall. Deciding to get comfortable, she walked toward Frankie's study room, knowing the layout by heart having visited enough times.

She got another shock when she entered the room. The room was completely empty. Frankie's desk, her charts, her bookshelf of medical journals, the table she used for her impromptu medical check ups... they were all gone. Plus, the room had been painted in a pale yellow colour.

"Oh there you are!" Frankie spoke as she approached, now in a jumper and skirt.

"What happened to your office?"

"Oh, I moved everything into that small spare room I have. I'm turning this room into a guest bedroom. I was just painting it when you arrived."

"Really? How come?"

"Well, er..." Frankie seemed to struggle to reply. "I just thought... it would be useful to have one, you know. In case anyone needs to stay over."

"I guess, but.." Laura looked around the room. "It seems a little big for a guest bedroom, doesn't it? Why not use that spare room?"

"Well... I think guests deserve a bit of space. I didn't have a lot of things in here when it was a study, so why not put the space to better use?"

Frankie took Laura's hand. "Now how about we start the examination?"

"Okaaay.." Laura followed Frankie to her new study, curious as to why her friend seemed so jumpy.

With the examination completed and given a clean bill of health, Laura started on her way home. Frankie promised she would call later, then ran off back into the depths of the house before Laura even reached her car. Laura reckoned she was probably just busy with something...

When she returned home, Clawd was waiting for her with a hug.

"So, is everything okay?"

Laura smiled. "The little one and I are doing fine, though she says we should book a sonogram soon."

"Great." Clawd grinned. "Hey, close your eyes, I wanna show you something."

Playing along, Laura closed her eyes and let Clawd lead her upstairs. When he beckoned her to open her eyes, she was met with the sight of a large room, with a small crib and some drawers set up nearby.
"I finished the nursery." Clawd declared proudly. "What do you think?"

"Oh Clawd, it's wonderful! It's..." Laura trailed off as she took in the whole room. She saw that the walls were painted a pale yellow colour.

The exact same colour Frankie had painted her new bedroom.

"Clawd, what colour paint is that?"

"Erm, Jaundice Yellow, or something like that." Clawd replied. "Since we agreed to keep the baby's gender a surprise, I didn't want to just paint it blue or pink. So I looked up your Good Tombkeeping magazine, and they said this is a really popular colour for kid's rooms these days."

He looked worried as he noticed Laura staring at the walls. "Do you like it? I can change it if you want."

"No no no! It's perfect." Laura hugged him. "I just thought I saw that colour somewhere before..."

"Frankie painted her office the same colour as your nursery?" Clawdeen asked as Laura finished. "I dunno, it could be a coincidence."

"I guess, but why would she paint a spare bedroom a colour of a kid's room? And why the sudden need for a guest room anyway?"

"I'm more worried that she never called you back..." Clawdeen shook her head. "She's gotta be doing something, but what?"

"Whoa, Draculaura!" A familiar voice purred. They turned to see Toralei had approached their table. "I know you wanted to be bigger during high school, but I thought you meant taller, not wider."

Laura's face flushed red. "That's not funny!"

"Okay, I'm sorry!" Toralei held up her hands, sniggering. "It was just a joke. It know what it's like, believe me. When I was pregnant, I was a blimp."

"What are you doing here?" Laura asked, frowning.

"Just having some retail therapy while Nekora is with her grandparents." Toralei indicated the shopping bag she carried. "I was getting a drink when I saw you ghouls being all serious. What's up?"

"We were talking about Frankie. We've haven't seen her in ages, and it feels like she's avoiding us..." Clawdeen explained, when an idea struck her. "Hey, you haven't seen her around, have you?"

"Me? Well, once in a while." Toralei shrugged. "We sometimes run into each other in the grocery store, shoot the breeze for a minute or so, but that's it."

"Has she been acting... odd, at all?" Laura asked. "Or did she say anything unusual?"

"No stranger than she usually is." Toralei scratched her head in thought. "Although, this one conversation we had kinda sticks out."

Laura and Clawdeen leaned in closer. "Could you tell us? It might be important."
"Okaaay.." Toralei took a nearby chair, watching the curious ghouls warily. "But she didn't act or say anything weird. I just remember this because she asked me something no one else had ever asked before."

"What did she ask?"

"Gimme a chance to talk, will you? It was about two months ago. I was at the park with Nekora, and she happened to be walking by. So she stopped for a chat..."

"She's really athletic." Frankie commented as she and Toralei watched Nekora climbing across the monkey bars at the local playground. Both women were sat on a nearby bench.

"Yep, she gets that natural grace from me." Toralei said proudly, stretching out. She frowned as she watched her daughter flip up to the top of the monkey bars and balance precariously on them. "I'm not sure where she gets the energy from though. That's why I took her here before we went to the dentist. I figure if she tires herself out here, she won't cause a fuss when she has to sit in the chair."

"Sounds like a plan." Frankie said. "I know what it's like to examine unruly kids, believe me."

"Maybe you could loan me a gurney to strap her down on before I go?" The two chuckled at the joke, before lapsing into a content silence. Toralei noticed Frankie was staring at the playground, watching Nekora and the other kids playing with a pensive look on her face.

"You okay?"

"Oh um.. yes." Frankie replied. She still looked nervous as she faced Toralei. "Actually.. I have a question I want to ask you."

"If it involves moving furniture, you can forget it.."

"No no! It's more of a personal question. You don't have to answer it if you don't want to..."

"Meh, I'm game. What is it?"

Frankie was silent for a few moments, fiddling with her fingers nervously before she spoke. "What's it like.. being a mother?"

Toralei blinked. "Whoa... that's er... no one's ever asked me that before. Wouldn't it be better to ask your mom?"

"Yeah, but it's not quite the same. Mom took care of me when I was mentally 15 years old. She never got to experience what it's like caring for a child." Frankie explained.

Toralei raised an eyebrow. "Why are you asking, anyway?"

"I'm just... curious. I'm only thirteen years old, you know. There are lots of things I've not experienced yet."

Toralei wasn't quite sure how to answer her, but Frankie's pleading gaze caused her to relent.

"Alright, well... if I had to describe it, I'd say motherhood is a series of small moments of joy as you watch a tiny, amazing monster grow up... mixed in with days of frustration when said monster drives you up the wall!"

Frankie's face turned pale at that comment.
"It's not all bad." Toralei explained. "But on the bad days, it can feel like everything is going downhill all at once. Especially if you're looking after a baby. Feeding it, changing it, trying to get it to sleep..."

She glanced at Nekora. "You've probably figured it out already, but I had Nekora when I was still in college. I was dumb, reckless, and I made a lot of stupid choices, including the kind that got me pregnant in the first place. When I was giving birth, I was ready to just give her up for adoption. I really didn't want to be a mom, and I thought it would be better to just give her to someone else."

She smiled as she recalled the memory. "But then they put her in my arms, and she looked at me in a way no one but my parents had looked at me before. I can't quite describe it. It was... I dunno, like she truly loved me, and needed me. And I knew that if I let her go, I'd regret it for the rest of my life. So we went home together."

Frankie was enraptured as Toralei continued. "I won't deny that raising her was a challenge, especially at the beginning. But its been a lot of fun as well. I love playing with her and helping her learn, and there's just something fulfilling about watching her grow up. She's always coming up with these crazy ideas for fun things to do, she loves being active. and it's great to help her grow up to be a good person..."

She frowned when she realized Nekora was trying to climb a nearby tree. ".even though she never listens half the time... NEKORA!" She bellowed.

"What?!" Nekora called back to her.

"Were you trying to eat some birds again?"

Nekora looked guiltily at a bird's nest resting in the tree's branches. "Um... no?"

Toralei gave her a disapproving frown. "Get down from there now. We are not going to the dentist with feathers stuck in your teeth."

Nekora huffed and dropped down from the tree. Toralei sighed.

"See what I mean?"

Frankie chuckled. "Yeah.. still, you seem to be handling it well."

"Well, I have learned to be a pretty patient over the years. That's another nice thing about motherhood. It makes you want to be a better monster. I know I've grown up a lot since I gave birth. I kinda had to, really. Pulling pranks does not pay the bills."

Toralei checked her watch. "Aw damn, I have to go, our appointment is due."

She called for Nekora to return as she got up. "So, did that answer your question? I'm not exactly good with all this deep meaning stuff..."

Frankie nodded. "Yeah.. that cleared up a lot of things for me. Thank you."

"Eh, no worries." Toralei shrugged. She took Nekora's hand. "Well, we gotta go. Say goodbye to Miss Stein."

"Bye Miss Stein." Nekora replied cheerily.

As Toralei led her away, the young girl waved at Frankie, who waved back with a bright smile.
"And that was it really. Nothing unusual, just Frankie being nosy." Toralei shrugged.

"Yeah, that doesn't sound too unusual for Frankie." Clawdeen conceded. "Still, it's a kinda random question to ask."

"She was probably just curious. I mean, other than the twins and Wydowna, I'm the only old classmate who still lives in town and has a kid. Present company excepted." Toralei suggested, glancing at Laura.

She gathered up her bags. "Well, if you see Frankie, tell her I said hi, and I hope she's okay. I gotta go."

With that, Toralei made her way out of the cafe, leaving Laura and Clawdeen deep in thought.

"So, does asking Toralei for advice count as weird?" Laura asked.

"If we were back in school I would have said yes, but Toralei isn't the jackass she used to be. Maybe she really was the best person to ask."

"Why not come to us, or her parents first though?" Laura folded her arms under her chin. "She's still totally avoiding us."

"Maybe not all of us." Clawdeen pulled out her iCoffin. "Maybe some of the other ghouls have seen her around."

"Good idea!" Laura grabbed her own phone. "Lets start calling."

Unfortunately, their calls didn't get much results. Cleo was too busy with the latest issue of her magazine to even notice Frankie had been absent. Lagoona had been busy settling into her and Gil's new workplace, and had only talked to Frankie occasionally over the phone, and only for brief chats. Robecca, Howleen, Twyla, Wydowna and Scarah gave the same answers, only spotting her in town here and there. Even Spectra didn't have a clue as to what Frankie was doing, something that disturbed the gossipy ghost herself.

It was Ghoulia who was able to give them a more concrete answer.

"She visited me at M.A.D Labs a couple of months ago." She explained, her phone automatically translating her zombie speak into an electronic English voice. "She wanted my opinion on a scientific problem she was working on..."

Inside one of M.A.D Lab's huge hangars which served as testing areas, Ghoulia took her place behind a small, desk mounted control panel.

A short distance away, Professor Reginald Moonshroud, one of M.A.D's top minds, was preparing to test his latest invention. The tall lanky werewolf adjusted his crash helmet as he stepped into a small golf cart, with large solar panels attached to the roof.

Once strapped in he looked to Ghoulia. "Alright, we're ready to begin, Mrs Mortavich. Let's start slow and work our way up. Give me about 10% intensity."

Ghoulia nodded and turned a dial on her controls. Up above, a large skylight partially opened, letting a thin beam of moonlight shine into the room, and onto the golf cart. Moments later, its engine spluttered to life, and the cart began slowly moving forwards.
"Ha ha, yes!" Reginald pumped his fist in victory. "Alright, lets increase moonbeam exposure by another 10%.

Ghoulia complied, opening the skylight slowly. The moonbeam shone brighter, causing the cart to move slightly faster.

"Ghoulia?" Frankie's voice cried out.

Ghoulia jolted in surprise, accidentally turning the dial all the way to 100%. The moonlight lit up the entire room, and the slow moving cart suddenly jolted into high speed.

"WHOOOAAAAAA!" Reginald shrieked as the cart careened forward. He frantically steered the cart around various crates and barrels, skidding uncontrollably around Ghoulia and nearly hitting Frankie, before it raced out of the front door. It was speeding away into the distance before Ghoulia closed the skylight.

Frankie stared slack jawed at the speeding cart as it vanished into the night. "Wh.. what was that?"

"That would be Professor Moonshroud's latest invention, solar panels that absorb moonlight instead of sunlight. He's hoping to create a cheap electric moonbeam powered car for night dwelling monsters to use." Ghoulia explained, Frankie understanding her zombie language perfectly. "There are still a few kinks to work out."

Frankie looked guilty. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you. I can come by another time..."

"It's alright." Ghoulia smiled. "This isn't the first time one of Reggie's experiments has gone awry. He'll be fine. But I take it you came here to meet me?"

"Frankie nodded. "Yes... I've been working on something for a while, and I needed a second opinion."

"Is this a medical issue? That's not quite my expertise."

"Sort of... its more of a formula I've been working on on the side, for medical use."

"Taking after your father, huh?" Ghoulia said. Frankie's father had become a famous name among monster scientists for the scientific and medical discoveries he'd made while working as a doctor. It seemed Frankie was following in his footsteps.

"Not exactly..." Frankie pulled out a large folder full of papers. "This is a formula for a special serum I've been making. I wanted to know if there's anything I might have overlooked."

Ghoulia took the folder and began reading through it. As she scanned the various chemical formulations and biology notes, it dawned on her what this serum was for.

"This is... an aging formula?"

"Yes." Frankie leaned over Ghoulia's shoulder to point at some notes. "This formula is meant to stimulate cell division, as well as restrict the production of telomerase within the cells. As you may know, telomerase is an enzyme which the body can produce to lengthen the telomeres, which can determine how long a being can live. Monsters like vampires, werewolves and zombies produce extraordinary amounts of telomerase, one of the reasons why they live so long. My parents put specially-made blood and bodily fluids into my veins which simulates the effects of telomerase when combined with electricity, just enough to keep me from rotting. I've been working backwards from there, trying to find a way to reverse the process and induce aging in the undead."
"I see..." Ghoulia groaned as she continued reading. "If you don't mind me asking, why are you making a serum to make monsters age?"

"Well..." Frankie hesitated for a moment. "I've had a few patients, vampires mostly, express an interest in ways of looking older. Since monsters and humans are becoming more integrated these days, they're worried that they might alienate or frighten people close to them because they don't age."

"Yes, than can be an issue. And plastic surgery isn't an option because their healing factor rejects any surgical attempts." Ghoulia noted

"So I thought I would take a crack at the problem, and came up with this." Frankie added. "I've already done some trials on lab rats and some old cadaver parts. I wanted to hear your opinion of the results."

Ghoulia carefully read the experiment notes. Sure enough, Frankie's test indicated this serum was reacting to bodily cells just as she described, and with seemingly no after effects. Still, a couple of things came to mind...

"Well Frankie, this serum seems to be working fine. I would probably conduct several more tests just to be certain, but it looks like you've cracked it."

Frankie sighed with relief. "Oh that's good to hear. I was worried I might have messed up somewhere."

"There are two things I've noticed though. One, all your tests were on human or undead remains. Wouldn't it make more sense to test it's effectiveness on vampire or werewolf remains? They are what this serum is for, right?"

"Oh right!" Frankie seemed surprised by that fact, but she quickly recovered. "I wanted to get the formula right on human flesh as a baseline before I start with the longer living creatures. I'll start tests tomorrow."

"My other query is.. how fast is this serum supposed to work? I noticed you've been giving the majority of your test subjects quite small doses."

"Yeah, big doses had some adverse effects over time, so I decided to stick to small doses so as not to cause damage to the cells. Why do you ask?"

"Well, if you're planning for people to use this long term, it's going to take a long time to take effect." Ghoulia pointed to the notes. "Based on your measurements, I calculate that a person would need to take a dose of this serum every day for a year just to age.. well, a year."

"I see what you mean, but that sounds fine to me." Frankie replied, a slight smile on her face. "I wouldn't want to age too quickly, would you?"

"I guess so." Ghoulia shrugged, returning the notes. "Is there anything else to show me?"

"No no, that's it! Thank you Ghoulia, this is just what I needed!" Frankie hugged her friend. Ghoulia couldn't help but notice she seemed rather excited all of a sudden.

"I have to get home and do some more work on this, can I call you later?" Frankie asked.

"Of course. I'd love to see more of your results if I can spare the time." Ghoulia said.
"Great! Thank you so much again." Frankie said hurriedly. She jogged towards the exit, waving goodbye as she left.

Ghoulia waved back, a little puzzled by Frankie's sudden mood shift. She seemed a little too happy about her results.

Suddenly a loud screech caught her attention, and she turned to see the moon-powered golf cart had pulled in, with several dents on the bonnet and tree branches stuck to it. Professor Moonshroud stumbled out, holding a bag of Skrispy Skreme donuts.

"Well, at least we don't have to worry about mileage. I got to the Maul and back before the battery gave out. Want a donut?"

"...And that was the last time I saw her. She hadn't called me after that visit, though I was so busy with my own work, I hadn't really noticed. I just assumed she was finishing her own research." Ghoulia finished her story.

"I see..." Laura sighed. "Do you have any idea what she might be up to?"

"Not a clue. I thought she would have contacted our offices about her serum by now. Perhaps she's still performing tests."

"But why wouldn't she just tell us that? Why all this secrecy over an aging serum?"

"I don't know... but she seemed very happy with the advice I gave her. Whatever it is she's working on, its clearly important to her." Ghoulia replied. "If you see her, let me know if she's alright."

"Sure. Thanks Ghoulia." Laura hung up and rubbed her head. "Holy Bram Stoker, this is maddening! What the heck has Frankie gotten herself into?"

"I don't know, but there's only one way to find out. We've gotta ask the ghoul herself." Clawdeen got to her feet, and helped Laura to hers. "Come on, lets go to the hospital. We should be able to catch her there."

"Aw, she left just an hour ago." Duzer, the gorgon nurse Frankie worked with replied to Laura and Clawdeen's query. "She asked for a big shift change a while ago, she usually works the morning and afternoon shifts now."

"Drat!" Laura cursed. "And we really needed to talk to her."

"Whoa, is it something bad?" Duzer asked, concerned.

"We're not sure..." Clawdeen spoke. "Hey, you work with her. Have you noticed her doing anything... unusual lately?"

Duzer's eyes widened. "Oh yeah, she totally did something out of character a few weeks ago!"

"Wh... what did she do?!"

"She booked some holiday time."

Clawdeen blinked. "That's it? What's so weird about that?"

"You don't get it." Duzer replied. "Apart from her mandatory days off, Doc Stein practically never
takes time off. She really loves what she does here. She's practically the only doctor I've ever met who enjoys the thought of overtime."

She smirked. "Everyone from me to the guys in HR have been telling her to take it easy for a while with all that holiday time she's got clocked up, and it looks like she finally listened. She booked a whole month off."

"A month?!" Laura gasped. "She never told us that."

"Maybe she was going to surprise you." Duzer suggested.

"Did she say if she was going anywhere?" Clawdeen asked.

"Nah, she didn't mention anywhere particular. Maybe she's just going to chill at home, work on that experiment of hers."

Laura and Clawdeen froze. "What experiment?"

"I don't know." Duzer shrugged. "All I know is that for the last few months she's been ordering a lot of equipment. These delivery guys would come in and tell her they've got some stuff for her, then she helps them put it in her car to take home later. She said it's for some kind of thesis she's working on or something..."

"What kind of equipment?" Laura asked.

"Medical stuff mostly. Things like surgical thread, tools, antibiotics, electrical cables, a surgery table... one time, she even got this huge ass bathtub thing. She had to take the afternoon off just to drive it home."

Clawdeen looked puzzled. "Did she say what kind of experiment?"

"She didn't say anything to me." Duzer made a check of her charts. "Sorry, but I gotta go check on the patients."

As she walked off, Clawdeen called to her. "One more thing. Did Frankie give the hospital some toys for the children's ward recently?"

"Toys? We ain't gotten any new toys for ages."

Duzer strode off, leaving Laura and Clawdeen more confused than ever.

"Okay... now I'm worried." Clawdeen spoke quietly.

As they drove away in Clawdeen's car, the two were silent as they mulled over what they had learned.

"Okay, I think I know what's going on." Laura spoke up. "Frankie's gotten into trouble with the Monster Mafia!"

Clawdeen looked at her sister-in-law with a deadpan look. "Seriously? That's your theory?"

"Think about it! All the medical equipment, the aging serum... maybe she's being forced to perform some sort of secret surgery for some big Mafia boss, like changing how they look so the police won't find them. And the month off is so she can flee the country!" Laura declared, holding up her hands dramatically.
"And the toys and the new bedroom? How do they fit in?"

"Er.. I think..." Laura fumbled, before throwing her hands up. "I don't know! Even I'm not that good of a writer to make sense out of all this."

"Well, we're gonna find out." Clawdeen sped the car up, frowning in determination. "We're gonna get Frankie to explain all this once and for all."

They drove into the residential area of Salem, onto Frankie's street, and were met with a bizarre sight as they approached her house.

"Why the hell does she have a huge metal rod stuck on her roof?"

Frankie hummed to herself as she connected the last few wires. This afternoon had gone quite smoothly. The antenna hadn't taken too long to assemble, most of the work had been leading the wires down through the roof into the attic. Everything was now set, all she needed to do was test to make sure everything worked properly.

She stepped back and admired the fruits of her labour. She still couldn't quite believe it had all come together so fast. It had started as a small idea, and now it was nearly real. All she had to do was flip the switch... and everything would change forever.

Of course, she would also need the appropriate weather. She picked up her diePad and checked the weather app, reading the forecasts for the next few weeks.

To her delight, she found that a heavy thunder storm would occur in just a few days. Perfect! She could have everything ready by then. She wouldn't have to wait to become...

She froze. Maybe she shouldn't rush this. After all, she still had to tell her parents. It didn't seem right to surprise them with this after the fact. But she was so close, and when would a storm like this occur again? She couldn't wait too long, or else her chance could be lost forever...

The sound of her doorbell shook her from her thoughts. Who could be calling at this time?

She took a last look at the laboratory before she rushed upstairs, locking the door behind her.

Frankie opened the door, surprised to see Clawdeen and Laura standing before her.

"Oh hey ghouls. What are you doing here?"

"We came to see you, of course." Clawdeen replied, an edge in her voice.

"Oh well.. I'm a little busy right now. Perhaps you could.. hey!" Frankie was pushed aside by Clawdeen, Laura following her in.

Frankie chased after her friends as they entered her living room and faced her, arms crossed.

"What's going on?"

"We're here to hang out with you." Laura said firmly. "And we're not taking no for an answer."

Frankie sighed. "Look, I'd love to go out with you, but I have a lot of important work to do."

"Really? What kind of work?"
"Y.. you know. Just some medical stuff." Frankie spoke, a nervous look on her face. "It's very important. I can't really talk about it..."

"Oh cut the crap!" Clawdeen suddenly snapped. Frankie flinched at the anger in her face. "Since when the hell has something been so important that you can't talk to us about it?!"

"You've been ignoring us these past few months! And we don't know what you're doing, but it sure isn't related to your work!" Laura spoke, glaring.

"I.. I'm not.." Frankie stammered. "What do you mean?"

"We know about the aging serum, and all that medical equipment you've been buying. Not to mention all the other weird stuff we've noticed. What are you up to? Are you in trouble with the Monster Mafia?" Laura asked.

Clawdeen shot a look at Laura, then focused on Frankie again. "Seriously, what is going on? Please Frankie. We're worried about you. Whatever you've gotten into, we want to help."

"Yeah ghoul. You can tell us anything." Laura urged.

Frankie looked back and forth at her friends, nervously sweating as she tried to think of something to say. Finally, she let out a low moan of defeat.

"I'm sorry... I was afraid of what you would say if you knew..."

"Knew what?" Laura asked.

Frankie didn't reply at first. She sat down on the couch, looking down at her feet. Clawdeen and Laura sat next to her, sensing they needed to be close right now.

"Ghouls... have you ever felt... empty?" She spoke in a sad, quiet voice.

Laura looked sympathetic. "I felt that a little when Clawd and I first broke up."

"Then you know what it's like. That feeling that something went wrong and something is missing from your life, and now you can't ever take it back. I felt it after the school reunion."

"What happened?" Clawdeen edged closer.

"It was... when I looked at my old photo collection. I realized that everyone had changed in so many ways. They have families, children, exciting thing happening in their lives... and I don't have any of that."

She looked at her friend's concerned faces. "I mean.. Laura, you're having a baby. Abbey and Toralei already have families. Clawdeen, you've got a wonderful relationship going on. Cleo and Lagoona have all these amazing adventures in their work. And meanwhile, I've been working at the same job for years, and nothing has changed for me. Everyone seems to have something special... except me."

"But you love working at the hospital, don't you?" Clawdeen asked.

Frankie nodded. "I do.. I can't imagine doing anything else. But I've devoted every moment of my time these last few years working toward that goal. I've had to sacrifice so much... relationships, new experiences, family. I know I don't necessarily need those things, but when I see how happy everyone is with their lives, I want to have those things too. And I feel that for all my
achievements, I've missed out on so much, and I'll never get the chance to have those things again.”

Clawdeen felt her heart break as she looked at Frankie's sorrowful face. She wrapped her arm around her shoulders.

"This reminds me of our first year at Monster High. Remember how scared you were because you thought you would never be cool, or interesting or popular like everyone else? And in the end, everything turned out just fine."

She smiled. "Just because your life isn't exactly the same as everyone else's doesn't mean you've wasted it. It just means you took a different path. And it's a life you chose because you wanted to do something you love."

"And your life is pretty exciting. You get to experience all sorts of amazing things no one else could ever do." Laura added. "You save lives and help the whole community. I sit on my fat butt and write romance novels. You shouldn't compare your life with ours, they're all different. But that doesn't mean yours is any less fulfilling."

"I know.." Frankie sighed. "On some level, I do know that. But it's hard to remember sometimes, when you feel like you're in a rut and everyone else is so happy."

"So make yourself happy!" Laura said, leaning over and patting Frankie's shoulder encouragingly. "If you think something's missing in your life, you should go and change it. Do something new, find an awesome hobby, get out there and find yourself a hot date. I mean, look at Clawd. He changed from playing football to designing shoes, and he's never been happier. You should change something too."

Frankie wringed her hands nervously for a few moments. "Well... that's kind of the problem. I have tried to change something."

Laura blinked as she put two and two together. "You have... wait! Is that what all the secrecy's been about?"

Frankie nodded in response.

"Whoa... what are you trying to change?" Clawdeen asked.

"After that night at the reunion... I was feeling so lost. I thought I would never have the kind of happiness everyone else has." Frankie spoke. "And then, like a bolt of lightning, I had this... idea."

She rose to her feet, her voice and movements a little more animated as she spoke. "At first I thought it was a crazy idea. But the more I looked into it, the more I realized that I truly wanted it. So I decided to just go for it."

"So... what was the idea?" Clawdeen asked.

Frankie didn't seem to notice. "That's why I've been hiding away these last few months. I needed a lot of time alone to get this done, not to mention acquire everything I needed. And once I got into it, I just wanted to spend more and more time on it..."

"What did you do?" Clawdeen demanded.

Frankie continued rambling. "And I wanted to tell you ghouls, I really did. But I was so afraid that you might disapprove, or even try to stop me, and I wanted to do this so badly..."
"FRANKIE!" Clawdeen barked. "What the hell did you do already?! You're freaking me out here!"

Frankie calmed down. "You're right, sorry... you deserve to know. Just... just promise me that you won't overreact, or judge me too harshly."

Her friends nodded, and Frankie beckoned them to follow her deeper into the house. They came to a door locked with padlocks, which Frankie took several moments to open. The door led to a dark stairwell leading upstairs to the attic. Laura and Clawdeen followed Frankie up, their nerves tensing up with each step.

Finally, Frankie opened another door, leading to a brightly lit attic. Laura and Clawdeen followed her inside...

And nearly fell over in shock at the sight before them.

"Oh dear God..."

"N.. no way..."

The attic was a large room, its plain concrete walls and slanted roof immaculately clean and bare of decoration. Several tables lined the walls, each one covered with neatly arranged surgical tools. A whiteboard covered with medical drawings, a surgical table with a spotlight, and a few large electrical devices and tesla coils took up the remaining space.

But Laura and Clawdeen barely noticed these. Their attention was on the device in the center of the room.

It was a large cylindrical tank the size of an average coffin, made entirely from copper. It was bolted upright to the floor, it's upper end covered with cables which snaked up to and through the ceiling. A door with a large glass window was set into the front.

And inside the tank, floating inside a body of water and suspended by thin wires... was a little girl.

She looked about seven or eight years old. She wore a simple white towel wrapped around her body, which fluttered slightly in the weightlessness of the water. She had long black hair, floating in the water like a strange halo, which framed a soft, gentle face. With her eyes closed and her peaceful expression, she looked like a sleeping cherub.

But this girl was no cherub. And she was no human either. The mint green skin, the small bolts in her neck, and the delicately stitched up seams on her arms and legs were proof of that.

Laura and Clawdeen stared dumfounded as Frankie stood next to the copper tank. She still looked nervous, but there was a definite look of pride in her eyes as she glanced at the little girl within the device.

"Laura, Clawdeen, I'd like you to meet... my daughter."

END OF CHAPTER 3

Author Notes

1: DUN DUN DUUUN!

2: For those wondering about the non-Monster High characters I've referenced in past chapters:
Mr Francouer: A Monster in Paris

Duzer, Vinnie, Blanche, Frank.N Tyke: Gravedale High

Tanis, Phantasma: Scooby Doo and the Ghoul School

Alucarda Vein: Character from Graphix Fashion Monsters

Demitri Maximoff, Morrigan, Zabel Zarock: Darkstalkers
The Birthday

Chapter Summary

Frankie's dream of becoming a mother finally come true, but not in the way she expected...

Monster Life

By Toby Danger

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Chapter 4: The Birthday

The attic was silent as Frankie connected a large battery to the mass of cables which would normally be connected to the antenna on her roof. These cables would supply electricity collected from the antenna directly into the Birthing Chamber, as she had named it. Thus it was important that to make sure that there were no faults in the wiring when, or if the big day came.

She flicked a switch, and observed as a voltmeter flickered into life, indicating that voltage was traveling to the Birthing Chamber with no problems.

Not enough voltage to actually bring her daughter to life, however.

Frankie moved to stand before the chamber, gazing longingly at the tiny child she had created.

It just didn't seem fair. Everything was in place to finally bring her child to life. All the machinery was ready. She had finished painting the new bedroom. She had bought enough toys and educational tools to ensure her child would have the best possible start in life, and be prepared when the time came to enroll her in school. She'd switched around all schedules at work and booked time off so she could spend as much time as she could with her. Everything was perfect, everything was ready. All she had to do was bring her to life.

But now she had to wait, wait until her parents got back from their anniversary trip in a few days and explain everything to them. And she was dreading that conversation. How would they react? Would they try to stop her? Would they say she was making a mistake and make her... destroy her child?

She sighed. Despite her fears, she did need to talk to them about this. Laura and Clawdeen had made that clear.

She glanced up at the ceiling, thinking back to a week ago when she had revealed the truth to her friends...

Frankie rubbed her arms nervously as she watched her friend's reactions. As she imagined, they
were not taking it lightly.

"Omigod omigod omigod..." Laura mumbled, her eyes locked on the chamber.

Clawdeen stared at Frankie with wide eyes. "You.. you MADE A KID?!

Frankie nodded. "That night, I realized what was missing in my life. I want someone I can share my life with, someone I can teach, someone who needs me... I want to be a mother."

She turned to the Birthing Chamber. "I've spent the last few months creating her. As you can guess, finding the right donor parts was a bit of a challenge, especially for a body so young. But I wanted her to have the kind of childhood I never had. And I wanted to improve on the way I was created."

She patted the chamber's side. "This tank will supply power to her whole body without the risk of her getting injured.." She lightly touched the scar on her right cheek, a holdover from her own birth. She then indicated a small computer screen and keyboard attached to the side of the chamber. "This computer will run the entire process when power is transferred into her body, and I've input eight years worth of basic knowledge into it's database, which will be downloaded into her brain upon awakening. She'll be fully functional, just like any other little girl. And with the aging serum, she'll be able to grow older just like anyone else."

"Frankie.." Laura managed to calm down. "This.. isn't this a little much? I mean, no disrespect, but wouldn't it be easier to have a child the more, er.." She indicated her stomach. "Natural way?"

Frankie's face fell. "I can't. I had some tests a while back... I can't conceive a child."

"Oh!" Laura gasped. "I'm sorry..."

Frankie shook her head. "It's alright. It's just a thing for constructs like me. Mom warned me years ago there was only a slim chance I would be able to conceive. I just couldn't beat the odds. And adoption's out of the question. A single parent with a job as busy as mine wouldn't stand a chance of being chosen to adopt someone."

Her smile returned. "But it's okay... this way I can have a child on my own terms."

Clawdeen struggled to speak. "Yeah.. but... Frankie, this is crazy! You can't just make a kid just because you suddenly feel like being a mom!"

"Why not? My parents did the same with me."

"But they're your parents! They've been around for decades, they know more about this stuff. What do they think about all this?"

Frankie stared at her feet. "They.. don't know about any of this."

Laura's jaw dropped. "Sweet mother of Akasha, are you serious?! You haven't told them?!

"I was going to tell them eventually!" Frankie argued.

"Man, that's gonna be one hell of an anniversary gift. Hey Mom and Dad, while you were away I made a grandchild. Surprise!" Clawdeen spoke sarcastically. She rubbed her temple, feeling a headache forming. "Holy Fenrir, how could you do this?"

"I'm sorry!" Frankie shot back. "I was scared that if I told them about this, they would try and stop me."
"You're damn right they would!" Clawdeen barked. "Just because you want someone in your life doesn't mean you can just make them out of body parts. Don't you remember what happened with Hoodude?"

"I do, and I don't intend to make the same mistakes." Frankie spoke gravely. "I'm not going to abandon this child. I'm going to give her all the love and support she needs."

"I don't doubt that, but how can you possibly think you're ready to look after a child? Your life is busy enough already, and you want to add looking after a kid to that?"

"What are you saying?" Frankie's replied in a hurt voice. Her eyes narrowed at Clawdeen. "Are you saying I'm not fit to be a mother?"

Laura got between the two, speaking in a calm tone. "No one's saying that, Frankie. I personally think you would make a wonderful mother."

She looked at Frankie with a stern gaze. "But this isn't just something you casually decide to do. You're looking after a child. A living being. You can't take that lightly."

She looked down at her swollen belly. "When I first learned I was pregnant, I was ecstatic. I thought it would all be fun and laughter, and that I would instinctively know what to do when the time came. But in the last few months I've been reading and learning about what motherhood entails, and it scares me!"

She crossed her arms around her stomach. "There's so much I have to worry about. How to feed them, how to make them better when they get ill, how to make time to care for them if I still have to work.. and my child will be a mix of werewolf and vampire, so I have even more to consider. Will they be more vampire or werewolf? Will I have to feed them blood or meat? How will they develop when they grow older? And you're trying to give birth to a seven year old. I can't imagine what that will take."

She looked at Frankie again. "In all my centuries, I've never had so much responsibility put on my shoulders. And I'm willing to bear it. But I don't think I would have the courage to do it without all the time I've had to prepare myself, and all the support I have from Clawd and my family. What about you, Frankie? Can you truly say you feel ready to look after a child?"

"I.. I am!" Frankie replied forcefully. "I'm not going in unprepared. I've been reading every book I can find on child raising. I have a whole month off work to teach her about the world, and all sorts of lessons planned. I've thought of everything I possibly need to raise this child well!"

"It's never enough." Clawdeen spoke up. "I'm not going in unprepared. I've been reading every book I can find on child raising. I have a whole month off work to teach her about the world, and all sorts of lessons planned. I've thought of everything I possibly need to raise this child well!"

"How would you know?"

"Frankie, I was around when my mom gave birth to all my younger siblings. I was there when my brothers had their kids. I've helped my mom and my sisters-in-law with more newborn cubs than I can count, and I've seen how they act."

Clawdeen glanced upward, memories of her extended family flashing through her mind. "They give it their all to look after them, but even then they still make mistakes. They sacrifice a lot for their children, even things they love, and sometimes it takes a toll on them. I've seen my mom yell at my dad because she was so frustrated with everything she's had to do around the house. I've seen Howlminton's wife become utterly depressed because she thinks she's always doing something
wrong to her kids. And Howlard's wife nearly left him because she was so resentful about giving up her career to be a housewife."

She stepped closer to Frankie and touched her shoulder in a comforting manner. "You're one of the strongest ghouls I know Frankie, but being a mom is on a whole other level. I don't want you throwing your life away on something you might not be ready for."

Frankie was silent, tears forming in the corner of her eyes. "I know you're all concerned for me, and I appreciate that..."

She stared at her friends, a desperate look on her face. "But I do want this. I want this more than anything I've ever wanted in my life. I want to love this child and give her a wonderful life. And I'm willing to do anything, bear any hardship that comes my way, deal with any consequences that will happen... whatever it takes!"

She looked at the chamber and the child inside. "I can't turn back now. I can't just abandon her when she's so close to being complete. She has a right to a life just like any other being. And I want to be there and give her that life, no matter how difficult it is. I know I sound crazy, but I can't deny how I feel."

The tears began to flow. "Wh... what can I do or say to convince you that I'm ready for this?"

Laura stepped closer and took her friend into a warm hug. "I think you just did."

Clawdeen sighed as she watched Laura comfort her weeping friend. As much as she felt this wasn't a good idea, she couldn't deny Frankie's devotion to this path she had chosen.

"Frankie... how long can that kid stay in that pod?"

Frankie sniffed and looked at the pod. "She should be alright for the next couple of weeks. Any longer than that, and I might not be able to wake her."

"And when do you parents get back from their vacation?"

"In about ten days..."

Clawdeen approached her. "If you really want to go ahead with this, then we'll support you in any way we can. But you cannot bring this kid to life before you tell your parents. They deserve to be a part of this, and you are going to need their help."

"I know, I know.." Frankie moaned. "It's just... what if they think I'm making a mistake, and make me des... destroy her?"

Laura gave a comforting smile. "I've known your parents for years. If there's one thing they value about all else, it's life. They'll probably be angry you didn't tell them about this, but they would never let that child come to harm."

She chuckled. "And besides, I don't know any parent who isn't happy about having a grandchild in their lives."

"Yeah... I'm sure dad will want to spoil her..." Frankie gently laughed.

She hugged her friends tightly. "Thank you ghouls.. I feel so much better knowing I'm not alone in this. Will you promise not to tell any of the other ghouls about this until I talk to my parents?"
"Just promise us you're not going to shock this kid to life before then, okay?" Clawdeen spoke.

"And when you do, be sure to invite us, we wanna be there for you." Laura added.

"I will.." Frankie replied gratefully. "I will..."

And so she had kept her word. Aside from regular maintenance checks, she had stayed away from the laboratory. Her child would remain safe for a while within the pod until it was time to awake her... if her parents would let her.

She tried not to think of that possibility. She knew her parents weren't the type to just cast away a child, undead or not. But her father was a direct descendant of Frankenstein's original monster, and knew more about the risks of bringing the undead to life than anyone. Would he try to persuade her to give her child up?

She sighed and gently touched the glass of the Birthing Chamber, as if trying to touch her child's cheek. She felt truly guilty about not asking her parents about raising a child before starting this. But the desire to be a mother and change the direction of her life had overridden all her usual common sense, and once she had started, she couldn't bring herself to stop.

Maybe there was more of Victor Frankenstein in her than she thought.

She shook her head and tried to cheer up. She was probably making things worse in her imagination than they actually were. Everything would be fine. Her parents would be back in three days, and they would discuss what to do next, and then, sooner or later, she would bring her child to life.

"It will all be fine, sweetheart." She spoke softly to the still body of her daughter.

She yawned, stretched her arms and began tinkering with another piece of machinery. Laura and Clawdeen had promised to come and visit this evening for a friendly dinner and get together, and she wanted to finish all of her checks before then.

Clawd stared at his wife with wide eyes. "Whoa... Frankie made a little kid? Are you for real?!"

Laura nodded. "Oh it's real, darling. I saw the child myself. She's ready to bring it to life at any time."

She hadn't meant to tell Clawd, or anyone else about Frankie's plans. She had managed to keep it quiet for a week since that fateful day, which considering how gossipy she could be was a new record for her.

But when she had mentioned to Clawd that she would be visiting Frankie for dinner, he had picked up on the unease in her voice, and hadn't fallen for her flimsy excuse to sound like nothing was wrong.

Sometimes having a loving husband who was so in tune to your emotions could be a pain in the butt.

Clawd sat down on the bed, still stunned by what he had heard. "Wow.. that is crazy.. I mean, making your own daughter out of spare parts.."

Laura raised an eyebrow. "What's so strange about that? Constructs like Frankie have been around
for decades."

"I know, it's just..." Clawd tried to find the words. "I've known Frankie and her parents for years. Her dad looked after me when I was sick as a kid. They're like any other person I know. They're always so... alive, you know? It's hard to believe that once they were just body parts of dead people stitched together and brought to life by lightning. And now she's doing the same thing to a child's body." He rubbed his temple. "It's a little hard to get my head around."

Laura sat next to him. "I know what you mean. But when you think about it, all of the monster races came from some unbelievable origins. And every single race, including humans, create new life in very different ways. What's natural for one being is strange to someone else. But in the end, it doesn't matter how we come to life. It's how we live that life that matter what, Frankie's child will still be just an ordinary kid at heart, like everyone else."

Yeah..." Clawd nodded, impressed by her insight. "Still, it's weird to think that in a few days, she's gonna be a mom."

Laura nudged his side. "How do I think I feel? I still can't quite believe this big old belly is going to become a baby in a few months."

"Neither can I.." Clawd gently rubbed her bump. "Everything is changing so quickly for all of us."

"I know.." Laura pressed her hand next to his. "I just wonder if we can cope with it all. There are so many things we still have to learn and be ready for. And Frankie... she's about to have a whole seven year old kid enter her life. I'm worried about taking care of a baby, I can barely imagine what challenges Frankie will face."

Clawd pulled her closer. "This is Frankie we're talking about. The ghoul helped save Monster High from destruction a dozen times. She's practically picked up all of us when we hit rough spots in our lives. She even stood up to two Van Hellscreams. If she can do all that, then raising a child should be a breeze for her."

"And what about me?"

"Between all the time you've spent babysitting my little brothers, the way you kicked my butt into gear after my accident..." He made a quick glance at his right leg, the one that had cost him his football career. "...and everything you've learned in the last few hundred years, you're going to be a great mom, I guarantee."

Laura giggled as Clawd kissed her forehead. "Thanks sweetie. I'm glad you've got faith in my abilities."

She pushed herself to her feet with a grunt. "At least Frankie and I can share advice since we're having kids so close together..

"Say, would it be okay if I joined you ghouls?" Clawd joined her. "I'm kinda curious to see what this kid looks like, and maybe Frankie could give us a few pointers for when our baby comes."

"I guess she wouldn't mind..." She narrowed her eyes at him. "But you have to promise not to tell anyone else about this! Pinky swear you won't!" She held up her hand and extended her pinky finger.

Clawd chuckled. "Alright, I promise." He wrapped his pinky finger around hers.

"No freaking way!" Howleen exclaimed. "She seriously made a kid out of body parts?! Can.. can
you even DO that?"

Clawdeen nodded. "Well, there's no law saying you can't do it. And if Frankie's anything like her parents, she's made this kid from the bodies of people with no names and no family to claim them, just like she was made."

Clawdeen had tried her hardest not to spill the beans about Frankie's secret, but after a whole week of not being able to talk to anyone about it, she couldn't hold it in anymore. So when Howleen came to the boutique to pick up some leotards for her dance class, she immediately sat her sister down to give her the story.

After several moments spent absorbing the story, Howleen spoke. "Wow... well, good for her, I guess. It's a weird way to have a kid, but I guess if it works for her..."

"Yeah, if it works..." Clawdeen muttered.

Howleen perked her ears up. "You don't sound too happy about this."

"I am.. kinda." Clawdeen sighed, leaning against her desk. "Part of me wants to be really happy for Frankie. She's a wonderful ghoul, and I know she's gonna do what's right by this kid. But I can't stop wondering if she's just doing this because she wants to be like the other moms, that she's jumping on a bandwagon that she's not ready for."

"I know what that's like..." Howleen shrugged. "But you know, Frankie didn't get that PhD of hers for nothing. She's probably the second smartest ghoul around here next to Ghoulia. I'm sure she knows what she's getting herself into."

"Yeah maybe. I just worry that she'll fall apart if something goes wrong. I saw how devoted she was to that kid. I dread to think what will happen if it doesn't wake up..."

Howleen settled next to her. "Well, whatever happens, we just gotta help her as much as we can, right?"

Clawdeen nodded in response. The two sisters lapsed into a thoughtful silence.

After a moment, Howleen spoke. "Man, seems like everyone's having kids these days. First Romulus and Scarlett, then Big Bro and Laura, and a month ago Twyla told me she's expecting. And now Frankie's gonna be a mom."

Clawdeen blinked and stared at her sister. "Oh don't tell me you're pregnant as well!"

"No, not yet. Though Dougey and I have been talking about it."

"Oh.." Clawdeen calmed down. "So.. what do you two think?"

Howleen glanced down at her stomach. "I think I would like to have a kid one day. It would be nice to raise a family, and Dougey would love a son to play football with." She rolled her eyes at that statement, knowing too well how much her husband loved the sport. "But I don't know if its the right time for us to have one. Dougey's been working some overtime to help towards our new place, and I have my dance classes. I'd have to stop doing them for a while if I got pregnant, and I don't want to let the kids down."

She looked at Clawdeen. "What about you? You ever think about having kids?"

"Me?" She looked surprised. "Come on, you know me. I am way too busy with the boutique and
"Maybe right now. But you're telling me you haven't thought about being a mother a few years from now, maybe when you've got more time away from the business?" Howleen smirked knowingly. "Maybe once you and Vince finally shack up for good?"

Clawdeen blushed as she stammered. "Wha.. wh... Vince and I have only been dating for six months! We haven't even met each other's parents yet. It is way too early for us to be talking about stuff like that!"

Howleen sniggered at her sister's embarrassment. "Okay.. but you know, you have dated that guy longer than well... anyone. I can see how much you two care for each other. I don't know why you don't move in together, at least."

Clawdeen frowned. "Look, me and Vince have a good thing going on, and I don't want to ruin it by taking things too fast."

"If you say so, but I wouldn't wait too long." Howleen moved to pick up her leotards. "So you're going to have dinner with Frankie now, right?"

"Yeah, to try and take her mind off things before her parents get home."

"Well, tell her I wish her good luck with her kid. And if she needs a babysitter, she knows who to call."

A beeping outside indicated Laura and Clawd had just pulled up in their car. Howleen gave her sister a hug goodbye and headed off, leaving Clawdeen to lock up the shop.

As she walked up the street, she looked up, noticing the darkening clouds filling the sky. She heard a low rumble up above.
"Looks like a storm is coming in..." She scowled, pulling up her hood and jogging off.

Frankie let out a breath of relief as she stood up and rubbed her sore back. Calibrating the tesla coils had taken longer than she had expected, requiring her to lay on her back so she could get at the machinery, but they were now working at peak condition.

She looked around the attic laboratory, casting her eyes on every bit of machinery in the place. Every device was switched on and operating on a low power current, beeping and whirring quietly, a good sign that they were working properly.

She had even switched on the computer which would control the Birthing Chamber and download all of the information into her child's cerebral cortex. The program she had written to initiate the download automatically was still the same as when she had last checked it, with no problems or miswritten code. She would probably need to calibrate everything once more on the day of the birth, but everything seemed sound.

Satisfied, she decided it was time to shut everything down and start preparing for dinner. Laura and Clawdeen were due to show up in a few minutes, and she needed to get the sauughsage and bean casserole out of the oven. She was looking forward to seeing her ghoulfriends again. She hadn't seen them since confessing her secret to them last week, and was eager to catch up, as well as possibly discuss what the future would hold once her parents were informed of her child. Hopefully, talking everything out would help prepare herself for when she had to confront her parents.
Suddenly, she heard a loud rumble outside, a noise she instantly recognized as a thunderstorm. This surprised her, as she wasn't expecting a storm to occur for several days yet. Several more rumbles told her that this would be a large storm as well.

Her eyes wandered towards the Birthing Chamber, and the control panel on the far desk that operated it. It would have been simple to start the birthing process. Everything was already active, she just had to wait for lightning to strike the antenna on the roof, transfer the power to the tesla coils, and when she had enough, transfer it all to the chamber...

She shook her head. She'd promised her friends she would wait until she had her parent's support, and she was not going to break it.

The temptation though, to finally hold her living child in her arms, was agonizing.

She cast a sad look at her still child. "I'm sorry.. today would have been a perfect birthday for you..."

With a sigh, she turned to the control panel and pulled down the lever to lower the antenna.

She was about to turn the rest of the machines off when she realized she couldn't hear the familiar sound of a motor lowering the antenna. She pulled the lever back up and down again.

She still couldn't hear the antenna lower.

Laura looked up at the sky as she, Clawd and Clawdeen exited the car. The dark clouds which had been slowly forming in the sky since this afternoon were gradually growing darker, casting a dim grey pallor on the surroundings. Loud rumbling could be heard up ahead.

"Goodness, how did the weather forecast miss this?"

"Yeah, came out of nowhere..." Clawd commented.

"I hope it doesn't rain." Clawdeen fluffed up her hair. "Wet weather and this hairdo do not mix well."

Laura jumped slightly as a distant crack of thunder broke out. "You don't think Frankie would..."

Clawdeen had the same thought. The storm would be perfect for Frankie's intentions. "No, I don't think so. She wouldn't break her promise. I hope..." She muttered the last part. She could imagine Frankie would be sorely tempted to take advantage of the storm.

As they approached Frankie's house, they noticed a large minivan pull up to the sidewalk. A familiar pair of tall people with green skin piled out.

"Is.. isn't that Viktor and Viveka?" Laura gasped.

"What are they doing here? They shouldn't be back yet." Clawdeen spoke.

The three sped up to meet the two constructs. Both were still clad in brightly coloured vacation clothes, and Frankie's father had a very annoyed look on his face. Watzit, who had been sleeping on the front lawn, rushed toward the two, barking happily. Viktor knelt down to give the dog creature a pat on the head.

Viveka's face lit up as she saw Frankie's friends approach.
"Laura, Clawdeen! And Cl... Oh, it's so nice to see you."

"Nice to see you too, professor." Laura exchanged a hug with the older monster, and waited for the others to exchange greetings. "What are you and Doctor Stein doing here? We thought you wouldn't be back for a few more days."

Viktor grumbled. "Our cruise was forced to end prematurely."

"Yes, the ship had just left Monstergo Bay when half the passengers and most of the crew were affected with food poisoning." Viveka explained. "It was rather unfortunate."

"Unfortunate?!" Viktor raised his voice. "It was complete *kuhscheiße*! For what we paid for that trip, I would have expected the chefs to know how to handle food properly! We spent most of the trip home helping the ship doctors deal with all the sick passengers because all the staff were busy heaving their guts over the side."

Viveka's skin turned a slightly different shade of green. "Please darling, don't go on about it. The memories - and the smell - are still rather fresh."

Viktor sighed. "Well, at least we got some of our money back from the cruise line..."

"And we thought we'd come and visit Frankie before we headed home." Viveka finished.

Laura and Clawdeen turned pale at this realization.

"Oh.. er.. we were just going to have dinner with her, actually.." Clawdeen said nervously.

"What luck!" Viveka beamed. "I just know you ghouls will love to hear about what the cruise was like before.. the unpleasantness."

As Viveka turned to help her husband find something in the back of the van, Clawdeen, Laura and Clawd huddled together.

"Omigod, what do we do? We can't let Frankie meet her parents now!" Laura spoke quickly.

Clawd looked puzzled. "I thought we wanted her to tell her parents about this kid of hers."

"Not like this! She needs time to prepare herself, steel her nerves, let them down gently."

Clawdeen pulled out her phone. "You two stall them. I'll call Frankie, let her know they're coming."

Laura and Cl... nodded, then moved toward the Steins. "Oh Doctor Stein! If you don't mind, I have a question about pregnancy I want to ask you."

"Er... that's not really my field of expertise.." Viktor replied.

"Oh pleeeeaasse!" Laura pouted as cutely as possible. "There's something that's been really worrying me."

While Laura talked to the Steins, Clawdeen called Frankie's number. She growled in annoyance as the dial tone kept ringing.

"Come on, pick up.." She muttered.
Frankie didn't hear the buzz of her phone. She was too preoccupied with yanking the lever up and down, trying desperately to get the antenna to lower. But there was still no indication it was moving at all.

This was bad. She could hear the storm rumbling outside, a clear indication that lightning was about to occur at any time. If it struck the antenna now, before she had a chance to prepare everything...

She pulled the handle one last time before giving up. She would have to get on the roof and pull it down herself.

Clawdeen glared at her phone. Frankie still wasn't answering. "Dammit, where is she?" She glanced up at the sky, noticing the clouds were almost pitch black. The storm was starting to get worse.

"...so to answer your question, no." Viktor spoke to Laura. "The amount your bellybutton is sticking out is not an indicator that you're about to give birth. You still have a few months left."

"Oh, really? I was so sure that's why it stuck out." Laura replied, trying to look naive.

"Well, glad I could help..."

"Wait! I have another question! How do kankles appear, and what can I do about it?"

Viktor winced. "Er... maybe we should get inside and meet Frankie, I'm sure she knows more about this kind of thing..."

Laura stepped in his path, desperate to stop him. "Wait! Clawd has this weird bit of fur growing on his lower back! Could you take a look at it now?"

Viktor frowned. "Okay, what's going on?"

"Darling..." Viveka was looking up at Frankie's house. "Did Frankie have a massive lightning rod on her roof the last time we visited her?"

Everyone followed her gaze. Sure enough, the antenna was still standing upright.

"Well, I'll be." Viktor said. "She must have installed it while we were away. Wonder what she needs it for?"

Clawdeen gritted her teeth in fright. Why was the antenna up in this storm? Was Frankie actually trying to catch some lightning and bring her child to life now?

As she watched, she realized the antenna kept jerking back and forth, as if it was trying to move down but was stuck on something. She felt some relief. Maybe Frankie wasn't going ahead with it after all.

"Come on, we'd better go inside." She called to the others. "This storm is getting worse..."

Everyone leaped out of their skin as a huge crack of thunder broke out, and several bolts of lightning erupted from the clouds. Some of the bolts flew directly down, striking the antenna. A burst of bright light surrounded the metal rod before it was absorbed into it.

"Whoa!" Viktor steadied himself. "What the heck is Frankie doing?"
Clawdeen moved toward the front door, a nagging feeling in the gut that something terrible would happen if this continued. She found the door was locked, and began hitting it with her fist.

"Frankie! Frankie! Open up!"

Frankie was about to leave the attic when the lightning hit.

First there had been a massive cracking sound, as if the earth itself had just split in half. A mere instant later, she'd heard something striking the antenna outside, the metal rod vibrating from the impact with a loud hum.

The moment the lightning hit, every single bit of apparatus in the attic had reacted as the excess power flowed into them. The light bulbs had exploded, plunging the room into darkness. The tesla coils had sparked up, blue trails of electricity surrounding them and providing illumination to the darkened room.

Every other bit of electrical machinery, from the transformers to the computers monitoring them, were erupting sparks from their casings. A thick smell of burning metal filled the air.

As Frankie took this in, her eyes settled on the Birthing Chamber. To her shock, a light within the chamber was lit up, illuminating her child's body.

Then a tinny, digital voice spoke up. "BIRTHING SEQUENCE INITIATED. STAGE 1 IN PROGRESS."

Frankie gasped in horror as she realized that the surge of power must have activated the computer which controlled the Birthing Chamber, and somehow started the program. As the chamber lit up, he could see small devices moving within it. A set of long metal prongs extended from the inner wall and attached themselves to the bolts in her child's neck. A small helmet made of steel wire lowered onto the child's head, attaching itself to her temples. Small needles surrounding the interior of the helmet gently penetrated her skull, ready to transmit information into her brain.

"No no no..." She raced toward the computer. This wasn't meant to happen. Her child was meant to be born in a safe, controlled environment with her family and friends present, not suddenly jolted to life by a random lightning storm hitting her faulty equipment.

Frankie reached the computer, reading it's screen. It indicated that preparations for the first stage of the birthing process were nearly complete. She frantically pressed buttons on the keyboard, trying to find someway to disable the program. Then she remembered that she couldn't stop the program. It was supposed to be a one time thing, designed to complete the progress completely until her child was awakened. She hadn't imagined she would need to stop the process for any reason.

Her child was about to be born.

Panic gripped her as she looked back and forth at the chamber and the computer. If another lightning strike hit, it could provide enough power to awaken the child, unless she found a way to stop that happening. She found herself torn. She was unprepared to suddenly awaken the child now, the sensible thing to do would be to stop the birthing process from happening.

But even if it was sudden and unplanned, her child would be awake, just like she wanted. Shouldn't she just let the course of events continue?

Suddenly, the computer beeped, and its tinny voice spoke again. "STAGE 1 COMPLETE. AWAITING SUFFICIENT VOLTAGE FOR STAGE 2."
Frankie read the screen, letting out a small sigh of relief as she realized what had happened. She had programmed the computer to only activate the second stage, the one that would actually transfer power into the child's body, once it had detected a certain amount of power was channeled into the chamber and the tesla coils. Until that happened, the birth couldn't go ahead.

Now all she had to do was make sure no more power entered the machine. It would halt the process, and give her time to get everything shut down. The easiest way to do that would be to disconnect the cable connecting the chamber and tesla coils to the antenna.

The cable itself hung from the ceiling, just above and right of the Birthing Chamber, a set of plugs connecting it's two halves. Frankie quickly reached up and grabbed it.

"FRANKIE! Come on, open up!" Clawdeen hammered the door harder. "I know you're in there!"

Viktor approached her. "Calm down Clawdeen, I'm sure she heard you by now. Give her a chance to open the door."

"You don't understand doc! We've gotta get in there before it's too late!"

"Too late for what?" Viktor asked, frowning. "Is Frankie in some kind of trouble?"

Clawdeen hesitated, unsure just what to say to him. How do you tell someone their daughter is possibly about to bring their granddaughter to life?

"It's.. complicated. But we gotta stop Frankie before..."

Suddenly another crack of thunder rang out, even louder than the last one. The two of them looked up at the dark clouds, wondering where and when the lightning was going to come down.

"Oh my god!" Laura shrieked. "Get out of there!"

Clawdeen and Viktor stepped back from the house, eyes fixed skyward. What they saw was something they would never forget.

A massive bolt of lightning, bigger than any they had ever seen before, was streaking through the sky directly toward the house.

Viktor grabbed Clawdeen and pulled her away from the house, moments before the lightning hit. It struck the antenna, but the entire house became surrounded by sparkling, crackling energy, casting a bright white light around the entire building. The antenna glowed red hot as more lightning bolts struck it.

Frankie grabbed the cable, and with a fierce yank separated the plugs connecting the two halves. Feeling relieved that she that stopped the process, she was about to step down...

When the lightning hit.

The massive burst of power surged through the cable, directly through the only thing connecting the halves - Frankie herself.

She shrieked in agony as the power bolted through her, setting off every nerve in her body. She jerked uncontrollably, unable to release her hold on her cables.

She was familiar with the sensation of electricity coursing through her body, she felt it every
morning when she charged herself. But she had never experienced a charge as intense as this. It hurt throughout her entire body, but as it flowed through her, she also felt a strange sense of euphoria.

As she tried to fight against the pain and regain control of her body, she heard the computer speaking again. "VOLTAGE AT MAXIMUM. STAGE 2 WAKING PROCESS INITIATED."

"N.. no!" She struggled to speak. She managed to turn her head just enough to look at the Birthing Chamber, which was now humming as it was activated. The lights within the chamber grew brighter as more power entered it. She tried once again to let go of the cables, but the surge of power was too strong.

All she could do was watch as the light within the Chamber grew brighter, while crackling electricity gathered around it like a cocoon.

Then the tesla coils burst into life, emitting bursts of electricity which flew towards the Chamber, striking its surface. The entire room seemed to be full of sparks, dancing and bouncing off every metallic surface. The water within the chamber began to bubble and boil, and the lights were growing brighter, until her child was barely visible in the blinding light.

She could barely see due to the light and her constant jerking around, but Frankie could swear... the child's eyes were opening.

Amidst the pain, she felt a sense of joy. Just a little longer and her daughter would be awake...

"WARNING! POWER OVERLOAD! POWER OVERL..."

The computer screeched this out before it caught fire and shut down. As too much power surged into the machinery, the tesla coils and transformers could take no more, all of them exploding almost simultaneously.

Frankie felt herself being flung backwards through the door by the explosive force, then tumbling down what felt like the stairwell. Then she felt nothing as darkness overcame her.

The explosion was deafening, creating a force of wind which send debris flying and nearly knocked the nearby monsters off their feet. Viktor and Clawd instinctively shielded their wives and Clawdeen from the blast, huddling over them.

When the wind and noise died down, they all turned back toward the house, jaws dropping in shock. The roof and part of the first storey had been demolished, collapsing in on itself. Smoke and fire could be seen rising from remnants of the roof into the night sky. Burning debris littered the front lawn. All the windows were smashed, no light could be seen inside the house.

For several moments no one moved. The only sounds to be heard were the fires crackling and Watzit barking as he ran toward the wreckage, worried about his OWNER.

Then Viveka shrieked. "FRANKIEEEEE!

Viktor, Clawd and Clawdeen immediately rushed toward the ruined house. Laura stayed behind, using one arm to steady a hysterical Viveka, the other to find her phone and call the emergency services.
Clawd kicked open the door and led the others in. The interior of the house was also a mess. Pieces of the ceiling were crumbling down, crashing atop the furniture and onto the floor.

"Frankie! Where are you?!!" Viktor called as they moved deeper into the house. He grabbed anything in his path, debris and fallen furniture, and flung it aside as easily as a child throwing a toy.

"Frankie! Can you hear us?!!" Clawdeen yelled, praying that her friend was still alive. She was more grateful than ever for her enhanced vision, it would have been impossible to see anything in the dark room otherwise.

As the group left the living room and into a corridor, Clawd spotted a large mass laying on the ground near a destroyed door. "Over there!"

It was Frankie, laying prone at the foot of the stairwell leading to the attic, her body pinned down by a pieces of the ceiling.

Clawd lifted the debris off her, and Clawdeen and Viktor knelt down to look her over. Her hands had nasty black burn marks all over them, and her right hand and leg were coming loose at the seams, but she was more and less in one piece.

"Frankie! Frankie, wake up!" Viktor begged.

Her eyes opened. She groaned as she tried to push herself up. "Uhhhgh... wha.."

"Oh thank God!" Viktor took her in his massive arms, hugging her tightly.

Frankie came to her senses. "D..dad? What are you doing here?"

"We came home early... thank goodness we did. We don't know what happened, but there was an explosion."

Clawdeen quickly tightened up the stitches on Frankie's limbs. "You are lucky to be alive, ghoul. The whole top of your house just went up in smoke."

"Oh.. right, the lightning.. there was an overload" Frankie replied, rubbing her head. She winced as she realized her hands were burned.

"Overload? What were you doing?" Viktor asked, then shook his head. "Never mind. Come on, we need to get you to the hospital. Can you walk?"

Frankie nodded, and she let her father and Clawd help her to her feet, Holding her arms, they supported her as she took shaky steps forward. Slowly, the group began moving back down the corridor.

But when they reached the living room, Frankie suddenly paused, her eyes wide with realization. "She's still in there!"

Viktor looked at her oddly. "Huh? Who are you talking about..."

"SHE'S STILL IN THERE!" Frankie screamed. With renewed strength she pulled herself free of Clawd and Viktor's grip and began running back to the stairwell. The others gave chase as she charged up the stairs.

"Wait, it's not safe up there!" Clawd called.
"Oh no..." Clawdeen followed him, dread building in her gut. She had a horrible notion of what was waiting for them upstairs.

She bounded up the stairs, catching up to Frankie just as she entered the attic. Both of them were stunned by the sight of the attic, Frankie falling to her knees.

The roof had split in half and collapsed into the room, revealing the dark sky above. Burned, broken machinery littered the room, smoke rising and sparks occasionally spurting forth from the ruins.
But all eyes were on the chamber in the center of the room, or what was left of it. It seemed to have exploded, it's sides bent and splayed out, and the window on it's front shattered, the doorframe hanging limply from it's hinges.

And laying in a pool of water at the foot of the chamber, was the still body of Frankie's child.

"No.. NO!" Frankie wailed as she stumbled toward the child. She gathered the body into her arms, looking it over for any signs of life.

Viktor stared at the child his daughter was cradling. "Who is that..." He began. But then he glanced at the wreckage around her, noticing the mangled remains of the surgical tables and tesla coils, and was struck with realization. These things, they all reminded him of that fateful day when he and Viveka had brought Frankie into the world... He nearly fell over as he realized fully what Frankie had done.

Frankie gently shook her child's shoulders, trying to provoke some response. Other than a large scratch running across her nose, the child seemed unharmed. So why wasn't she waking up? She must have received all that power, she must have. She kept looking for any sign of life.

And felt her heart shatter into pieces when she didn't see any.

She had failed. Her child was gone.

She cried as she held the body close to her chest, tears falling onto the child's forehead as she wept sorrowfully.

Clawdeen stood silent along with Clawd and Viktor, unable to take her eyes away from her despairing friend. She felt helpless. She wanted to comfort her, but she couldn't think of anything to say. What could anyone possibly say to someone who had just lost their child?

"I'm sorry... I'm so sorry..." Frankie sobbed as she held the body tighter, unwilling to let her go. Unwilling to fully acknowledge that she was gone, and it was all her fault...

"Uhhhhhh..." Frankie froze as she heard the soft moan, and felt a set of fingers grasp her shoulder. She slowly leaned the body back and looked down at her child. The girl's eyelids slowly opened, revealing a pair of vibrant blue eyes full of life.

She gasped as the child reached up at her. "Maaaaa... maaaaa..."

"She's alive..." Frankie spoke, disbelief and sorrow giving way to joy. "She's alive! SHE'S ALIVE!"

She burst in tears again, but this time her sobs were ones of happiness as she hugged her daughter. The child seemed confused at first, but she held onto Frankie tightly.
Clawdeen couldn't help but feel tears well up in her eyes as she watched Frankie embrace her child. She was overjoyed to see both her friend and the child were safe and alive, but she also felt touched by the sight of Frankie and her daughter together.

As much as she worried that Frankie wasn't ready for this... she couldn't deny that it looked right.

Half an hour had passed since the emergency vehicles arrived to deal with the fire and take Frankie and her family to the hospital. Clawdeen, Laura and Clawd had followed, and now the three were sat in the waiting room.

Clawd stretched out on his chair, looking up at the ceiling tiles in boredom as he stroked Watzit, who was asleep on his lap. Next to him, Laura was busy texting as many people as she could, letting them know that Frankie was alright.

Clawdeen leaned on a wall, staring at the door on the far end. Beyond the door were the examination rooms, where Doctor Stein had taken Frankie's daughter to be examined, and Mrs Stein was currently patching up Frankie.

She hoped Frankie was alright. She could imagine that her parents weren't going to take the revelation of Frankie's child lightly. She just hoped they weren't too hard on her...

She heard several dozen footsteps thundering toward them. The entrance doors were flung open as Cleo stormed inside. Deuce, Lagoona, Gil, Ghoulia, Howleen and Twyla were close behind.

"Is she alright?! What happened?!" Cleo demanded. "All I heard was that there was an explosion at her house..."

"It's alright everyone," Clawdeen addressed the group. "Frankie's fine. Her mother's treating some injuries she had, but she's okay."

"Well, what happened?" Twyla asked. "How the heck did her house explode?"

"That's ah..." Clawdeen bit her lip. "That's kind of a long story."

"Can we go see her now?" Lagoona asked.

"I would leave her alone for a while." Laura spoke up."She might be too busy to talk to us right now. She has something important to do."

Cleo raised an eyebrow. "What could possibly be important in a time like this?"

"She needs to be with her daughter." Laura replied simply.

"Oh right..." Cleo nodded in agreement. Then her jaw dropped. "Wait... DAUGHTER?!"

Frankie kept looking through the windows of the exam room's doors as her mother bandaged her hands. Her daughter was in one of the rooms nearby, being looked over by her father and other hospital staff, and she wanted to be by her side to comfort her.

"Can I go to her? She pleaded to her mother. "I should be with her."

"Your father's taking care of her, he'll let us know when we can see her." Viveka replied flatly.
She was quiet as she applied the last of the bandages, but then she could no longer hold back. "Mein Gott... Francine, how could you do this without telling us?"

Frankie cringed. Her mother only called her by her true name when she was really upset. "I'm sorry Mom..."

"Sorry? You made a child and brought it to life without talking to us about it! Sorry is not going to cut it!"

Frankie looked down at her feet. "This wasn't mean to happen. I was going to talk to you first before I tried to awaken her. This was a complete accident.."

"That doesn't change the fact that you should have talked to us before you even started." Viveka responded, trying to keep her anger in check.

"I.. I thought you would stop me."

"Possibly, but we might also have supported you fully and helped you, did you ever consider that?"

"I figured you would just say I'm too young to think about things like that." Frankie looked up at her mother.

"In many ways, you are..."

"I'm thirteen years old Mom!" Frankie replied indignantly. "Mentally I'm twenty seven! I'm old enough to know what I want in my life. And I want to be a mother."

"I respect that." Viveka frowned. "But did you have to go about it so recklessly?"

"Recklessly? I've been planning everything to the letter for the last few months. I studied all of your old journals, followed all of the proper procedures. I had everything set up to look after her, it just happened earlier than expected..."

"And what if something had gone wrong when you did plan to wake her?" Viveka spoke firmly. "What if she hadn't lived? You knew that there were dangers involved. You read our journal, you knew..." Her voice wavered slightly. ". you knew that you weren't our first attempt to have a child."

She rubbed her eyes, as if trying to wipe away old memories. "Those days before we gave birth to you... I cried for days, unable to get over those bodies we were unable to awaken, those lives never to be. Your father and I would have given up if we hadn't been there for each other. Losing a child before they're born.. it's a burden no one should have to carry, and the last thing I want is for you to suffer the same."

Frankie fell silent, guilt welling up in her. She'd been so confident about her plans, she hadn't considered the possibility that her child may not have ever woken up... until she'd nearly experienced it for herself.

Heavy footsteps announced the arrival of her father, who stepped into the room looking rather exhausted.

"Is she alright?" Frankie asked.

"She's fine. She was a bit overwhelmed and fell asleep while I was examining her." Viktor looked Frankie in the eyes. "Frankie... I can't believe you did this."
Frankie looked away in shame. "I'm sorry Dad..."

"I'm amazed. You put her together so beautifully!"

"Eh?" Frankie blinked. She was expecting condemnation, but instead her father seemed really happy.

"I mean, the way you connected her bolts to her nervous system, brilliant! It gives a much smoother transfer of power into her than our old bolts can. And your stitching is perfect! Coating nylon thread in clear monstertanium so it's less likely to break... that was a masterstroke! And inserting multiple needle points instead of just two to transfer knowledge into her cortex.. only a few others have done that before!"

He gave his daughter a look of utter pride. "You've improved on virtually every technique we used to create you." He wiped a tear from his eye. "You've created a perfect monster! You've made your old man proud!"

"Viktor!" Viveka shot a reprimanding glare at her husband.

"Ah, right.." He put on a frown, but it was obvious he wasn't really angry. "But still, you really should have told us about this earlier. We could have helped you. Surely we deserved to be a part of this?"

"I know, and I'm sorry..." Frankie's voice was quiet. "Its just... when I realized I wanted to be a mother, it completely overcame me. I pictured myself spending my life with my child, teaching her, playing with her... the more I envisioned it, the more I wanted it to be real, to the point where I didn't care about what might happen."

She gave her parents a pleading glance. "Surely, you know what that feels like."

"Of course we do." Viveka responded. "Lord knows we felt desperate to create a child after several years. But we knew we couldn't do something like that lightly. Our histories had taught us all the risks involved. We knew we couldn't create you until we were absolutely sure."

"That's what I felt." Frankie spoke. "I thought everything would be okay as long as I was careful. I had studied everything, I planned out everything I could think off... I thought I would be able to do it on my own, that I didn't have to wait for you..."

She slumped down, unable to hold back the guilt she felt about her actions. "And I screwed it all up anyway. She... she could have died. And now the house is gone... where are we going to go?" She began to cry.

Viveka wrapped her arms around her daughter and held her close, stroking her back comfortingly. "It's alright." Her voice was soothing. "Mistakes were made, but we'll get nowhere just dwelling on them. All we can do now is move forward the best we can."

Frankie nodded against her shoulder.

Her father spoke up. "And first things first. As soon as you're both ready, you and your child are moving in with us."

Frankie gasped. "Wha.. no, I can't impose on you guys!"

"It's no trouble darling." Viveka spoke. "We've got plenty of room. Until you find a place of your own, you and the child need a stable home. And besides, we'd like to get to know our
She paused, a surprised look on her face. "Oh my... we're grandparents now. That's... going to take some getting used to."

Viktor grinned and gave his wife a quick hug. "Well if it's any consolation, you're still the hottest grandmother in this town."

"Oh you.." Viveka chuckled, lightly pushing him.

Frankie smiled as she watched her parents laugh, beginning to feel at ease once again.

Laura watched the assembled group of their friends as they slowly sat down. Save for Howleen, all of them had stunned, wide eyed expressions as they took in her explanation as to why Frankie had been absent for the last few months.

"Bloody hell..." Lagoona breathed. "And this child, she's alive and awake right now?"

Laura nodded. "Yep. She almost didn't make it, but she's alive."

"Guuugh?" Ghoulia groaned.

"Yeah, that what she needed the aging serum for."

Cleo shook her head, still trying to comprehend. "Great Osiris... I still can't believe it. She did all this... and without telling us about it? By Ra, we're her friends! Surely we had a right to know about this."

Clawdeen stepped before her. "Hey, give her a break. This was a huge decision for her. She probably didn't tell us because she was afraid we'd react negatively."

"I guess..." Deuce spoke. "Still... wow, this is nuts. I mean... a bolt of lightning, and pow! She's a mom!"

"Tell me about it." Clawdeen sighed.

"So, what do we do now?" Twyla asked.

"Just give her all the love and support we can offer." Laura replied. "I know she's going to care for her daughter with all her heart, but she's going to need our help sometimes."

Everyone nodded in agreement. Just then, they saw Frankie enter the room, flanked by her parents.

"Oh my... you all came.." She gasped quietly.

"Oh ghoul, are you alright?" Cleo declared. Everyone rushed forward to either hug Frankie or give their regards.

"I'm so glad you're alright love." Lagoona gave an awkward smile. "And um... I guess congratulations are in order."

"Uhhhhh!" Ghoulia spoke in agreement.

"I know.. I still can't quite believe it myself." Frankie spoke. "I'm really sorry for hiding all this from you..."
"Ah, forget it." Lagoona said. "Just promise you'll come to us if you need a hand with anything, alright?"

"I don't suppose you ghouls know how to rebuild a house?" Frankie asked, eliciting a few chuckles from the group.

A satyr nurse approached them, and addressed Viktor. "Doctor Stein, your patient has just woken up."

Frankie's eyes lit up with joy and relief. She looked at the group. "Well, would you guys like to meet her?"

Everyone nodded their heads, but Viktor raised a hand. "Hold on. We don't want to frighten or confuse her more than she already is by putting so many people in the room at once. How about we check on her first, and you guys watch from the window."

Everyone agreed, and were led by the Steins toward the exam rooms. Howleen, Twyla, Gil and Clawd stayed behind, unconsciously agreeing that it was only fair that Frankie's closest ghoulfriends should share this important moment with her.

The Steins led the group toward an examination room, where through a window they could see the little girl sitting on a cot, being watched by a nurse.

Right away Laura could see there was something different from when she saw her in the chamber a week ago. A small stitched together scar ran across the bridge of her nose, and her once dark hair was now stark white, save for a jagged wide streak of black which ran down the center. Despite that...

"Oooh, she's beautiful!" Lagoona cooed.

"Thanks." Frankie smiled nervously. She took a deep breath, trying to calm her nerves. "Well... here we go."

Clawdeen patted her shoulder. "Go for it ghoul. You're gonna be fine."

Frankie gave an affirming smile to her friends. After a moments pause, she stepped into the room, her parents following.

The girl looked at them as they entered, her eyes filled with curiosity.

"Hi there." Frankie waved gently. "Do.. do you remember me?"

The girl looked at her quietly for a few moments, before her face lit up. "You... you were there.. when my.. when I could see."

Frankie felt relief that her child's speech and cognitive functions were working fine.

"Yes, I was there..." She sat next to her. "I... I'm your mother."

"Oh..." The girl frowned in thought. "What's a mother?"

"Well, it's a person who creates a child and looks after him or her." Frankie smiled. "I made you, and I'm going to care for you."

"You mean.. we're going to stay together?"
Frankie nodded, and the girl smiled brightly.

"That's great. I like you." She reached over and hugged Frankie.

Frankie smiled, tears in her eyes. "I like you too."

Viktor and Viveka stepped closer. "And you're going to live with us for a while too."

The girl's eyes widened at the sight of the larger people. "Who are you?"

"We're your grandparents." Viktor smiled. "We're the ones that are gonna spoil you rotten."

Viveka gave her husband a nudge, though she couldn't deny she was thinking of the same thing.

The girl looked confused as she tried to figure out what this meant, then noticed something else. "And who are they?"

She pointed at the window, where Frankie's ghoulfriends were pressing against the glass, smiling giddily as they observed the scene. Laura and Lagoona waved at the child, while Cleo tried to shove Clawdeen's head aside to get a better look, much to the werewolf's annoyance.

"Well.." Frankie let out a small sigh, and pointed to each of the ghouls. "That's your Aunt Draculaura, your Aunt Clawdeen, your Aunt Lagoona, your Aunt Ghoulia and your Aunt Cleo. I know that's a lot of names to remember, but don't worry, you'll learn them all. I have a lot of stories about them to tell you."

The girl stared curiously at the odd assortment of monsters, then back up at her mother. "Do.. do I have a name?"

Frankie nodded. "I thought... Tesla, would be a nice name for you. How does that sound?"

"Tes...la... Tesla." The girl tested the name out. She smiled. "I like it."

"I'm so glad..." Frankie smiled. "I know things are a little strange and confusing right now, but things are going to get better. There's a wonderful world out there, and I'm going to be by your side so you can experience it all."

"Really?" Tesla grinned excitedly. "That sounds voltage! Whatever that means..."

Frankie laughed and hugged her tightly. Her parents and her friends, looked at the new mother and daughter with pride and awe.

"Come on Spectra, put the dang tablet down!" Phantasma called from her side of the bed. "I wanna snuggle!"

Spectra shot a look at her ghoulfriend. "In a minute... I just want to check for any updates..."

She resumed flicking through the windows on the tablet, simultaneously checking her FaceSpook, Tomblr and Grimtrest accounts. It was unlikely that she would find anything really newsworthy happening to the monsters she followed at this time of night, but you never knew. Cleo might announce a celebrity coming to visit or Draculaura might blog about some familiar faces which inspired her latest story.

But there was nothing. Spectra was beginning to feel drowsy, and decided it was time to get some shuteye.
She was about to switch her tablet off when her Facespook page let out a ghostly wail, announcing that a friend had posted something. Clicking on it, she was taken to Frankie's page.

It had been updated with a picture of Frankie and her parents, sitting with a small, green skinned girl with black and white hair. All of them were smiling for the camera, and Frankie seemed to have tears in her eyes as she held the girl in her lap.

The rest of the post read, "Frankie Stein and her family would like to announce the birth of her daughter, Tesla Shelly Stein. Welcome to the World, Tesla!"

"Oh.. that's nice." Spectra said, starting to nod off. She closed down her tablet and shuffled under the covers, nestling alongside Phantasma.

Several moments of quiet passed. Then, as realization suddenly hit her, she shot upright several dozen feet, flying through the covers and ceiling.

"OH MY GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOODD! SCOOP OF THE CENTURY!"

She flew back down, grabbing the tablet and frantically opening every social network site she could find. It was time to do what she did best.

END OF CHAPTER 4
Frankie's daughter Tesla celebrates her first week alive, and makes her first ever friend. Meanwhile, Frankie catches up with some old friends.

Monster Life

By Toby Danger

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Chapter 5 : The First Week

Frankie slowly roused from sleep, feeling the warmth of the morning sun on her face. She sat up slightly, not wanting to move from the warmth of her covers just yet, and looked out the window facing her bed. A calm blue sky graced her vision, confirming than it was probably going to be a nice summer day.

She was about to get up when she felt a weight on her legs. She looked down to see Tesla was laying across her legs, still dressed in her blue pajamas. She was reading one of the 'Adventures of Jenny Voltron, Mad Scientist' children's books Frankie had gotten her recently, and seemed quite engrossed in the story.

"Hey sweetie." She spoke, smiling. "You're up a little early."

Tesla looked away from her book to smile at her mother. "Morning Mommy. I got up so I could start on the new Jenny Voltron book. I wanted to read it with you, but Grandma said I should let you sleep in. So I thought I'd wait for you."

"Aww, that's nice of you." Frankie removed the clamps connected to her neck bolts, then switched off the portable charger next to the bed. "Did you charge yourself up?"

Tesla pointed to her own neck bolts. "Yep! I switched off my charger all my myself."

"Well done." Frankie praised. "I bet you can do the whole process all by yourself now, huh?"

"Uh huh.." Tesla nodded. She paused, then sniffed the air. She grinned as she recognized the smell of food cooking.

"Grandma's making breakfast! Lets go!" She tumbled off the bed and grabbed her mother's hand, urging her to follow. Smiling, Frankie got up and put on a dressing gown. The two of them tiptoed through the room, weaving around the various boxes full of items salvaged from Frankie's destroyed house.

As the two went downstairs and entered the kitchen, a familiar voice cried out dramatically. "They're alive! They're alliiiiiiiiiiiiiiive!"
Frankie rolled her eyes, feeling like a kid waking up for school again. She thought she'd heard the last of her father's corny jokes when she moved out to college. Sure enough, her father was laughing and slapping his knee. Her mother, who was cooking sausages at the stove, gave her a sympathetic look.

Tesla seemed to enjoy the joke, giggling as she approached Viktor for a hug. "Of course we're alive Grandpa. We charged up, just like Mommy showed me."

"I know you did, schatzi." Viktor chuckled.

Viveka began preparing the breakfast dishes. "Are you two ready to eat?"

"Yay!" Tesla hopped up onto a chair.

Everyone took their seats around the table as Viveka laid down their meals. As soon as she got hers, Tesla grabbed a sausage in her hands and took bites out of it.

"Tesla.." Frankie spoke firmly. "What did we say about eating with our hands?"

Tesla dropped the sausage, a guilty look on her little face. "I'm not meant to at the dinner table?"

"That's right. A proper lady eats politely at the table."

"I know... but knives and forks are tricky." Tesla held up the utensils, awkwardly positioning them over the sausage. "I can never cut it right."

"I was like that once, when I was first born." Frankie spoke lightly. "The first time I tried to eat dinner, I accidentally shocked my fork and flung it into the wall. So you're still doing better than I did."

Tesla giggled at the story.

"Do you want a hand?" Frankie asked. Tesla nodded. Frankie got up and stood over her, taking Tesla's wrists gently in her hands and guiding them over the food. "See, just hold a biteful with the fork and saw it off with the knife."

She moved back to let Tesla try on her own. Tesla managed to cut it and took a bite.

"See? I knew you could do it." Frankie smiled proudly.

"So, what plans do you two have today?" Viveka asked as they continued eating.

"I'm gonna watch cartoons!" Tesla cheered. "And then we're gonna do some studying, right mommy?"

"Yep. We're gonna learn all about the different cities and countries in the Monster Federation."

"Cool!" Tesla counted on her fingers. "I know there's Scaris, Screattle, Transylvania, and Ickistan."

Frankie blinked. "Ickistan? I don't remember mentioning that one to you."

"I saw it in Grandpa's paper yesterday." Tesla pointed at the newspaper Viktor was leafing through. "It said President Bouldrama was gonna give money to help feed monsters over there."

"Wow, reading the political pages already?" Viktor was impressed. "You'll be heading to Scarvard before you know it."
"Mommy says I should read as much as I can so I can get smarter." Tesla replied. "By the way, it also said that Governor Venus DeLeon called some other government person a..." She frowned as she recalled the words. "...A money grubbing, backstabbing sack of hippogriff dung she wouldn't use to fertilize her own garden."

She looked at her elders questioningly. "What does that mean?"

"Err..." Frankie glanced away, unsure how to answer.

Thankfully, Viveka stepped in. "Say Tesla, I feel like making gingerdead cookies tonight. How about you help me out when I get home from work today?"

"Gingerdead cookies?! You bet!" Tesla grinned. If there was once thing she loved more than reading, it was her grandmother's baked treats.

Frankie smiled gratefully at Viveka for the distraction. "Alright sweetie, time for us to have a shower and get dressed."

"Can I shower by myself this time?" Tesla asked. "I wanna try to do it on my own."

"Are you sure? You have to make sure you don't get your bolts wet..."

"I'll be careful, I promise."

"Well, if you're sure, then go ahead."

With that she hopped up and ran upstairs. Minutes later, the sound of running water was heard. "Only a few days old, and she's so independent already." Frankie commented.

"She gets that from you." Viveka replied, smiling. "I remember when we first showed you a Morgue and Spencer's catalogue. You couldn't wait to start buying your own clothes after that. As my credit card could attest."

Frankie smirked at that. "I did get a bit overexcited, didn't I? I just worry that she's going to hurt herself if she keeps rushing into things. Remember how many mishaps I had when I was learning new things?"

"I wouldn't worry." Viktor said. "Tesla's adapting really well to all these new things so far. I'm sure she won't get into many mishaps..."

At that moment, there was a sudden loud FZZZT of electricity, and the lights all began flickering on and off. Everyone looked upwards, confused.

"Sorry!" Tesla's voice cried out. "I got water on my bolts! I'm okay though!"

"Well.." Viktor winced. "..no more mishaps that she has already."

Frankie sighed.

It was late in the morning when Viktor and Viveka left for work, leaving their daughter and granddaughter to occupy the couch in the living room.

Tesla sat surrounded by some of her dolls and toys, engrossed in the latest episode of My Little Bonies, giggling as Dinky Die tried to throw Midnight Twinkle a birthday party. Frankie smiled as she looked up from the journal she was writing to glance at the TV. She had to
admit, the strange cartoon about talking magical animal skeletons was actually quite amusing, and it had become habit for her and Tesla to watch it together before getting down to studying. It was a small change, one of many that had entered her life since Tesla's birth, but it made her new life as a mother all the more enriching.

As she looked at her daughter, she thought back to the last week. While losing her house and moving all her belongings into one of her parent's spare rooms had been stressful, looking after and educating Tesla had made her the happiest she had felt in forever.

There were so many moments which she felt blessed to be a part of. Teaching her new things and watching her smile as she understood what it meant, and then happily repeating what she had learned to her grandparents. Helping her with words as she read books and was amazed by the information and stories within. She was especially interested in adventure stories, such as the Jenny Voltron books, and Viktor's science textbooks.

She hungered for new knowledge, and wanted to know about everything she could see and touch. It reminded Frankie of her own early days, and she was only too happy to answer all her questions. And she had plenty. Their study sessions were constantly interrupted by Tesla inquiring about something, like how she could move when her body parts were from different people, or why Watzit could only bark or meow instead of talk.

Playing with her was another great joy. As well as getting active as they explored the outdoors, (within the confines of the garden, for now) playing games like tag, climbing trees and helping her act out adventures with Tesla's dolls was more fun than she had imagined. Partly because she had never done such things herself, being born a teenager, but mainly because Tesla's sheer enthusiasm and delight at their games made her want to keep playing for her daughter's sake.

Little by little, day by day, her daughter was growing up. And it felt so incredible to guide her along and watch her grow. Toralei had been right about how fulfilling it was.

Of course, she was also right in that it could be a frustrating and sometimes embarrassing job at times. Frankie had only been a mother for a week, but she'd already experienced quite a few unexpected events, thanks to her daughter's inquisitiveness.

She looked down at her journal, which she had started writing the day after Tesla's birth. She'd considered writing a blog online, but her mother had insisted that something this important needed to be inscribed on paper for Tesla to read in the future.

She flipped back a few pages, reading her past entries about Tesla's first days.

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**Tuesday**

*Tesla's been on a roll ever since she found out she can understand words. She's been reading through books faster than I can dig them out of Dad's library, and while I'm happy she's learning, I'm worried I'm going to run out before the end of the week. I found some books at the supermarket called the Adventures of Jenny Voltron, Mad Scientist, which are not only good stories, but educational as well. Tesla's developed a real interest in science since we started reading them together...*

"What happened next?" Tesla asked eagerly, shifting in her mother's lap as she waited for her to continue the story..

Frankie turned the page and began reading. "Jenny picked up a long piece of scrap metal, wrapped some wire around it, and sent a jolt of electricity from her body into it, causing it to crackle. "There." She said. "Now that I've turned this into an electromagnet, we can use it to find the..."
entrance to Dr Morbious' hidden laboratory...

Tesla frowned. "What's an electromagnet?"

"Well, when electricity travels through a wire, it creates a special field which can attract metal toward it."

"Electricity can do that?" Tesla looked at her hands in amazement. "Wooow..."

"Yep... it's pretty amazing stuff." Frankie agreed. She continued reading. "Jenny searched the ground with her electromagnet..."

A short while later though, Frankie would realize that maybe she should have reminded Tesla that electricity wasn't something to be played with. Because it was then that she found Tesla in the kitchen, with several meters of electrical wire wrapped around her arms and connected to her neck bolts.

"Look Mommy! I'm an electromagnet!" She declared happily. "Watch me pick up these coins."

"Tesla, no!" Too late, Tessa sent a surge of electricity through her bolts into the wires, causing it to glow. She aimed her arms at the small pile of coins she wanted to attract.

And got a shock when the coins, all the spoons and cutlery from a nearby drawer, and several pots and pans flew towards her and stuck to her body with a THUNK. She tumbled to the floor, covered in kitchen utensils.

Frankie rushed to her, frightened for her safety. But she calmed down once she pulled off a frying pan to reveal Tesla's pouting face, looking more disappointed than hurt. She would have laughed if her daughter didn't look so pitiable.

"I don't want to be an electromagnet anymore." Tesla moaned, pulling some spoons off her face. Frankie just smiled and helped her up, giving her a hug and a warning about playing with electricity.

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Wednesday

The first couple of nights, Tesla slept with me in my bed, the poor dear was too frightened to be on her own. But now she's getting used to sleeping in her own bed, and really enjoys having her own room. Of course, she still needs to learn a few ground rules...

As she helped her mother carry some loads of laundry upstairs, Frankie heard loud noises coming from Tesla's bedroom. The sound of bedsprings rapidly creaking, mixed with the sound of pop band Scarefume's latest song.

Placing the laundry on the floor, both she and Viveka entered the room. The once sparse bedroom was now full of Tesla's things, including books and toys all over the floor, and posters of Scarefume, My Little Bonies, and other cute things decorating the walls.

Tesla herself was jumping atop her bed, waving her arms as the song blared out of the small radio Viktor had given her.

"Tesla!" Frankie spoke firmly as she turned the music down. "I thought I asked you to tidy your room."

"I was, but then this song came on, and I just had to dance! I love it!" Tesla replied as she continued bouncing.
Her bouncing slowed to a halt as she saw how her mother and grandmother were staring at her. "Tesla, you can't jump on your bed."

"Why not? It's fun! It's kinda like flying."

"Maybe, but if you keep doing it, you'll break your bed. So please don't do it anymore."

Tesla pouted. "That's not fair. How come Grandma and Grandpa can jump on their bed, but I can't?"

Viveka blinked. "What do you mean? We don't jump on our bed."

"Sure you do. You were doing it last night."

Viveka turned pale, while Frankie looked at her oddly. "We... we were?"

Tesla nodded. "I was getting a glass of water, and I heard you and Grandpa bouncing on the bed. And you were bouncing a lot as well. More than I can bounce."

Viveka's face remained frozen while Frankie stared at her with a horrified expression.

"...and you were really having fun. You were all out of breath and you kept saying 'yes' a lot..."

Tesla continued innocently. "Maybe I should bounce on your bed with you guys instead..."

"Trampoline!" Viveka suddenly blurted out.

"Eh?"

"How about we get you a trampoline? Then you can bounce on that instead of your bed." Viveka smiled a little too eagerly.

"That sounds cool! Thanks Grandma!" Tesla hugged her.

Viveka took her hand. "Come on, let's look for some on my computer..."

She lead Tesla out of the room, leaving Frankie to watch her leave with a disturbed look on her face.

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**Thursday**

*Tesla's curiosity constantly surprises me. Just when I think she's got a handle on things, she always finds something new to get excited about. Even though sometimes she gets into things she probably shouldn't just yet...*

As Frankie and Viveka prepared dinner, Viktor stomped into the kitchen, clad in a lab coat. "Okay, I don't want anyone to panic, but a lab rat just escaped from the basement."

"Oh Viktor." Viveka sighed. "I told you not to bring your experiments home. Please tell me you're not messing around with Cherenkov radiation again. It was a nightmare vacuuming after the last time."

"Don't worry, it's nothing serious. This rat is undergoing a new electro-massage therapy we've developed at the hospital to help with weight loss. Totally harmless."

Frankie removed her apron. "I'll help you look Dad. It can't have gotten far."
"It's the strangest thing." Viktor said. "I was certain I closed it's cage up securely. I step out of the lab for a few minutes and it's gone."

Just then, Tesla entered. "Mommy, do we have any cheese?"

"Um... sure." Frankie reached into the fridge and brought out a wedge of cheddar. "Did you want a sandwich, sweetie?"

Tesla took the cheese. "No thanks. It's not for me."

She walked out. Curious, Frankie followed her back to her room, and peered inside. "Dad? I found your rat."

Sure enough, Tesla was sitting on the floor, with a rather plump white rat perched on her arm nibbling on some cheese.

Viktor joined Frankie, his eyes wide in fright. "Aggh! Tesla, put that rat down."

"Why?" Tesla asked innocently. "He's just eating."

Frankie gave her daughter a firm stare. "Tesla, where did you get that rat?"

"From Grandpa's lab. I went there to ask him about how batteries work, and I found this little guy in a cage." She stroked the rat's head.

"Tesla..." Viktor frowned. "I thought I told you not to mess around with anything in my lab."

"He's not a thing! He's a creature!" Tesla replied vehemently. "He looked so lonely in that cage, I wanted to cheer him up."

She extended her arm to show them the rat. "Isn't he so electro-cute?"

Frankie raised an eyebrow as she studied the rat's face. It had a rather glazed, manic look in its wide eyes, and it seemed to judder and twitch at regular intervals. She had a feeling it had been undergoing her father's electro-massage for a little too long.

"Can I keep him?" Tesla pleaded. "I promise I'll look after him. I can look up how to take care of rats on Mommy's diePad."

Viktor knelt down before her. "I'm sorry Tesla. But I need that rat. He's helping me test a new experiment I'm working on, and I really need him so I can make sure it works properly."

"Oh, okay." Tesla smiled. "But when he's done helping with your experiment, then can I look after him?"

"Umm..." Viktor looked uneasy. "I'm not sure if he'll... still be around after I'm done."

"Wh... why?" Tesla asked, her eyes wide with worry. "You're... you're not going to get rid of him, are you?"

"Well, I..." Viktor started, ready to tell Tesla that she might not ever see the rat again.

But then he looked at his granddaughter's face. Her blue eyes were large and watery, as she was about to burst into tears, and her lips were trembling. He tried to remain firm, but his resolve crumbled as those eyes stared at him.
A short while later, the rat had a new home in the form of a cage filled with clean straw and a little toy house for him to live in. Tesla was delighted as she watched her new pet settle in.

Viktor sighed, thinking of the lab rats Frankie had persuaded him to let her keep when she was young. "It's the Glitterati all over again..."

"Now Tesla.." Frankie spoke as she knelt down to Tesla's level. "You really have to mean it when you say you'll look after him. This is a living creature, not another one of your toys."

"I know." Tesla nodded. "Don't worry. I'll make sure Sparky never goes without food or water."

"Sparky's his name? Huh, that's cute." Frankie said.

"It's because he sparks!"

At that moment, Sparky suddenly juddered, and a small burst of electricity shot out of his tail and struck the bars of the cage. Tesla touched the cage and giggled as her hair stood on end. Frankie just smiled weakly, wondering if Sparky's little shock meant he was happy or annoyed with his new owner.

Friday
Since Tesla seems interested in animals, Mom and I thought it would be good for her to let her help with looking after Watzit as well. She's loves playing with him, and Watzit's quite fond of her too. Though I think it might be a little soon for her to be taking him for walks...

Frankie glanced around the living room, wondering where Tesla was. She'd been busy writing up reports for the hospital and hadn't seen or heard from her for a while. Which worried her.

"Mom, do you know where Tesla is?" She asked as she entered the kitchen.

Viveka looked up from her cooking. "Oh yes, she's out taking Watzit for his walk."

"She's outside? On her own?" Frankie was alarmed. "Mom, she's too young to go outside without supervision!"

"Calm down dear. She's only going to that little patch of lawn at the end of the street. You know, with the tree?"

"That's a whole block!" Frankie gasped, suddenly terrified for her daughter's safety. "What if something happens to her? She could fall over and get hurt, or someone could kidnap her, or she could get lost..."

"Frankie.." Viveka spoke calmly as she held her daughter's arm. "Relax. I told her not to run off anywhere, not to talk to strangers, and to come straight back once Watzit finished his business. She should be back soon."

"But.."

"I know you're worried. Lord knows I felt the same when you started making your first trips outside. But you can't keep her cooped up in the house forever. She needs to get out and experience the world out there. Let her get used to doing things on her own. just like you did."

Frankie nodded, though she was still worried. "I guess... but its been a while. Shouldn't she be back by now?"
At that moment, the back door opened and Tesla entered. She had mud splattered all over her skirt and leggings, and oddly, was wearing thick, bulky winter mittens on her hands, even though it was summer outside. When she saw her mother, she suddenly looked frightened.

"Oh... hi Mommy, hi Grandma."

"Welcome back, sweetheart." Viveka replied warmly. "How was your walk?"

"It... it was fine!" Tesla spoke in a hurried voice. "Watzit had fun. I put him in his doghouse with some water. I'm gonna go to my room now..." She made to leave, but Frankie stopped her.

"Wait a minute. How did you get so muddy?"

Tesla tried to avoid her gaze. "I... fell over, that's all. I'll get changed into something clean."

"And..." Frankie pointed at Tesla's hands. "What's with the mittens? It's a little warm for those."

Tesla didn't reply at first, she just looked down at her feet, trembling. Frankie knelt down before her. "Sweetie, what's wrong?"

Tesla looked up at her, tears in her eyes. "I'm sorry Mommy... it was an accident."

Concerned, Frankie pulled off the mittens, and was surprised to see Tesla's hands were missing. The stitches around her wrists were torn.

"I was holding Watzit's leash, just like Grandma said. But then Watzit saw a cat and ran after it, and he tugged the leash away and it took my hands with it. And I ran after him and chased him back home, but when I got there I couldn't find my hands! They're gone!"

She collapsed into sobs. Frankie held her tightly.

"Oh don't cry. It wasn't your fault." She spoke soothingly. "We'll find your hands, I promise."

"How? I couldn't find them anywhere."

"If I know Watzit..." Frankie grinned knowingly. "I'll bet he's buried them in the garden somewhere. He would always pinch my body parts when I was re-stitching myself and bury them. I don't know why he does it though..."

"So... I haven't lost my hands?" Tesla sniffed.

Viveka patted her shoulder. "No... and even if you did, I'm sure we could find you some new ones."

"That's good." Tesla managed to smile. She tried to wipe her eyes, only stopping when she remembered she lacked the hands to do so. "I like having hands."

Frankie chuckled and took her daughter's wrist in her hand. "Come on, lets find Grandma's trowels. Watzit's probably buried your hands in her flowerbed."

"I hope so." Tesla said. "I want to take him for a walk again. It was really fun until he ran off."

"Well, how about next time I come with you? Just to make sure he doesn't misbehave again." Tesla nodded happily, and the two shared another hug.
Frankie sighed as she closed the book. Yes, Tesla's first week of life had been fairly tumultuous, but ultimately it had been a learning experience for both of them. She just wondered when the next big event would happen, and how they would deal with it. After all that had happened so far, she felt confident she and Tesla could handle anything.

The end credits for My Little Bonies rolled, prompting her to pick up a large teaching book from the side. "Alright honey. It's time to start our studies."

"Can't we watch one more episode?" Tesla pleaded. "That last one was really funny."

"You can watch some more later, I promise. But now's the time for learning," Frankie replied. "And today, we're going to learn about all the different countries in the Monster Federation." She opened the book, revealing a large map of the planet, with countries and cities of the Monster Federation marked.

"Wow!" Tesla gasped. "There are loads of them!"

"I know. There are a lot of them to remember. So we're gonna start with the country we live in now, the United States..." She pointed at the USA on the map. Suddenly, she heard the front doorbell ring.

"I'll get it!" Tesla hopped up and ran to the front door, eager to see who it was. Frankie followed her, curious. The mailman had come and gone and she wasn't expecting any visitors. Tesla swung open the door, and gasped with delight when she saw who it was.

"Aunt Lala! Aunt Clawdeen! Aunt Lagoona! Aunt Ghoulia!"

Sure enough, Laura, Clawdeen, Lagoona and Ghoulia were there, their arms laden with shopping bags.

"Hello darling!" Laura cooed, bending down as much as her belly could allow to kiss Tesla's forehead. "Oh, you just get cuter every time I see you."

"Hey sweetie." Clawdeen waved. "Ooh, you are rocking those leggings." She indicated Tesla's striped leggings. "They look fierce."

Tesla giggled, enjoying the attention.

"Hi ghouls, what are you doing here?" Frankie asked. "Did we have plans?"

"Nope, this is a total surprise," Lagoona grinned.

"What's... the surprise?" Frankie was wary, knowing full well how much her friends liked springing the unexpected on her.

"Well, back when Clawdeen and I first learned about Tesla, I thought it would be a great idea to give her a little birthday party when you awakened her." Laura explained. "Then your house exploded, so that was out. But I wanted to do something her, so I got the ghouls together and we decided to do this."

With that, Laura reached into her bag and pulled out a small chocolate cake, adorned with a single candle.

"HAPPY FIRST WEEKDAY!" The four friends cried (and groaned) for Tesla.
Tesla's eyes grew wider. "No way! A birthday! I thought you only got those when you've been around for a year."

"Yeah, but we can make an exception for once." Clawdeen smiled. "Most people are too young to celebrate being alive for a week."

She held up a bag. "So, you wanna see your presents?"

"I get presents?!" Tesla squeaked with amazement. "That is so cool!"

"Come on, let's open them!" Laura sounded as excited as the little ghoul was.

Frankie ushered them inside. "Thanks ghouls. You didn't have to do all this."

"Yeah, but we wanted to. Every ghoul deserves to celebrate their birthday, even if it is a little late. Or early." Lagoona replied.

"Plus, it'll be a while before we have our own kids to spoil. So we're living vicariously through you." Laura laughed.

"Gee, thanks." Frankie sounded sarcastic, but she was genuinely touched that they had done all this for her and Tesla.

She was about to follow them to the living room when a loud knock was heard. She returned to the door to open it.

"Abbey?" She was surprised to see her abominable friend, dressed in a smart pink shirt and white jacket and skirt combo instead of her usual fur winter clothing. Due to the nature of her work and living so far up the mountains, they never got to see Abbey as much as they would like.

"My friend, it is good to see you again, and in good health." Abbey gave her one of her trademark bone crushing hugs.

"It's great to see you too." Frankie returned the hug as best she could. "How are you?"

Abbey looked sad as she pulled back. "Truthfully, I am hurt."

"Hurt? Hurt where...?"

"Hurt that I did not know wonderful news that you were with child!" Abbey declared, frowning. "I am returning from week long trip down south side of mountains to herd yak, and when I get home I get text from Spectra telling me you are mother. First I am hearing of this."

Frankie looked ashamed. "I'm sorry Abbey. To tell you the truth, I didn't tell anybody about it until the last minute. I was worried how everyone would react."

"Da, I understand." Abbey's expression softened. "You are big shot doctor now. You have important reputation, and sometimes people get wrong idea when single woman becomes pregnant."

"Pregnant?" Frankie blinked. "Er, what did you hear exactly?"

Abbey didn't seem to hear. "I am sad I did not get to give you knocking up party, but I can give you gift now." She reached into her handbag and pulled out a small wad of cloth. She opened it up to reveal it was a one piece body suit, small enough to fit an infant.
"Oh! That's er... very nice." Frankie put on a smile.

"Am glad you like. Is made from real yak fur, so baby will always be warm, even if cold front comes in."

"Erm... Don't think I'm not grateful Abbey, but... she's a little too big for this."

"Is okay. It stretches to fit."

"Mommy! I'm gonna open my presents..." Tesla called as she popped up behind Frankie. She paused as she noticed Abbey.

"Oh.. hello." She smiled and waved, having to crane her neck to look up at the tall yeti.

Frankie held Tesla's shoulders. "Abbey, I'd like you to meet my daughter, Tesla. Tesla, this is Miss Abbey. She's an old friend of mine from school."

"He... hello." Abbey managed to speak, very surprised. She had not been expecting this. "It is nice to meet you too."

She leaned toward Frankie. "She is... very large for her age."

Frankie couldn't resist chuckling. Abbey's stunned expression was priceless. She then noticed a smaller figure hiding behind Abbey. A small yeti boy of about four years old, with pale blue skin and shaggy white hair, peeked out from behind his mother's legs.

"Ivan?" Frankie knelt down to meet him. "Wow, I haven't seen you in ages. You've gotten so big."

"Am not that big..." Ivan replied shyly.

"Hi there! I'm Tesla." Tesla greeted him cheerily, causing Ivan to hide behind his mother's legs again.

"Hope you do not mind me bringing him." Abbey said. "Yakov is busy preparing for market. Plus thought it would be fun to visit town."

"Well, you picked a good time. The other ghouls are here for a little party for Tesla."

"Great. Have been meaning to catch up. Is hard to keep up with gossip when herding yak."

"Come on Mommy!" Tesla tugged on Frankie's skirt. "Everyone's waiting!"

Abbey took Ivan's hand and took him inside as Frankie invited them in.

"Miss Abbey?" Tesla was sat on the floor surrounded by torn wrapping paper and the gifts her aunts had given her, including a set of new clothes from Clawdeen, a large plush shark toy from Lagoona, and a Scarbie doll sized Fearrari Convertible from Laura. Sparky and Watzit rested nearby, Watzit clad in Abbey's infant bodysuit.

"Yes?" Abbey asked from the couch, where she sat squeezed next to Clawdeen, Lagoona and Ghoulia, while Frankie and Laura sat on chairs. All of them were drinking coffee served up by Frankie. Ivan sat at his mother's feet, preoccupied with a picture book.

"Mommy showed me pictures of all the things she did when she went to school with everyone. Is it true that you all stopped some supervillain guy from taking over Monster High?"
Abbey laughed. "Would hardly call that bum Van Hellscream supervillain, but yes. Your mother and we, we kick his butt out of there and unify the school."

"Wow... and did you really start your own roller skating team?"

"Da, we started first all female team in centuries. Were very famous for short while."

"And did you and Mommy really defeat a whole army of normies who were going to destroy the school?"

"We did not defeat normies, we befriended them with most powerful weapon of all: Awesome party and delicious food."

"Cooool" Tesla was awed.

"Yes, it was quite cool, even though we had couple of freeloaders..." Abbey cast a glance at Laura and Clawdeen.

"Are you still mad at us about that?" Clawdeen huffed.

"You were messing around with speed dating while we did all work. Do not see why you got to wear fancy outfits."

"They were made for a vampire and a werewolf, somebody had to wear them. And trust me, the speed dating was not my idea." She cast a small glare at Laura.

Frankie held up her arms. "Come on ghouls, let's not fight."

She picked up another parcel and handed it to Tesla. "This one is from Aunt Ghoulia."

Tesla tore open the wrapping, and gasped in surprise. "Wow! A soldering gun!"

Frankie blinked in surprise as she studied the 'Junior Mad Scientist Electronic Soldering Kit with Working Soldering Gun' Tesla held in her hands. She looked at Ghoulia quizzically.

Ghoulia shrugged. "I had one when I was a kid." She spoke in Zombish. "It taught me a lot about science."

"This is awesome!" Tesla cheered. "Jenny Voltron used one of these to fix the electronics on the Dietanic II before it sank! In the second book, remember?"

"I do remember." Frankie gently took the box from her. "But I think I'd better teach you how to use this safely before you start fixing boats, okay?"

"Speaking of boats..." Clawdeen rummaged through her purse. "Cleo said she had to go to some photo shoot on a yacht with Miley Slimeus, so she couldn't join us. But she did give me a present to give to you."

"Oh, that's kind of her." Frankie smiled. "I bet it's something fancy."

Clawdeen frowned as she handed Frankie a cheque. "Oh yeah, real fancy. She got me the same thing for my birthday and Laura's anniversary."

"Remember when Cleo used to actually shop for presents for other people?" Laura sighed. "I know she's busy with her magazine and all, but come on. It's the thought that counts, you know."
Tesla got up and hugged each of her aunts in turn. "Thank you. This was all so great."

"You're welcome sweetie." Laura smiled.

Just then the doorbell rang.

"I'll get it!" Tesla dashed off towards the front door.

When she was out of sight, Laura clasped her hands and let out a small squeal. "Ooooh, she is so precious! I can't wait until my baby's that age."

"Ooh, I know." Lagoona grinned. "I think I may talk to Gil about having kids sooner rather than later."

"Trust me ghouls, it's not all fun and cuteness. She can be a real handful sometimes." Frankie spoke up.

"How have you been holding up?" Lagoona asked.

"Fine, mostly. It's been a challenge, but it's also been one of the most wonderful experiences I've ever had." Frankie smiled.

"Mommy, there's a lady at the door. She's a.. werecat? Yeah, a werecat."

Frankie moved to the front door, and was surprised by who she saw waiting there.

"Toralei?"

"Hey..." Toralei waved, giving Tesla an awkward glance. "I'm guessing this is the kid I've heard so much about."

"Hi, I'm Tesla." Tesla spoke politely. "It's nice to meet you."

"Yeah... nice to meet you too." Toralei replied, looking rather stunned.

"Tesla, this is Miss Toralei. She's another old friend from my schooldays." Frankie said. "Would you like to come in?"

Yeah, sure." Toralei stepped inside. "Sorry, she kinda surprised me. When I heard from Spectra you had a kid, I thought she meant you'd adopted a baby..."

"I guess Spectra got her facts wrong as usual." Frankie sighed. She led Toralei to the living room, where the others were surprised to see her.

"Hey, what's up?" Clawdeen asked. "I haven't seen you in a while."

"Just because it's summer vacation doesn't mean I'm not busy." Toralei shrugged. "I just wanted to stop by and congratulate you."

"Well, thank you." Frankie pulled up a chair for her. "Can I get you a drink?"

"I could do with some milk, if you got any."

Frankie quickly moved to the kitchen to get Toralei a glass of milk. As she handed it to her, Tesla approached, carrying her new toys. "Mommy, is it okay if I play with my toys in the garden?"
"Sure thing sweetie. Just remember not to go near the hydro-electric generator, okay?"

"Okay." Tesla nodded. She picked up Sparky and placed him on her shoulder. "Come on Ivan, I'll show you the garden."

Ivan got up and followed her out of the room, along with Watzit.

"Aww, she's sweet." Toralei smiled as she watched them go. "She looks just like you."

"Well, I did follow some of my father's old blueprints when I was building her."

"I'm kinda surprised you made her into a little kid though. Didn't you want to make her a teenager like you were made?"

"I did consider it." Frankie answered. "But then I thought back to all the kids I've looked after at the hospital, and all the fun games they told me they played. I kinda regret I never got the chance to be born as a little kid and experience all that, so I thought I should give it to Tesla."

"Fair enough. I just hope you're prepared, kids can be a real pain in the butt at that age." Toralei replied.

"Well, we've had a few mishaps, but she's been really well behaved so far."

"Take it from me, kids never behave perfectly. Take mine for example. Nekora's not a mean kid, but she's always driving me crazy with all the things she does behind my back."

"Like what?" Clawdeen asked.

"You know... she goes riding all over town on her bike when I tell her not to go far, she stays up late playing and wakes up cranky in the morning, she keeps messing around instead of doing her chores." Toralei related. "I love her, but she drives me crazy."

"Children are always like that, they get excited about new things when they are young." Abbey spoke, addressing both Toralei and Frankie. "What is important is to teach discipline, let them know what is right to do and what is not right. Perhaps you need to be firmer with your daughter."

"Hey, I'm always firm with Nekora." Toralei frowned. "She just never listens to me half the time."

"Then you must make sure she has listened. What is point of telling off children if they cannot understand why you are angry?" Abbey replied.

"That's funny, coming from you." Toralei glared at her, angry over Abbey's implication about her parenting skills. "I'm amazed your son can understand you at all. Seriously, it's been ten years and you still mangle your English like a garbage disposal."

Abbey glared back at her. "At least I bother to learn English. You flunk Dead Literature all the time at Monster High."

"Why you.." Toralei snarled, her ears folding back in anger.

"Hey, come on ghouls!" Frankie spoke up, holding her arms between the two. "Just because you have different opinions, doesn't mean we have to fight. Okay?"

She looked at Toralei and Abbey as they sat back in their chairs, saying nothing. They still continued to glare at each other, giving Frankie the uneasy feeling that they wouldn't stay silent towards each other for long.
Shady Forest Drive was one of Salem's more affluent residential areas, consisting of large modern homes situated closely to the forest belt that surrounded the town. It was a quite peaceful neighbourhood, even more so now that most of the residents and their children were away on summer vacation. The only people on the street were a couple of residents... and one lone werecat child, riding toward the Stein house on her bike.

Nekora Stripe grinned as she spotted her mother's car parked outside a house behind some other cars. She sped up, eager to see why her mother had come here.

Earlier that morning, she had found Mom getting ready to go out. When she asked if they were going out somewhere, she told her that she was going out on her own to meet some old friends. Nekora was curious, as far as she knew Mom didn't have many friends beyond Aunt Meowlody and Aunt Purrsephone. When she asked if she could come with her, Mom said no, saying that this was just a meeting for adults, and then told her to ride to Aunt Meowlody and Purrsephone's house and stay there for the day.

As far as she was concerned, Nekora had two choices. She could spend the day putting up with her Aunt's annoying little kids, or she could follow her mother and find out who this mysterious person she was meeting was. And spying on Mom sounded a lot more exciting that trying to play with her immature 'cousins'.

So she had pretended to ride her bike to her Aunt's place, doubling back once she was out of sight and following Mom's car at a distance. Just like in the cop shows. Thankfully Mom drove slowly enough for her to keep up. She was able to follow her one of the posh areas of town, where the really fancy houses were.

Leaving her bike by a lamp post, she crept up to the house, keeping low as she approached the nearest side window. She wondered what Mom was doing in a posh place like this. Maybe she was meeting with a realtor to buy a new house here. Or sneaking over to meet a hunky celebrity boyfriend like Liam Damnsworth! Or maybe she was here as part of her secret job to hunt down evil aliens attempting to infiltrate society by disguising themselves as monsters!

Okay, that last one wasn't very likely. But how cool would it be if it was true!

She peered through the window, and was disappointed by what she saw. Her mother was just chatting away with some other monsters, including a really fat vampire, a tall woman with sparkling icy skin, and some lady with green skin and bolts in her neck whom Nekora could vaguely remember seeing somewhere before.

She sighed. Mom was just hanging out with some other adults. She should have known.

She was about to leave when she heard some laughter from the house's backyard. Curious, she moved to the fence and leapt to the top, her feline guile letting her balance easily.

She could see two kids in the backyard. One was a little boy with white hair and icy skin, clad in a strange looking furry coat. He was busy colouring in a picture book with some crayons. The other was a ghoul about her age, with green skin and stitches on her arms and legs. She was playing with some dolls, trying to place one on the back of a dog... thing that was sleeping nearby, and the other inside a toy car.

"Come on Watzit." The ghoul urged the dog to wake up. "Let's see if you're faster than a Fearrari."

Nekora gasped as she realized what the car was. "Whoa! A Scarbie Fearrari!"
"Ahh!" The ghoul jumped up, looking up at her in fright. Nekora raised her hands. "Sorry, didn't mean to scare you. I just saw your Scarbie car, it's so cool!"

"Um... thanks." The ghoul smiled. "I got it today for my birthday."

"You're lucky. I wanted one, but my mom says its too expensive."

"Well... you can play with mine if you want."

Nekora's eyes went wide. She was going to play with the Scarbie Fearrari! This day was turning out great after all.

"Aw sweet! Thanks!" She hopped down from the fence and approached the ghoul. "I'm Nekora, by the way."

"I'm Tesla. Nice to meet you." Tesla smiled, happy to meet a new person.

Nekora sat down next to Tesla and set down her backpack. "So, today's your birthday. How old are you?"

"I'm a week old." Tesla replied proudly.

Nekora blinked. "What... that can't be right. If you were a week old, you'd still be a baby."

"Yeah, but I wasn't born. I was made in a laboratory." Tesla explained, as if that was totally natural. "My mommy put me together, then brought me to life with lightning. She used a bit too much though, and our house blew up."

"Your house blew up?!" Nekora gasped. "And you survived? No way!"

"Yeah. After that, we had to move in with my grandparents." Tesla indicated the house. "They're really awesome monsters, though Grandpa can get a little grumpy if I play in his lab."

"I have two Aunts who are the same. They totally growl and hiss if I mess up their living room when I'm around."

"Grown ups can be really fussy, huh?" The two laughed together.

"Hey, do you wanna play dolls?" Nekora asked, reaching into her backpack. While Tesla seemed a little odd, she was really friendly, and looked like a fellow fan of dolls. It would be great to play dolls with someone else besides Mom or her cousins.

"That would be great!" Tesla grinned excitedly. "I've always wanted to play dolls with someone. Well, I play with my mom sometimes, but she has trouble making voices."

"Well don't worry, I am awesome with voices. I learned it from my mom." Nekora pulled out her dolls from the backpack. "So what dolls do you have?"

"Well, I had some Scarbies and Screech Valley High dolls, but they got blown up in my old house." Tesla showed her dolls. All of them had mismatched limbs of different skin colours. "So Mommy went to the Ghoulwill store and bought some spare arms and legs. And we put them together, just like I was put together."

She picked up a doll dressed in a steampunk style outfit, complete with a set of little goggles and a toolbelt. "This is my favourite one. She looks like Jenny Voltron."
"Nice... who's Jenny Voltron?"

Tesla gasped. "You don't know who Jenny Voltron is?! She's in these books I read. She's this awesome mad scientist who goes on adventures and fixes things to save the world! She's like, the bestest superhero ever!"

"I don't really get science." Nekora shrugged. "But I got a doll that's even better than that."

She proudly pulled out a werecat doll, dressed in a frilly yellow and white dress. "This is Cure Calico. She's the leader of the Scary Cures."

Tesla blinked as she studied the doll. "What's a Scary Cure?"

"Only the most amazing show ever made by man or monster!" Nekora exclaimed, grinning. "The Scary Cures are five ghouls who have magical powers, and transform into superheroes and beat up bad guys with kung-fu!"

"Wow, that sounds cool." Tesla held up her doll. "Not as cool as Jenny using science though!"

"No way, the Scary Cure's powers are way cooler than boring old science!"

"Are not!"

"Are too!"

"Alright then." Tesla posed her doll in a fighting stance on the ground. "Let's have Jenny and Cure Calico team up and fight a bad guy. Whoever saves the day first is the better hero."

Nekora posed her doll next to Tesla's. "You're on! We need a bad guy to fight against though..."

Both ghouls looked around for ideas, and simultaneously their gaze settled on Tesla's plush shark, and Sparky, who was snoozing nearby. The white rat looked up at them, an approximation of a worried look crossing his muzzle when he saw the two ghouls grinning at him.

"So Frankie." Toralei spoke up. "Are you planning to send Tesla to school once summer ends?"

Frankie nodded. "Yes, I've already made arrangements to enroll her in Salem Elementary."

"Oh nice. Nekora's going there too. Maybe they'll be in the same class."

"That would be so cute." Laura smiled. "It's a shame we don't all have kids that age. They could all be friends together, just like we were."

"The chances of all of us having children in the same year is highly improbable though..." Ghoulia groaned.

"Man.. all of us, pregnant at once. That's a scary thought." Clawdeen chuckled.

Abbey nodded. "Is good that your kids are going to school. Let us hope that they do not become as disaster prone, or troublesome, as we were in school."

Toralei frowned at the yeti. "What does that mean?"

Abbey shrugged. "Am just saying, sometimes children copy their parents."
"You're saying just because I was a bully at school, my daughter's going to be the same?!" Toralei shot to her feet, eyes blazing. "Listen you, I've taught my kid to be a good person. Sure she misbehaves sometimes, but she never goes out of her way to hurt people. I taught her better than that!"

"Alright." Abbey sat back, somewhat frightened by Toralei's expression.

Toralei grinned, eager to have the last word. "And hey, at least my kid is going to a proper school."

"My son is going to school." Abbey retorted.

"Yeah, I've seen the schools up in the mountains. They're just little shacks. Do you guys even have teachers, or do your farmhands take turns tutoring?"

"Yeti schools may be small, but at least they teach our children how to behave, unlike yours!" "Don't you dare..."

Frankie got between them again. "Hey hey, enough okay? There's no reason to fight."

"She started it!" Toralei pointed at Abbey. "She's the one who keeps saying I'm a bad parent."

"I did not! Was just trying to give advice! You are one who is taking it wrong way!" Abbey shot back.

"Advice? More like judgement if you ask me!"

Clawdeen got up. "Calm down Toralei. I'm sure Abbey didn't mean anything by it. You know she can be a bit too blunt sometimes."

"I must be blunt! Being a parent is serious business, and must be treated as such." Abbey spoke firmly. "When you are parent, you will understand."

Clawdeen frowned at that statement. "Oh yeah, like I wouldn't know anything about looking after kids. You do know I have like a dozen nieces and nephews, right?"

"It is different when it is your own child.."

"You see? She thinks she's so smart." Toralei got right into Abbey's face. "Well, I've been a parent much longer than you have, so don't try and lecture me!"

"Just because you have been doing it longer does not necessarily make you better at it." Abbey glared back.

Frankie gave a nervous groan as the two stared each other down.

"Bwa ha ha! You fools!" Nekora spoke in an overdone German accent as she placed Sparky atop Tesla's plush shark. "You are no match for my cyborg shark! It's death ray will vaporize you into atoms!"

"No way Dr Ratface!" Tesla declared, moving her Jenny Voltron doll before the shark. "Your evil plan stops right here!"

"Yeah, we'll stop you together!" Nekora posed her Cure Calico doll next to Tesla's. She then reverted to the German voice.
"Bwa ha ha! And how are you going to do that?"

"Like this!" Tesla picked up a crayon and put it in the shark's mouth. "I've stuck a magnetized lightning rod into your shark! It'll conduct any energy through it. Now Cure Calico, fire your magic attack at the rod!"

"You got it!" Nekora waved her doll in the air. "Calico Aurora Scratch!"

"Arrrrrrgh!" Tesla mock-yelled, picking up Sparky and throwing the shark a short distance away. She held up Sparky, gently moving his front paws as if he was shaking his fists.

"Curse you Cure Calico! And you too Jenny Voltron! I'll be baaaaaack!" Nekora mimed.

"That was fun!" Tesla dropped character, laughing as she stroked Sparky's fur.

"Yeah, I gotta admit, Jenny Voltron is a pretty cool hero." Nekora smiled. "Even if I don't understand all that science stuff."

"You should read some science books sometimes, it's really amazing stuff. Some of the things you can do, it's like having super powers."

"We're monsters, we already have powers." Nekora replied. "Don't we? Can you do anything?"

"I can make electricity come out of my bolts." Tesla frowned and clenched her fists, letting a few sparks jump out of her neck bolts. "Mommy says I have to be careful though, in case I shock someone."

"That's pretty neat. I can do something like that too."

"Really?!"

"Yeah, but..." Nekora leaned in close. "You have to promise not to tell anyone about it." She glanced at the house. "Especially my mom."

"Okay." Tesla nodded. "But why can't we tell your mom?"

"You'll see. Watch my tail." Nekora stepped back and twisted her tail around so it was in view. She closed her eyes and concentrated, grunting slightly from the effort. Suddenly, the tip of her tail ignited into flame. Tesla gasped as Nekora waved her tail around, letting the flame dance and sway.

"Pretty cool, eh?" Nekora said proudly.

"That is amazing!" Tesla gushed. "I didn't know werecats could do that!"

"They can't normally. At least, my mom and my aunts can't do it. I guess it's from my dad."

"What kind of monster is he?"

"Beats me." Nekora shrugged. "I've never seen him. Mom says he had to leave to do some important work somewhere."

"Oh... I'm sorry."

"Ah, it's okay. It's kinda fun, having a mysterious dad." Nekora extinguished the flame on her tail. "But you can't tell anyone about my flame power. I might get in trouble."
"Why?"

"I lose control of it sometimes, when I'm not thinking. I want to get better at controlling it, but..." Nekora looked sheepish. "I've singed my mom's furniture a couple times."

"Ooh, I get you." Tesla extended her hand. "Don't worry, I won't tell anyone!"

"Thanks Tesla. You're a real pal." Nekora shook her hand.

"Wait... does that mean... I'm your friend?" Tesla asked, voice wavering.

"Yeah.. I guess you are."

Tesla squealed and hugged Nekora. "Oh thank you! I've never had a friend before!"

"Whoa, calm down!" Nekora tried to pull herself from Tesla's grip. "Wow, you really are a week old, huh?"

Tesla let go and turned at Ivan, who was still busy drawing in his picture book. "Hey Ivan, do you want to be friends too?"

Ivan looked up, a puzzled expression on his face. "I... I guess.."

"What are you drawing anyway?" The two ghouls sat next to Ivan and looked at his book.

"Just some things I like." He flipped through the pages, showing them several crayon drawings. He pointed to a picture featuring three crudely drawn stick figures, one massive one with big muscles, one with long white hair, and a small one with white hair. "These are my mama and papa and me."

"Aww, that's nice."

Ivan showed them another picture of what looked like a mountain. "And this is my home. I live on a mountain. My village is here." He pointed at a set of square buildings he had drawn on the side of the mountain.

"Wow... it must be really neat living on a mountain." Tesla said.

Ivan smiled. "Is pretty nice. There's always something to do."

"Hey, what's that?" Nekora pointed to a strange, four legged shape walking up the mountain.

"Oh, that is Shiver, our mammoth. He carries us up and down mountain when we need to go somewhere." Ivan answered.

"Whoa wait! Mammoth?" Tesla exclaimed. "You mean one of those huge furry elephants? I saw them in one of my Grandpa's books. I thought they were all extinct."

"No.." Ivan shook his head. "They still around. Mama and I ride on Shiver to get here."

"You mean... your mammoth is actually here?!" Nekora gasped. "Can we see it?"

"I guess.." Ivan got up. "Mama tied him up in the trees nearby."

The two ghouls followed Ivan as he toddled toward a side gate in the backyard fence, which allowed anyone to access the grassy area and forest belt just behind the houses. They walked several meters away from the house until they reached the trees. Shiver stood nearby, pulling up
hunks of grass with his trunk and shoving them into his mouth.

"Wooooooww..." Tesla and Nekora gasped.

"Da, he is great." Ivan smiled. "Shiver is strongest mammoth in village. No one can beat him."

Tesla and Nekora moved closer to pat Shiver's sides. "He certainly looks strong. I bet he could pull my mom's car." Tesla spoke.

Nekora's grin got wider. "Ooh! You know what we should do? We should totally ride him!"

Tesla and Ivan looked at her oddly. "Ride him?"

"Yeah. I've never ridden a mammoth before. The view from up there must be amazing." Nekora stared up at Shiver's back. "Come on, it'll be fun."

"Mama and Papa do not let me ride Shiver on my own. Say I am too young."

"It's okay, you're not on your own. You're with us. We won't go far, we'll just stay near the house."

"I don't know..." Tesla looked up at the massive creature. "It could be dangerous. And do you know how to ride a mammoth? I sure don't."

"Me neither, but it can't be that hard..." Nekora looked around thoughtfully, and spotted the long rope tied to Shiver's harness, tying him to the tree. "I know! We'll take turns. One of us rides him, the other holds onto the rope and leads him around. That way, he can't run off."

"I guess..." Tesla frowned. "I dunno... maybe we should ask my mom first."

Nekora huffed. "Oh come on, we're not doing anything dangerous. We're just going to walk him around on a leash. It's the same as you walking your dog, or me walking my sabertooth Nibbles. You don't need to bother your mom about this."

"I ought to let her know though, just in case." Tesla reaffirmed.

"Alright, fine." Nekora sighed. "But don't come crying to me if she says no."

"I'll be right back!" Tesla ran off back towards the house.

"It's alright for you, you've got a husband to help you out!" Toralei growled at Abbey. "I've had to do it all on my own, and I think I've done pretty damn well!"

"Do not presume I have it easy because Yakov helps me! We both have to work hard to raise our son!" Abbey shot back angrily.

"Not as hard as I've had it. I'm not perfect, but I've done the best I can for Nekora, so don't you dare judge me!"

"Wasn't trying to! Ugh, you as still as bad as you were at school. You always have to have conflict when people try to talk to you."

"I wouldn't have to start conflicts if people would stop insulting me behind my back! You all did plenty of that in school as well!"

Laura raised her voice. "Come on ghouls, stop fighting. This is pointless, you're both equally good
mothers..."

"Hey, butt out!" Toralei spat at her. "This is between us."

Laura frowned. "Well excuse me for trying to help. Maybe Abbey's right about you..."

"Oh don't you start! Bast, you're always so damn nosy!"

"I am not!"

"She has point, you do stick in nose where it is not needed sometimes." Abbey spoke.

This riled Laura up. "Well sometimes I have to stick my nose in, especially when my friends are acting like kids!"

"You'd be the expert, you're still the biggest kid around here, shorty." Toralei bit back.

"Ooooh!" Laura wringed her hands. "If I wasn't pregnant I would kick your asses right now!"

"Would like to see you try!" Abbey taunted.

"Fenrir, will you guys shut up already!" Clawdeen growled.

Frankie groaned as she watched the three bicker among each other. Despite her best efforts to get Abbey and Toralei to calm down and act civilly, they kept coming up with new comments to insult and infer each other with, usually comments about their parenting skills. And now the others were getting dragged into it too.

As voices were raised, and Lagoona tried to inject herself into the argument if only to get everyone to quiet down, she moved to the kitchen. Maybe if she gave everyone tea they would calm down...

"Mommy, can I ask you something?" She turned to see Tesla looking up at her.

"Um..." Frankie paused, unsure what to do. The ghouls were arguing even louder, and she didn't want Tesla to see her aunts fighting.

"It's.. kind of a bad time now sweetie. Could you wait a little bit?"

"But it's really important!" Tesla pleaded. "It's about mammoths."

"Mammoths?" Frankie was puzzled. But before she could dwell on it, she heard Abbey yell something that rhymed with 'witch' at someone. Things were getting worse in there.

"Why are they yelling back there?" Tesla asked.

"Sweetheart, I'm sorry. I need to talk to them before they kill each other. Just wait outside a little longer, okay?" She gently guided Tesla out of the door.

"But..." Tesla protested.

"Please, just wait. I'll be right back." Leaving Tesla in the backyard, she rushed back to try and calm her friends.

Disappointed, Tesla sighed and plodded out of the back gate.

"So what did she say?" Nekora asked as Tesla returned.
Tesla sighed. "I didn't ask. Mommy was too busy trying to stop my aunts arguing."

Nekora rolled her eyes. "Ugh, adults can be such a pain sometimes."

"Maybe we should wait until I ask her..."

"Oh come on! When are we going to get another chance to ride a mammoth?"

She took the rope attached to Shiver's harness and handed it to Tesla. "Ivan and me will go first, and you can lead him along. As long as we're careful, it'll be totally fine."

Tesla was still unsure, but she didn't want to disappoint her new friend, and she did really want to ride the mammoth...

"Okay then."

She tightened her hold on the rope as Nekora picked up Ivan and helped him up onto Shiver's back. Nekora grabbed the harness and pulled herself up, settling on the mammoths back and took the reins.

"Okay, we're ready!"

Tesla tugged as hard as she could on the rope, prompting Shiver to lumber forward. She slowly led him behind her, his massive feet creating small quakes on the ground. She laughed as she watched the mighty creature walk. She had seen a few living creatures like Watzit and Sparky before, but never anything as large as this.

"This is so awesome!" Nekora cheered.

"Da, is really fun!" Ivan spoke excitedly.

"Its like riding a... humongous bike!"

Tesla led Shiver around the clearing, moving a little faster. After a few laps around the grass, she was eager to try riding him herself.

"Let me try!"

"Sure, hold on!" Nekora climbed down and took the rope from her. Tesla grabbed the harness and climbed up, settling down behind Ivan.

"Here we go!" Nekora pulled, and the mammoth lumbered forward again.

Tesla was wide eyed. Nekora was right, the view was amazing! She could actually see over the nearby fences into her neighbour's gardens. She could almost see over the houses! Not even sitting on her grandpa's shoulders gave her a view like this.

Nekora prompted Shiver to speed up a little as they rounded the clearing. Hearing the thumping footsteps of the mammoth as she towered over everything, Tesla felt like an invincible giant.

"This is so cool!" She cheered, raising her arms. Her neck bolts sparked with excitement. And that's when it happened.

The sparks struck Shiver, giving him a massive jolt with sent him into convulsions, nearly shaking Tesla and Ivan off his back.
Then, frightened and hurt, he let out a thunderous cry from his trunk and charged forward, breaking into a run. The sudden force of movement pulled the rope tight, jerking Nekora off her feet.

"Whoa!" Only her quick reflexes allowed her to grab Shiver's harness before she crashed to the ground. She managed to pull herself up onto his back, sitting behind Tesla. Shiver continued running, heading towards the gap between the Stein house and their neighbour's.

"What did you do?!" Nekora cried out.

"I don't know!" Tesla tugged at the reins, terrified.

"Make him stop!"

"I can't.. AHHHH!"

The mammoth charged through the gap, his sides grazing the walls of the buildings. Once on the street, he turned and stomped down the road, the children on his back screaming in terror.

Frankie had managed to placate Laura with a cup of tea, but Toralei and Abbey were still at each other's throats.

"You know what? Screw this!" Toralei grabbed her handbag. "I'm not going to sit here and listen to this frigid bitch berate me."

"Fine by me!" Abbey got up as well. "Frankie, am sorry to have upset our gathering, but will not be insulted by her anymore. I will take Ivan and go."

"Fine by me!" Toralei spat back.

The two turned away from each other and began to walk away, Toralei for the door, Abbey for the kitchen and back door.

"Ghouls, wait!" Frankie called to them. She didn't want her friends to leave on bad terms if she could help it. "Let's all just calm down and settle this like adults."

Toralei glanced back. "Sorry for wrecking your party Frankie. But there's no way I'm apologizing to someone who thinks I'm an unfit mother."

"She didn't say that, not those exact words anyway." Frankie replied. She looked back to the kitchen. "Abbey, I know you don't..

She paused as she saw Abbey hunched over the sink, an uncomfortable look on her face. Clawdeen and Lagoona noticed it too, and all three rushed into the kitchen to help her.

"Are you alright?" Frankie asked, checking Abbey over. She looked a little flushed... as much as a yeti could look flushed anyway.

"Am alright, really." Abbey assured them. "Just suddenly felt queasy in stomach all of sudden. It has passed now."

"Still, maybe we should do an examination in my study. It might be a symptom of something else..."

"Please!" Toralei scoffed. "She's probably faking it just to get some sympathy."
"Give it a rest.." Clawdeen glared at her.

Toralei was about to reply, but then her iCoffin rang, and she retreated into a corner to answer it.

"Please Frankie, do not worry, I will be fine.." Abbey trailed off as she looked out the window at the garden. "Wait... where is Ivan? I do not see him."

Frankie followed her gaze, and felt a chill down her spine when she didn't see Ivan or Tesla.
"Where are the kids?"

"WHAT?!" Toralei shrieked. "What do you mean she never showed up?! I told her to go straight to your place!"

"What's going on?" Frankie asked as they returned to the living room.

"It's Nekora. I told her to go to Meowlody's place while I was here, but she never turned up." Toralei scowled.

"Do you think she got lost?"

"Meowlody lives a couple of blocks from me, she couldn't have gotten lost!" Toralei jabbed at her phone. "I bet she's run off to play somewhere. Good thing I bought her a phone, I'll call her and send her home..."

"But where are the others?" Laura asked.

Suddenly, they heard a loud, trumpet like noise. It was followed by thunderous footsteps which shook the entire room.

Lagoona looked out the front window, just in time to see a large wooly mammoth charge onto the road.
"What the... was that a mammoth?!"

"Shiver!" Abbey exclaimed. "How did he get free?"

"Why the hell did you bring a mammoth here?" Toralei asked.

"Is transportation..."

Lagoona gasped as she saw several small figures atop the mammoth before it ran out of sight.
"Bloody hell, I think Tesla and Ivan are riding that thing!"

"WHAT?!" Frankie nearly fell over.

"We must get after them!" Abbey ordered. "Quick, we must use a car! Shiver is faster than you think!"

"I'm driving!" Frankie grabbed her car keys from the side and rushed out the front door. The others followed her, save for Ghoulia, who was too slow to catch up, and Laura, who was weighed down by her belly.

"Ngggh.." She struggled to push herself to her feet, before giving up and falling back on the couch. She huffed. "Okay, we'll wait here then."

"AHHHHHHHH!" Tesla, Nekora and Ivan screamed as Shiver continued charging down the road.
Occasionally the mammoth would cut the corners and rush through the nearest front garden, leaving large footprints in the grass and knocking over trash cans.

"We gotta make him stop!" Nekora cried out.

Tesla kept tugging at the reins. "I'm trying! He won't listen!"

"Shiver, please stop!" Ivan yelled, tears of terror in his eyes.

Nekora reached for the reins and helped Tesla pull on them as hard as she could. But nothing they did seemed to make him respond.

"Come on you stupid elephant!" Nekora kicked his sides with her heels. "Knock it off! We're gonna get in trouble..

"Oh no!" Tesla screamed. Nekora looked up to see they were approaching a cross junction, with several cars passing back and forth across the road.

They closed their eyes and waited for the inevitable crunch when Shiver hit a car. But miraculously, he managed to dodge every car that got near. He even jumped over a flatbed truck like a gigantic showhorse, landing with a massive thud on the concrete before racing on as if nothing had happened.

Some distance behind, Frankie's car was in hot pursuit, trying to keep up as Frankie swerved past traffic.

"Come on, faster!" Abbey urged from the passenger seat.

Toralei leaned forward from the back seat. "Wait... is that... Nekora's on that thing!"

She hit Frankie's shoulder. "Come on, step on it!"

Frankie didn't answer, too focused on catching up the mammoth and getting her daughter and the other kids to safety. Speeding up as much as she dared, she began to gain on the mammoth as it charged into the heart of Salem.

Heath took a sip from his coffee and glanced sideways at the ghoul sat in the passenger seat of his squad car. Mona Culle, the new cyclops deputy, was also sipping from her coffee mug as she stared out at the street. They had taken a break from a routine patrol for some lunch.

He took a breath as he thought about what he was about to say to her. They had spent the last few months working together, and he had really come to like her. Not only was she really attractive, but she was also a great gal to hang out with. She would always hang out with him and the other officers after their shifts ended, and she could hold her beer and tell a good story as well as the guys, even better in some respects.

He'd been quietly waiting for the chance to ask her out, and now, with the weekend looming, he had a perfect opportunity.

"What are you looking at?" Mona asked. Heath realized he'd been staring at her.

"Sorry... I was just admiring your eyes.. I mean, eye." He put on his most charming smile. "It's quite beautiful."

Mona blushed. "Oh, um... thanks."
"So, hey.." Heath continued. "There's this really great band playing at the Dog and Groan pub tomorrow. Do you fancy coming down with me to check it out? I hear they're pretty hot stuff"

Mona blinked. "I guess..."

"You do? Great!" Heath's hair burst into flame for a moment, unable to contain his delight. "So when can I pick you up?"

"Hold on." Mona raised a hand. "Are you asking me to hang out, or is this a date?"

"Well, I'd love to take you to dinner afterwards, so I guess it's a date." He replied.

Mona sighed. "Heath... don't take this the wrong way..

Heath felt his heart sink as she uttered those words.

"You're a great guy and I like working with you. It's just.. I'm not really looking to date anyone right now. I'm trying to focus on my career here, plus the last relationship I had didn't go to well, and I don't want to jump into one just yet.

"Oh... I see." Heath slumped in his seat, unable to hide his disappointment.

"It's not you Heath, really!" Mona tried to assure him. "I do like you. You're a wonderful friend and partner. I'm just not sure..."

"That you want to go further than that." Heath sighed.

He gave a small smile. "It's okay, really. I'm glad to be your partner. Just thought..." His voice turned quiet. "...it was worth a shot, you know?"

Mona smiled in sympathy and patted his shoulder. "It's okay, I'm flattered. I just hope this doesn't make things weird between us."

"It won't, I promise." Heath sighed.

Mona smiled, which at least made him feel a little better. Sure it wasn't the outcome he'd hoped for, but as least she still wanted to be friends with him.

The problem was, every ghoul he met just wanted to be friends. Or avoid him entirely. It had been that way for what felt like forever. And he was getting sick of it.

Thankfully, the radio crackled into life to break the awkward silence.

"This is Dispatch, calling any cars in the vicinity of Town Center."

Heath answered it. "This is Burns, what's up?"

"We're getting some strange calls about a... giant white elephant running down Main Street."

He blinked. "An.. elephant? Ah man, was it that boozer Horace again? He's always calling in with his stupid hallucinations."

"It's not him, it's several people. They swear there's an furry elephant running toward the Maul."

"Well... we're near there, so we'll keep an eye out for it."

Heath hung up the radio and shook his head.
"A furry elephant?" Mona sniggered. "These prank callers just get more ridiculous..."

Suddenly, the car shook as a loud, stomping sound approached them. They turned just in time to see a white wooly mammoth come tearing past the car, charging around a corner.

Mona blinked rapidly. "Wh... was that..."

"I think it was." Heath answered slowly equally dumbfounded. "Get after it. I'll call for backup."

Mona shook her head and gunned the car's engine. The siren blared to life as the car took off and raced after the mammoth.

Luckily, the traffic on the road was light today, save for the slower cars who quickly swerved to the side to avoid getting trampled. Mona caught up with the mammoth, maintaining her speed a few feet behind it.

"What do we do? Do we shoot it?" She asked Heath.

"I dunno! This was totally not covered in training..."

Suddenly they heard children trying out. Heath stuck his head out of the side window to get a better look at the mammoth.

"Holy crap, there are kids on that thing!"

"Seriously?!!" Mona gripped the wheel tighter. "Damn, guess we can't ram it and knock it over."

Heath looked at her with shock. "You were gonna ram it?!"

"Well I can't think of any other way to stop it, short of shooting it. And I don't think a gun would even scratch it. You have any ideas?"

Heath looked out the window again, trying to think of a way to stop this enormous beast. He then noticed there was a long rope attached to a harness around the mammoth's shoulders, trailing and whipping behind it.

"Get alongside it!" Heath ordered. Mona sped up and swerved to the side, until the car was racing alongside the mammoth.

"Don't worry kids!" Heath called to the children as he leaned his upper body out of the window. "You're gonna be fine!"

He flailed around for the rope, missing it a couple of times, before he finally grabbed it.

"Gotcha!" He glanced back at Mona. "Okay, hit the brakes..."

Suddenly, the mammoth moved to avoid a bus and turned into a side road. The rope was pulled taut, and before he knew it, Heath was yanked out of the window.

"ARRRRRRRGH!"

"There he is!" Abbey pointed as she spotted Shiver running into a side road. Frankie quickly turned to follow, racing past a police car.

"Maybe I can get ahead of him and slow him down."
"No, he would flatten car like tin of tuna. Get me closer and I can call to him." Abbey asked.

Clawdeen leaned forward, spotting something between Shiver and the car. "What the... is that Heath running after him?"

"I think he is..." Lagoona was amazed. "How the hell is he keeping up?"

"Ohcrapohcrapohcrap...!" Heath had miraculously managed to land on his feet, and was running as fast as he could to avoid being dragged across the concrete by the mammoth. He tried to let go of the rope, only to find it was tightly wrapped around his arms. He would have tried to untie himself, but he was too busy concentrating on running to avoid becoming a stain on the road.

He looked up at the mammoth he was struggling to keep up with, and the children on its back looking back at him with looks of worry. Surely thing thing had to lose steam and slow down eventually, right?

Suddenly he heard screams of terror, and he realized they were coming from pedestrians. He tried to look past the mammoth to see where it was headed.

"Mother..." He whimpered as he saw he was begging dragged through a paved market street, with several market stands all over the place.

The mammoth continued on its way, monsters running and diving away to avoid getting trampled. It continued charging forward, stomping over and through any obstacles in it's way. And unfortunately for Heath, he ended up getting dragged right through them. First he stumbled through a fountain, getting soaked all over with murky water. Then he was dragged through a set of bushes, his face smacking every branch along the way. He'd barely recovered from that when he was sent flying into a box of blood oranges from a fruit stand, splattering him with fruit juice. Then he crashed through a trash bin, getting showered in bits of litter.

The elephant swerved back onto the main road. By now Heath was feeling his legs begin to give out, and he could see oncoming traffic dodging the elephant and nearly hit him as they tried to return to the right lane.

"I'm gonna die!" He thought as he tried to undo the rope again. A car narrowly avoided hitting him, and he nearly collapsed from exhaustion and terror.

Was this how it was going to end? Flattened by a car while being dragged by a crazy mammoth? It didn't seem fair, he'd only had this job for a year, and he hadn't even gotten a girlfriend! As he saw a massive truck approaching, he closed his eyes and waited for the end.

Suddenly there was the roar of a car accelerating, and he felt a pair of string arms grab his waist and heave him up. He opened his eyes to see he was being carried by...

"Abbey?!!"

Abbey was leaning out of the side window of Frankie's car, holding up Heath. "Nice to see you again Heath. You are keeping fit."

"Please tell me you can stop that thing!" Heath pleaded.

"Of course." With one arm around Heath, Abbey gripped the rope tightly with the other.
"SHIVER, HEEL!" She bellowed, giving the rope a sharp tug with her super strength.

To Heath's amazement, the mammoth actually slowed down, eventually coming to a halt on the side of the road. The car pulled up behind it.

"What... I could have done that!" Heath exclaimed.

Abbey ignored him, putting him down and racing out of the car to retrieve Ivan. Frankie and Toralei were with her.

All three parents helped their terrified children off Shiver's back. Abbey held Ivan in her arms, gently patting his back to calm the shivering yetling down.

"Oh thank God!" Frankie held Tesla tightly to her chest. "Are you alright?!"

Tesla didn't reply, she just burst into tears, along with Ivan and Nekora.

"Nekora.. what the hell were you doing?!” Toralei sounded both relieved and furious at the same time.

"I.. I'm sorry Mom!" Nekora wept. "We were just riding it.. we didn't think anything would happen."

"You tried to ride it?" Toralei exclaimed. "How could you be so foolish?"

"It wasn't her fault!" Tesla suddenly cried out.

Everyone looked at the weeping construct. "It was me! I accidentally shocked Shiver! I made him run away!"

She sobbed against her mother's chest. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry..."

Frankie and Toralei exchanged a look with each other. This wasn't the time for anger or discipline. Right now, their children just needed to be held. They said nothing, simply holding the children tightly.

"So... um.. is everyone alright?" Heath asked.

I think so..." Frankie replied.

"Oh good..." Heath sounded out of breath. '""If you don't mind, I'm gonna fall unconscious for a few hours."

And with that, he fainted onto the bonnet of Frankie's car.

Heath wasn't sure how much time had passed when he woke up on a couch in the back of the Salem Sheriff's office, where he'd apparently been dumped to recover from his ordeal.

He got up, stretched his aching back and legs, and plodded over to the coffee machine for a much needed cup. Looking across the room, he noticed Sheriff Growler's office door was shut. He was probably talking to Frankie and the others about their kid's escapade on the mammoth.

He hoped Growler wasn't being too harsh on the kids. He knew all too well what it was like to get yelled at for messing up. Especially when it probably was an accident.

He moved towards the exit, deciding to get some fresh air. Anything to clear the memory of being dragged around by that crazy mammoth out of his head...
He froze in horror as he stepped outside and saw the mammoth in the parking lot.

Mona was attempting to pull the beast toward a nearby grassy area, but the mammoth was stubbornly sat down on the ground.

She looked aside and noticed Heath. "Oh hey Heath. You feeling okay?"

"Wha... what's that thing doing here?!"

"Oh, we were told to keep him in the garage until Growler says its okay for his owner to pick him up." Mona tugged at the rope again. "Man, we couldn't get this guy to stop earlier, now he won't move when we want him to. Think you could give me a hand?"

Heath stared at the mammoth with terrified eyes. He could swear that thing was looking at him, as if it was thinking of finishing him off...

"Burns." Heath turned to see Sheriff Growler, accompanied by Frankie, Toralei and Abbey. Tesla, Nekora and Ivan stood by them, their heads lowered.

"I believe these little ones have something to say to you." Growler spoke. The children stepped forward and looked up at Heath, their eyes still red from crying.

"Officer Heath... we're sorry for all the trouble we caused." Tesla spoke.

"We're really sorry." Nekora added. "We only wanted to ride Shiver. We didn't think anything bad would happen."

"We really sorry you got hurt trying to help us." Ivan said sadly.

"Though it was awesome how you tried to stop him." Nekora smiled slightly.

"We wish we hadn't done it in the first place..." Tesla hung her head again.

Heath smiled sympathetically. "Oh hey, don't worry about it. It's all part of the job for Officer Heath, I've been in worse scrapes. I mean, I almost won Die Trying once."

"Whoa, really?" Nekora asked. "You have to be really hardcore to go on that show!"

"Aw, thanks..." Heath grinned at the praise, but turned it off once he saw Growler frowning at him. "But really, I'm just glad you kids are safe."

He looked to Growler. "They're not in any trouble, are they?"

"Well, apart from a few freaked out pedestrians and motorists, no one was hurt." Growler shrugged. "I think we can chalk this up as just kids getting in over their heads. They've been through enough."

He stepped before the kids and leaned down to look at them with one of his patented stern glares. "But I want you three to show better judgement in the future, okay? Next time you want to do something risky, don't do it until you ask your parents about it. Understood?"

"Yes sir." All three kids replied.

Growler nodded, and addressed the mothers. "Well, you lot are free to head home. And Burns, you take the rest of the day off. You look like you need it."
"Thanks Chief." Heath huffed with relief.

"Thank you Sheriff." Frankie shook his hand. "We promise we'll make sure nothing like this happens again."

Tesla winced at that comment.

Nekora turned to Tesla and Ivan. "Sorry for getting you guys into trouble."

"That's okay. It was my fault anyway." Tesla looked away. "I guess this means you don't want to be my friend anymore..."

"What? No way!" Nekora exclaimed. "You're one of the coolest friends I've ever made. There's no way I'm letting you go!"

They both looked up at Toralei. "Miss Stripe... is it okay if Nekora and I can still be friends?"

"Sure." Toralei crossed her arms. "But I'm afraid you won't be able to play together for a while. Right now you are grounded indefinitely, young lady."

"What?! Mom, that's not fair! Shiver running away was an accident!" Nekora protested.

"Never mind the mammoth!" Toralei replied sharply. "You disobeyed me when I told you to go to your Aunt's place. Do you know how worried they were when you didn't show up? They thought you had been kidnapped."

Nekora's ears flattened in guilt. She hadn't thought about that. "Sorry..."

"Well, until you learn to tell people where you're going, you're staying where I can keep an eye on you."

"Yes mom..."

"Toralei..." Abbey spoke up. "I feel I must also apologize for something stupid I have done."

"Really?" Toralei raised an eyebrow, not sure what to expect after their shouting matches earlier.

"I am sorry for saying you were not good at being a mother." Abbey bowed her head. "I was wrong, you are fine mother. It is just... being mother is very important job to me. Even more important than my duties as farmer or tribe leader. And when I hear about parents who do not take their job seriously... it upsets me. I feel I must advise, to help them become better parents. But I step over line. I let old memories of you cloud judgement."

Toralei sighed. "Well... I'm sorry too. I know you were trying to help me and Frankie. I'm just so sick of people assuming that I can't do anything right just because I was a screw-up as a teenager. It drives me crazy. I know I'm not the greatest mother. I know I do things wrong sometimes. But I do the very best I can for her every day, and I'm learning all the time."

"We have both learned something this day, I think." Abbey held open her arms. Toralei smirked and took Abbey into a friendly hug.

Abbey pulled back quickly though, a strange look on her face. "Ooh..."

"Are you okay?"

"Suddenly feel ill again, but it is not your fault." Abbey rubbed her stomach.
Frankie looked concerned. "We should really check you out. Maybe the Sheriff can loan us a room to give us some privacy."

"I am sure it is just something I ate." Abbey waved her away. "It is strange though. I do not ever get sick. The last time I felt like this, I was pregnant with Ivan..."

She froze as she realized what she had just said. "Oh my..

Frankie looked surprised as she came to the same conclusion. "Oh dear... I think we need to buy a test..."

After he'd changed out of his uniform, Heath left the sheriff's office. He saw Abbey and Ivan standing by Shiver, checking over his harness.

"Hey, uh... Abbey." He spoke nervously, partly because he was still afraid the mammoth would go after him... and partly because he hadn't really talked to Abbey since she'd left Salem. He edged toward them, keeping one eye on Shiver.

"Oh, hello Heath." Abbey had a bright smile on her face, the kind that had always warmed his heart back when they were dating so long ago. "Do not worry, we are taking Shiver out of your hair now."

"Uh, thanks." He calmed down somewhat, noticing Abbey's cheery disposition. "Are you okay? You looked kinda ill back there."

"I am better than okay!" She replied happily. "I have just discovered that I am pregnant again!"

"Whoa, seriously?!"

"Frankie perform test on me, and it was positive. Have been so busy with work that I did not notice I had missed period."

"Man... congratulations!" He looked down at Ivan. "Good news, huh?"

"Da!" Ivan grinned. "It will be great to have little brother or sister. Then we can have snowball fights together."

"Sounds good..." Sadness was beginning to creep into Heath's voice. "I guess Yakov will be happy."

"I'm sure he will when he hears news. Though I wonder if it will be boy or ghoul. Yakov will probably want boy, but I would prefer ghoul..."

She paused when she noticed the hurt, faraway look on Heath's face, as if he was thinking of something unpleasant.

"Are you okay? You seem troubled."

"No no... well... yeah." Heath sighed, rubbing his head. "I'm guess I'm feeling kinda... a little... jealous."

"Jealous? Of me?"

"Of you, of Yakov... of everyone."
"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Nah... I don't wanna bother you."

"Is no bother to help old friend." Abbey gave him a pleading look. "Please, do not hold it in."

Heath sat down on the kerb, crossing his arms across his knees and resting his chin atop them. He let out another long sigh as Abbey sat down with him.

"I feel... lonely, you know. I mean, all the guys have got these amazing girlfriends or wives, some of them are even having kids. But me... I haven't got anyone. I got home and the only person waiting for me is my pet Streaky."

"Having pet as friend is not bad."

"Yeah, but its not the same." Heath stared into the distance. "I was fine with it when I was younger. I loved being a bachelor. I could stay up and party, laze about my apartment, date loads of gals... but now, it just feels... I dunno... hollow. I want someone in my life, someone to live with, someone to love."

"Everyone wants that, I think." Abbey spoke softly.

"Yeah, but not everyone gets one. I sure haven't." Heath sounded bitter. "If I'm lucky enough to get a date for the weekend, I can never make it last beyond a night. We go out, we spend the night together, and then she doesn't want anything to do with me. I don't know if it's me, or if it's her, but its driving me crazy!"

He looked at Abbey with a look of profound sadness. "But you know what really burns me? I could have had someone in my life, someone I really cared about. Someone I wanted to stay with."

"Who is that?" Abbey asked.

"Well... you! We had a good relationship when we were dating in high school. I seriously thought we'd stick together forever, or at least through college. You're the ice girl, I'm the fire guy... it seemed perfect. But then I had to screw it up, like I screw up everything else."

He looked away. "And now, you're with that Yakov guy, and I'm all alone."

Abbey sighed. "Heath, you did not break up our coupling on your own. It was also my decision, and one which was coming sooner or later. It was inevitable, I think, that we would not stay together."

"You don't know that." Heath protested. "If I'd done things a little differently..."

"Would not have changed things. You wanted me to be more fun, I wanted you to be more serious. I wanted to go back to mountains and help village, you.. were not quite sure what you wanted to do. We were on different paths. Had we tried to stay together, one or both of us would have been miserable."

"I don't know... I would have been willing to live in the mountains. I could have kept myself toasty warm up there."

"But you would have been bored with our way of life. I got that when we worked together on school project about farming, and you fell asleep half the time."
"Guess you're right there..."

Abbey patted his shoulder. "But things work out all right. I have family with Yakov, you have a job you like and good friends, and one day you will find the ghoul that is perfect for you."

"That's nice of you to say." Heath sighed. "I don't think it's gonna happen anytime soon."

Abbey stood up, grabbed Heath's arm and yanked him to his feet. He looked directly into his eyes. "Heath, you are good monster. Though you may sometimes act silly, you have good heart, and always strive to help people and make everyone smile, even if your methods are little... unguided sometimes. Those are good qualities for any monster to have, and as long as you live by them, I am sure you will find person who is right for you."

"Huh, sounds easy when you put it like that." Heath shrugged.

"No, is not easy. Even I had trouble finding mate before I meet Yakov. It can take time. But until then, do not worry too much about it. Just concentrate on being good friend and good cop, and love will come to you."

"I can try..." Heath gave a small smile. "I'm don't think I'm ever gonna find a ghoul as amazing as you though. Yakov's a lucky guy."

"I am lucky one." Abbey replied. "But I will always be grateful to you for being my first boyfriend. I learn lot from you."

Heh, you taught me a few things too...

The two then shared a hug, a more friendly and motherly hug than the ones they had shared as teens. But it made Heath feel better than he'd felt in a long time.

Abbey and Ivan said their goodbyes, and rode off down the street on Shiver's back, waving back at him as they departed.
Heath waved back, watching them go before started on his way home.

"Hey Heath!" He looked to see Toralei and her daughter Nekora leaving the station. They waved to him as they made they way down the street.

"Thanks Officer Heath! You're awesome!" Nekora called.

Heath smiled back and waved. He might have struck out with Mona, but at least he'd met two ghouls today who admired him.

As he watched them go, he couldn't stop himself taking a long look at Toralei's figure as she moved. Man, had she always looked that hot, and he'd never noticed? Maybe it was worth talking to her...

He shook his head, remembering Abbey's words. Then again, maybe he needed to take a little break from dating for a while.

When Viktor and Viveka returned from work that evening, they found the atmosphere to be much more somber than they had become used to. Frankie was sat absently watching TV, and Tesla was at the table, doodling in a colouring book with an sad look on her face. When they asked what was wrong, Frankie explained what had happened earlier, resulting in the two instantly hugging and comforting their daughter and granddaughter.
Viveka decided to make up some gingerdead cookies to cheer everyone up, while Viktor prepared dinner. But while Tesla enjoyed helping her out and Frankie raised a smile when they tasted the sweet treats, their happy mood didn't last long after dinner, falling silent and melancholy once again.

Finally, once Tesla was sent to bed, Viveka sat Frankie down, asking her what was wrong.

"I'm a terrible mother." She uttered miserably.

Viveka balked at that statement. "Oh, no you are not..."

"Yes I am!" Frankie replied angrily. "I should have been watching her more closely. She.. she actually tried to talk to me about riding that mammoth. I should have listened to her, but instead I was too busy trying to get everyone to shut up."

She crossed her arms lowered her head in shame. "She.. she could have been hurt. Or killed. And all because I wasn't responsible for two seconds..."

"Frankie.." Viveka wrapped an arm around Frankie's shoulders. "This was just an accident. Tesla's alright, and I'm sure she's learned her lesson. You're doing yourself no good by beating yourself up about it."

"But I messed up... I let her down.."

"You made a mistake. You're not the first mother to make one, and you will certainly not be the last."

"You never made mistakes..."

Viveka smirked slightly. "Oh I've messed up once or twice. Remember when I tried to force you to wear make-up whenever you went near New Salem? You gave me the silent treatment for days before I realized how silly I was being."

"Yeah... but that's nothing compared to what I've done. I feel like I failed Tesla..."

"Everyone feels like that when something happens to their children. Do you know Harriet came to me in tears after that whole event with Howleen and the magic lamp? She thought it was her fault that Howleen had felt so miserable and succumbed to that shadow genie's control. And your father... he was practically falling to pieces when you almost died trying to un-fuse your friends with that time portal. He was convinced it had happened because he hadn't tried to keep you away from that portal in the first place..."

Frankie blinked away her tears. "R..really?"

Viveka nodded. "No parent is ever perfect. We will always do something wrong sometimes, and feel awful about it. But that's a good thing. It means that we care about our children and want to do better for their sake. That means you're doing it right. If you didn't care... then you truly would be a bad mother."

Frankie was quiet as she absorbed this.

Her mother gave her a small hug. "Go and talk to your daughter. She probably feels worse than you do right now."

Frankie nodded. "Thanks Mom..."
She returned the hug before she headed upstairs to Tesla's room.

Frankie poked her head through the doorway. She saw Tesla sitting on her bed, hugging her knees to her chest and holding her Jenny Voltron doll tightly. She looked incredibly sad, her eyes downcast.

"Hey sweetie." Frankie spoke gently as she entered. "How do you feel?"

Tesla looked up. "Fine, I guess."

Frankie moved closer and sat down on the side of the bed. "Do you want to talk about..."

She blinked as she noticed Tesla flinch and move away from her as she sat down. The little ghoul's face was suddenly one of fear.

"Tesla, what's wrong?"

Tesla whispered. "Are... are you going to take me apart and throw me away?"

Frankie gasped. "What... No! No, I could never do that. Why would you think such a thing?"

"Because I did something bad." Tesla replied sadly. "In the cartoons, whenever someone does something bad, something horrible happens to them. And no one likes them when they do something bad. And you don't like me anymore, so..."

To Tesla's surprise, Frankie gathered her up into a tight hug.

"Oh Tesla... I love you. We all do. I could never hate you, even if you did do something wrong."

"But.. aren't you angry that I misbehaved?"

"Well... I was, for a moment. But I was more relieved that you were okay than anything else."

She smiled at her daughter. "Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. We do something we're not supposed to do, or we misjudge something or someone, or we have an accident. Sometimes we upset other people, whether we mean to or not. But that's just life. It happens to everyone."

"Even you?" Tesla stared at her, somewhat confused at the idea that her mother could do something wrong.

"Especially me. You should have seen the things I messed up when I started school. But making mistakes is what helps us to learn. When we know we've done something wrong, we learn what we did wrong, and try not to do it again, or do something better than before."

Frankie replied. "You know not to ride strange creatures when you don't know how to control them now, right?"

"Right." Tesla answered.

"And you know now that you shouldn't do anything dangerous without talking to me or Grandma and Grandpa about it first, right?"

"Yeah..."

"So, some good came out of this. You learned how to be a bit more careful."
Tesla nodded. "I really am sorry about that. But I was so excited. I'd never ridden an mammoth before, and I wanted to do something with Nekora. She's my friend."

She looked up at her hopefully. "If you're not going to throw me away.. does that mean I can still be friends with Nekora? She's really neat."

"Sure. As long as her mom says its okay, she can come by whenever she wants. Once she's not grounded, that is."

Tesla smiled. "Thanks Mom. I really like having a friend."

"Yeah... it's one of the best feelings ever."

She laid Tesla down and began attaching a set of wires to her neck bolts. "Now lets go to sleep."

"Could you stay with me?" Tesla asked as she settled her head on her pillow. "Just so I don't have nightmares about mammoths and cars."

"Sure." Once she made sure Tesla was comfortable, and that her portable battery charger was connected, Frankie began softly singing a lullaby, one her mother has sung to her during her first few nights alive when she had been afraid to go to sleep in case she didn't wake up again.

"Der Mond ist aufgegangen,
Die goldnen Sternlein prangen
Am Himmel hell und klar;
Der Wald steht schwarz und schweiget,
Und aus den Wiesen steiget
Der weiße Nebel wunderbar.
Wie ist die Welt so stille,
Und in der Dämmerung Hülle
So traulich und so hold!
Als eine stille Kammer,
Wo ihr des Tages Jammer
Verschlafen und vergessen sollt..."

Before long, Tesla was fast asleep, still hugging her doll. Frankie watched her, an overwhelming feeling of love and pride welling up in her chest.

She had hoped that after the explosion at her house, looking after Tesla would be easy in comparison, that given time things would soon settle and they would enjoy a normal, family life.

But this first week with her, full of adventures with missing hands, strange pets, new friends and runaway mammoths, seemed to prove that her life, and her daughter's life, would be anything but normal.

But while it was scary, and she imagined that in the future mistakes would be made and things might get even crazier... she would never give this new life up for anything.

She kissed Tesla's forehead before leaving the room to head for her own bedroom. Tomorrow was a new day for both of them... and she couldn't wait to get started.

END OF CHAPTER 5

AUTHORS NOTES
Thanks to everyone for being so patient for this chapter. Writing children characters is a new experience for me, and I hope I've done them justice.
Chapter 6: The Babysitter

Frankie watched Tesla closely as her daughter sat down at the coffee table. Placed before the little ghoul was a curved surgical needle, a spool of Monstertanium thread... and her own detached left hand.

She looked up at her mother. "I think I can do it now Mommy."

Frankie smiled encouragingly. "Then go for it. And remember, you don't have to rush. Take your time."

Tesla nodded. With her right hand she picked up her other hand and placed it on her wrist, a soft squelch noise being heard. Resting her hand and wrist on the table, she picked up the needle and thread and began carefully threading it through the small, perforated holes on the edge of her wrist. She stuck her tongue out in concentration as she looped the thread through the holes over and over, tying the hand and the wrist closer together. Finally, she threaded through the last hole, and performed two more loops before she tied a knot and cut the thread with her teeth.

"How does it feel?" Frankie asked.

Tesla raised her arm and waved it about. To her relief, her hand didn't go flying off. She grinned as she wiggled her fingers. "I feel fine. I did it!"

Frankie proudly hugged her daughter. "Well done sweetie. I knew you could do it."

"Does this mean I can carry a sewing kit around, in case something falls off?" Tesla asked.

"I think you've proven I can trust you with one, yes."

"Sweet!" Tesla hopped up and down with joy. "And can I have loads of different coloured thread?"

"What for?"
"So I can change my stitches." She pointed at the seams on her upper arms. "I wanna put red and yellow thread here, and pink and purple thread on my legs. It'll look so cool."

"I'm sure it will." Frankie agreed. "But you know, coloured thread isn't as strong as regular thread. It might break if you move too much, and you'll lose your body parts."

"I'll be careful, I promise." Tesla replied. She looked at her mother's arms. "You've stitched yourself up with coloured thread, haven't you?"

"A few times, though I only used it for when I was going to a party or dance." Frankie thought back to her school days, a fond smile on her face. "I should dig out some old pictures and show you. I would use gold and silver thread to accent my dresses. It made me feel so glamorous... except for that one dance when I did the Zombie Shake so hard, both my arms flew off and landed in the punch bowl."

Tesla giggled as she watched Frankie cringe at the memory. Frankie didn't mind the small embarrassment though, she was just glad to see Tesla smile. She'd still been a bit shaken after the 'mammoth' incident a few days ago, but now it seemed she was over it.

The quiet air was broken by the ringing of her iCoffin. Frankie picked it up, frowning when she saw the call was coming from Salem General Hospital. She was still on her booked sabbatical, she wasn't expecting any calls.

She answered. "Hello?"

"Doc!" She recognized Nurse Duzer's voice. "I'm sorry to call you, I know you're still on vacation with your kid... Man, you with a kid. I'm never gonna get used to that."

Frankie chuckled under her breath. "It's alright. What's the matter?"

"I don't know if you heard, but there was a massive pile up on the freeway between Salem and Portland about an hour ago. Like, the whole road's been shut down!"

"Oh my... no, I didn't." Frankie reached for the remote and switched on the TV to the local news channel. Sure enough, a zombie anchorman was reporting from a helicopter as it circled over a pile of crashed cars. "How bad is it?"

"Pretty bad. There's been no casualties yet, but there are dozens of injured people, both monsters and normies, and some are in critical condition. We're having to divide them all between Salem General and Unison Hospital." Duzer reported. "Head Nurse Ratchet told me to call you in. I know you're meant to be off duty Doc, but we're getting swamped over here, and we need all the help we can get."

"I'm on my way!" Frankie declared, her instinctual need to help others in a crisis rising up. She would have grabbed her keys and rushed out of the house as she usually did in an emergency situation, had she not remembered Tesla.

Tesla was still at the table, now wrapping thread around the arms on one of her dolls. There was no way Frankie could bring her to the hospital, especially if things were as hectic as Duzer said.

"Actually..." She returned to her phone. "I need to find someone to look after Tesla first. Can you give me half an hour?"

"Sure thing Doc. Just get here when you can, it's getting crazy!"

Duzer hung up, leaving Frankie to ponder who to call. Her father was no doubt busy with patients.
at Unison Hospital, and her mother had mentioned a mandatory faculty meeting at the university. Neither would be able to come home to watch Tesla.

Thank goodness she had her friends to count on. Surely one of them would be able to help.

"Sorry ghoul, I just can't. I'm due in court for my new client like.. now! Gotta go!"

"Hihi, you've reached the Wolf-Draculs! Clawd and I are at a lamaze class right now, so leave a message and we'll get back to you. Smooches!"

"I wish I could help love. But me and Gil are currently 200 ft below sea level. We won't be back in Salem for hours. I'm really sorry."

"Hey, this is Howleen. I'm probably teaching a class right now, so I can't answer. Please leave a message."

"I'm sorry Frankie. I'm stuck at Billy's parent's home, they want to meet my dad. There might be some drama... sorry."

"I'm sorry, Professor Mortavich is busy with a sensitive experiment right now... oh dear, I think something just exploded."

Frankie let out a low groan of annoyance. It didn't seem possible, how could all of her friends be unavailable at the same time?

She looked at her contact list again. There was one more person she could call... but was she really the best choice for looking after a child? As far as she knew, her friend wasn't used to looking after kids.

She shook her head and grabbed her handbag. She didn't have any other choice, she couldn't wait any longer to find someone. But if she was going to convince her, it was probably better to ask face-to-face.

"Tesla, I need you to grab your backpack and pack any toys you want to bring with you."

Tesla looked up. "Why? Are we going somewhere?"

Frankie nodded. "We're going to visit your Aunt Cleo."

"Oh cool!" Tesla cheered. "I've not met Aunt Cleo before."

"Well, you're about to." Frankie put on a smile. "I just hope you're ready for her. Or the other way round..." She thought.

Maybe she was being silly. After all, Cleo ran a successful women's magazine. Surely she could handle watching a child for a few hours.

"Oh sweet Ra, I cannot do this!" Cleo exclaimed angrily, looking up at the ceiling. "Why can't I do this?"

She slumped down against her desk, resting her head in her hands. She ruefully stared at her laptop, wishing the damned thing would explode and save her the trouble of writing her editorial page.

It was customary for her to open each issue of Eternal Ghoul with a short introduction page, usually discussing something that had happened during the production of the issue, or just her own personal thoughts about life, fashion, current events and everything in between. To her, it was her
personal greeting to her loyal readers, and just as important as any other page in her magazine.

But now... She just could not think of anything to write.

This month had been uneventful. No major events in the news, no new fashion shows, celebrity parties, or famous female monsters doing anything interesting, not even a good movie. Everything noteworthy had either happened last month or was set to happen later, like the Monsterista Grand Prix fashion show in Scaris next month, of the Maximoff-Aensland wedding in Devilia which she still had to prepare for.

It didn't help there were was only a week and a half left until the magazine went to print, and she already had too many things to do today. She had two fashion shoots, including the all important cover shoot to supervise, which were supposed to happen days ago but had to be rearranged thanks to scheduling conflicts and the notoriously fickle model Natasha Neckinski. Not to mention the pile of articles on her desk she had to edit...

"Ma'am?" She looked up to see her faithful assistant Tanis enter. The young mummy held her trusty diePad in one hand and a small parcel in the other.

"Are you okay?"

"I will be once I write this stupid editorial." Cleo replied flatly. "I don't know what it is with me today. Usually I'm just overflowing with insight, but today I have nothing!"

"Oh don't worry ma'am. I'm sure you'll think of something, you usually do." Tanis assured.

Cleo smiled, her ego suitably stroked. "Thank you Tanis, I appreciate your faith in me."

Tanis glanced at her diePad. "Just so you know, some representatives from Babylon Fragrances are coming over in a half hour or so to show you some new samples."

"Ahh, one more thing to take care of. That's all I need." Cleo sighed.

"And this came in the mail for you." Tanis held up the square, brown wrapped package. Cleo's eyes lit up with delight.

"Ah, excellent!" She all but snatched the parcel from Tanis' hands. "Thank you Tanis, you can go now."

"Now?" Tanis blinked. "You don't need anything else? I can help with some of that workload..."

"Tanis." Cleo stared at her with a firm gaze. "That will be all."

Tanis recognized that look all too well. It meant there was no arguing with her. She nodded and turned to leave the room. She had to admit it was odd though. whenever Cleo got a parcel in the mail, she always insisted on being alone to open it...

Once she was certain Tanis had left, Cleo dropped her icy facade and put on a face of pure glee. She tore open the packaging and flung it aside.

"At long last, you're mine... and aren't you both beautiful?" She gazed adoringly at the item in her hands...

A super rare, first wave, Screech Valley High Elsabeth and Jerrica Stakefield doll twin pack, still in mint condition in its original box.
She let out a small squeal as she admired the dolls from all angles. She'd always hoped that one day she could hold them in her hands, she had missed out on buying them then when they first came out because she had wanted the other dolls in the line, Lila Scowler and Anna Karis first. It had cost her a king's ransom - She quietly cursed those damn scalpers that made collecting these so difficult - but at last Jerrica and Elsabeth were hers. She touched the clear film of the box's display, wishing she could open it up and pose the dolls. But after all the time and effort it took to attain this, she didn't want to risk ruining the beautiful dolls in any way. Unlike the wooden dolls she played with as a child back in Egypt, these were much more delicate and detailed, and it took a lot of effort to pose them just the way she wanted. She would not undo that work under any circumstances.

Besides, she had work to do. Playtime could come later. Checking to see if anyone was around, she stepped on one of the floor tiles under her desk. A portion of the nearby wall slid open, revealing a cabinet full of fashion dolls, posed on stands. She placed the box on an empty spot on the shelves, and stepped back to admire her collection. It was perhaps a bit much to have a hidden chamber in her office, but she couldn't take any risks. After all, how would it look if everyone knew that Cleo de Nile, one of the most powerful monsters in the fashion and press world, collected dolls meant for little ghouls?

She closed the cabinet and moved to a small mini-bar, pouring herself a small glass of wine. It was a bit early for such a drink, but she figured one glass would help relax her a little, and maybe put her in the mind to start on that editorial. She turned back to her desk.

And froze when she saw a tiny four foot tall Frankie Stein, in a grey dress and blue hoodie, standing before her.

"Hello." The mini-Frankie spoke, smiling.

Cleo just blinked as she stared at the ghoul, then looked at her glass of wine.

"Okay, no more of these at nine in the morning." She put it down and focused on the mini-Frankie. "Frankie... weren't you taller?"

"I'm not Frankie. I'm Tesla." The girl replied.

"Tesla!" The real Frankie rushed into the office, followed by Tanis. "I told you to stay near me."

Cleo shook her head at her own naivety. Of course, this was Frankie's daughter. She hadn't seen her since the day Frankie had revealed her, and she'd completely forgotten how alike they looked.

"I'm sorry Cleo, she got away from me." Frankie apologized.

"Oh, it's fine." Cleo waved it off. "At least I get to meet this little one in person at last."

"Hi, I'm Tesla." Tesla grinned and waved. "You're Aunt Cleo, right?"

"Aunt?" Cleo felt uncomfortable being called that. It made her sound... old. "I'm just Mrs de Nile, if you please."

"Okay, Aunt Mrs de Nile." Tesla replied happily.

Cleo frowned. "Just... Mrs de Nile." She returned to Frankie. "So Frankie. What can I do for you?" Frankie looked uneasy. "Well, I need to ask you a huge favour..."

"Well, you came to the right ghoul. You know I'm always ready to help a friend." Cleo replied with
"Oh great!" Frankie sighed with relief. "I know it's a lot to ask, but could you watch over Tesla for a few hours?"

Cleo's face fell. "Excuse me?"

"I know it's short notice, but I have to go to the hospital to take care of a major emergency, and I need someone to watch her. My parents are at work, all the other ghouls are busy. You're the only person I can count on."

Cleo just looked stunned. Frankie wanted her to look after a child... was the ghoul mad? She didn't know how to take care of a kid.

"Wha... can't you just take her to the hospital with you? I have work to do too, you know!"

"There was a massive car crash. There are dozens of patients and doctors and nurses running about... there's no way I can keep her supervised there. I figured at least with you, she could stay in your office and you could keep an eye on her as you work."

I don't know... I'm really busy."

Frankie clasped her hands in supplication. "Oh please Cleo, I'm desperate here! She won't be any trouble. And you can use this chance to get to know her better."

Cleo looked at her pleading friend, then at Tesla, who was looking around the office with awe. She did want to help, Frankie did seem desperate... and Tesla was only a little ghoul.

How much trouble could she be?

"I suppose I could do it. Just this once."

"Oh thank you!" Frankie hugged her. "This is so voltageous of you."

She knelt down before Tesla. "Sweetie, I've got to go to the hospital now. Aunt Cleo will look after you."

"Can't you stay?" Tesla asked, obviously worried about being apart from her mother.

"I wish I could, but right now the monsters at the hospital need my help. I might need to save someone's life."

Tesla put on a smile. "Well, if you're going to help people, than that's okay with me."

"I'll be back in a few hours. Until then, just do whatever Aunt Cleo asks, and don't misbehave." Frankie hugged her and planted a kiss on her forehead. "Love you lots."

"Love you lots too."

With a final call of "Thanks Cleo!" Frankie sped out of the office, leaving Cleo alone with Tesla and Tanis.

She took a deep breath and faced the little ghoul. She had decided right away to be as authoritative as she could toward her, and make sure that she didn't get into her hair. Maintain discipline. It worked with her employees, surely it would work with a small child.

"So... what do we do now?" Tesla asked. "Can we play something?"
"You may play if you want, but I will not." Cleo spoke firmly. "I have a lot of work to do, and I would appreciate it if you didn't disturb me."

"Ma'am?" Tanis raised a hand. "I can keep an eye on her if you're not able. I'm sure I can find some way to keep her occupied..."

Cleo cut her off. "Thank you Tanis, but I think I can manage. And besides, you have your own duties to take care of." Inwardly, she would have gladly handed Tesla off to her, but she didn't want to look weak or incompetent in front of her.

"So what can I do?" Tesla asked.

"Whatever you want, so long as you don't leave this office, don't mess with anything, or bother me." Cleo replied. "As long as you do that, we won't have a problem."

Only fifteen minutes later, Tesla was becoming a problem. It seemed Frankie had neglected to mention that Tesla was possibly the nosiest monster she had ever met outside of Spectra Vondergeist. She would get in about a few minutes of work before Tesla asked some inane question.

"Who's that guy in the funny hat?" Tesla pointed at a framed hieroglyph picture of a Pharaoh.

"That's my great uncle Ptolemy, one of my many influences." She replied tersely, not looking away from her laptop.

"We're so high up! How tall is this building?"

"I don't know, 200 feet?"

"What's this weird bowl thing?"

Cleo turned around and nearly shrieked as she realized Tesla was touching one of her rare 9th dynasty decorated bowls.

"Don't touch that!" She cried out, leaping to her feet. "It's 4000 years old! It's worth more than this whole building!"

Tesla shrank back from the bowl. "Sorry!"

"It's just..." She looked at Cleo. "...your office is so awesome. And so big. You could put my whole bedroom in here twice."

"Well, I'm glad you like it. But please look, but don't touch." Cleo spoke firmly.

She returned to her laptop, typing at a much faster pace than before. If she was quick she could finish writing this article up before...

"So what do you do exactly?" Tesla suddenly appeared right next to her, staring at her laptop curiously.

Cleo sighed in frustration. She'd never get any work done if this kept up. Maybe if she answered a few of Tesla's questions, she'd hush up.

"Well, if you must know, I make a magazine." She showed Tesla the article she was editing. "I and several other monsters write stories and articles and take pictures, and I put them together in a magazine."
"That sounds fun." Tesla smiled. "What kind of stuff do you write about?"

"Oh lots of things. Fashion, beauty, women's issues, current events. In fact..." She reached into a drawer and found a copy of last month's issue. "Why don't you read this? See what we're all about."

"Great! I love reading." Tesla took the magazine and sat down to read it. Satisfied that she was quiet, at least for a while, Cleo continued with her work.

It wasn't long though, before, "Why are these clothes so weird looking?"

Tesla held up the magazine, showing a set of photos from the New Yuck Fashion Show and some of the high-concept designs from Alexander McScream and Louis Verdead. Well, at least she was asking a question that interested her for once.

"They don't look that weird to me. I think they're quite unique."

"But they're all so goofy." She pointed at one flimsy looking outfit. "Look, this one looks like it's made out of garbage. And this lady's boobies are almost falling out. Why would anyone want to wear these?"

"Well, they're not really meant to be worn. They don't sell these in stores."

"Then what's the point of making them if you can't wear them? Tesla was puzzled. "That's what clothes are for."

"Well yes. But sometimes designers like to let their imaginations loose and see what they can create. It's like making art you can wear." Cleo finished with a flourish of her hands.

"I guess I understand." Tesla shrugged. "I don't see why they can't make clothes that look cool and are actually useful. Like Mommy's lab coats. They look awesome, and they have pockets for everything."

She grinned as an idea hit her. "They should make a dress that doubles as a lab coat! I would totally wear that!"

Cleo couldn't help but be amused by her enthusiasm. "Well, if you ever make one, I'll be sure to feature it in the magazine."

"Really! You promise?" Tesla gasped.

Cleo rolled her eyes. "Promise."

"Would one of the models in here wear it?"

"That's their job."

Tesla frowned as she stared at a photo spread featuring Kate Swampmoss and Heidi Krumm, draped in sheer Vera Fang dresses. "How come all these models are so skinny? Don't they get enough to eat? They look like they're starving."

"Well, many models prefer to stay slim so they can look good in their clothes."

"But that's silly. You shouldn't have to be skinny just to look good in clothes."

"You're quite right actually." Cleo nodded. "I always believe clothing should make you feel good, no matter what you look like. That's why I try to get as many different models and body types as I can to appear in my magazine. The readers love the variety."
She let out a small snort. "Sadly, the fashion industry still hasn't quite caught on, so I get stuck with the same identical skinny twigs most of the time..."

"That's really nice of you." Tesla said. "Mommy's always saying that we shouldn't judge people based on how they look, but on what they do and how they treat others."

"She's certainly the expert on that." Cleo agreed, thinking back to Frankie's regular motivational speeches from their schooldays.

"And Mom's nowhere near as skinny as these models, but I think she looks much more beautiful." Tesla spoke fondly.

"In many ways, she definitely is."

"In fact.." Tesla looked Cleo over. "You and Mom are about the same size. So you're both beautiful."

Cleo grit her teeth at that last comment. Was she saying she was as plump as Frankie has gotten over the years? Despite the urge to rebuke her, she held her tongue. Tesla was just a little ghoul, she was trying to be nice...

"Mrs de Nile..." Tesla spoke up again. "What's a 'G-Spot', and why do we need to find them?"

Cleo gasped in horror as she realized Tesla had turned to the health and sex section. She grabbed the magazine and tore it from her hands.

"Hey! I was reading that!"

"Trust me my dear..." Cleo hastily shoved the magazine into a drawer. "There's nothing there you should be reading at your age."

Just then, Tanis entered. "Ma'am, Alana Rune and Juniper Pine from Babylon Fragrances are here."

"Good, send them in please."

Tanis nodded and left to beckon them in.

"Are they friends of yours?" Tesla asked.

"Not quite. They make fragrances for me at my perfume company." Cleo replied proudly. Ever since that science project she and Ghoulia had worked on years ago, she had always fancied creating her very own perfume for everyone to wear. After the magazine had taken off, she had purchased a small distillery in Portland, which had created her first perfume. It had achieved some modicum of success, and she had entrusted a group of experts to make the next perfume even better.

"You make perfume as well?!" Tesla was awed. "That is so cool! Mommy and Grandma let me try on their perfumes if I ask. They smell lovely. Ooh, can I try some of yours?"

"This is not playtime. I'm conducting serious business with these women." Cleo spoke firmly, staring right into Tesla's eyes. "I need you to be quiet and not make a scene. Just let me talk to them in peace. Alright?"

Tesla was about to protest, but Cleo's scary gaze made her think twice. "Okay."
"Good." Cleo straightened up in her chair, trying to look imposing for her guests.

Tanis led in two plant creatures, one slim and tall with red hair shaped like rose petals, the other short and squat with her brown hair shaped like a pinecone. Both carried large suitcases

"Hey Mrs D!" The shorter one spoke cheerily. "Thanks for seeing us. Alana and I have got some amazing new samples to show you!"

"Indeed." Alana added. "I daresay, these are the best fragrances we've produced in ages. I think you're going to like them."

Cleo put on a smile. "Well, I hope so ladies. We really need to get a new product out before the autumn season..."

"OH MY GHOUL!" Juniper suddenly squealed, startling Cleo. "Who is that adorable little cutie?!"

It took a moment before Cleo realized she was pointing at Tesla.

"Who, me?" Tesla was surprised. "I.. I'm Tesla."

"Oh, aren't you just darling!" Alana gushed. "Is she a relative of yours, Mrs de Nile?"

"No, I am just keeping an eye on her for a friend." Cleo replied in a huff. "Please ladies, I have a lot to do today, so let's see what you have for me."

Alana and Juniper took their seats, Juniper pulling a small glass vial full of liquid.

"Okay, this one is a blend of desert roses, honey and a note of Frankincense.. I call it... Desert Secret!"

Cleo took the vial, opened it, and took a sniff. "Well, I don't recall the deserts in Egypt smelling quite like that, but this isn't too bad."

"If you like that you'll love this." Alana produced another vial. "I've mixed jasmine, cherry blossoms and just a touch of patchouli for a lovely Eastern scent with a bit of kick."

Cleo's nose wrinkled as she smelled it. "I think this may have a little too much kick."

She put the vials to one side. "You can do better than this surely."

"Well, we've got more! The two plant women quickly pulled out more vials to place before Cleo.

"I call this one Vanilla Rain."

"Ugh, more like soaking in sugar. Next."

"I've mixed lemon, lime and orange in this one."

"Ooh, that's quite enticing."

"You'll love this one. I blended lichen, swamp grass and peat moss for a beautiful earthy tone..."

"Bleegh! Smells like a damp compost heap!"

Cleo thumped her desk with the flat of her hand. "Come on, we need something more dramatic, more elegant, more... me."
"Umm... I have an idea."

Everyone turned to look at Tesla, who had suddenly piped up.

"You have an idea?" Cleo raised an eyebrow.

"Sure." Tesla picked up two of the vials Cleo had put aside. "Why don't you just mix them all together? If they all smell good, maybe they'll smell better when you combine them."

"That's not really how perfume works..."

"It can't hurt to try." And before anyone could stop her, Tesla poured the two perfumes into another vial.

Memories of the disastrous failures from her old science experiments flashed through Cleo's mind. "No! Don't do..."

Too late. The mixed together perfume began to violently bubble and boil, turning a brackish black colour. Suddenly, a small explosion of smoke burst out of the vial. Everyone reared back as the wisps of smoke grew in size, forming a massive cloud next to Cleo's desk. A dark void formed in the cloud, and a tall figure with a skull for a head appeared in it.

"NYYAAH HA HA HA!" The skeletal man laughed in a nasally voice. "At last! After ten thousand years, the portal is open! Now I can finally wreak my revenge, starting with that infernal He-Man!"

Cleo quickly grabbed the vial and put the stopper into it. The smoky portal began to fade away.

"No wait! I just got here!" The skeletal man tried to get out of the portal, but was sucked back in. "Noooooooooo...!"

The portal collapsed as the smoke faded into nothingness, leaving behind a pile of soot on Cleo's desk. Everyone stared at the space it had occupied with wide eyes. After several moments of stunned silence, Cleo forced a smile towards Alana and Juniper, who sat with faces frozen with terror.

"Well.. heh heh.. must have been the patchouli."

The two plant women didn't reply.

"I'm really sorry," Tesla spoke quietly as Tanis led a traumatized Alana and Juniper out of the office. "I just wanted to help."

Cleo just glared at her and sighed. "I don't recall actually asking for help."

"Mommy says you should always offer to help someone, even if it looks like they don't need it. It's the nice thing to do."

"Well next time you want to do a nice thing.." Cleo wafted away some stray smoke. "...ask before you do it."

Tanis returned, holding her phone. "Ma'am, I just heard from studio one. Himeno Kimihara is here for her photo shoot. They're just prepping her now."

"Oh, the archer! Of course," Cleo smiled. She'd been looking forward to this particular photo shoot.
The Monsterolympics, the Monster Federation's largest annual sporting event, had concluded recently, and Cleo had decided to gather as many of the winning female medalists as she could and do a photo shoot of them, showcasing their athletic ability and beauty.

"Let's head down there and get this done." She gathered her things and prepared to leave the office.

"Wait, can I come?" Tesla piped up. "Mom said I had to stay with you."

Cleo frowned. After that incident with the perfumes, she wasn't sure if she wanted Tesla near another of her projects. But she had promised to look after her, and she wasn't about to let a little ghoul make her lose her cool.

"Alright. But I really mean it when I say that you cannot touch anything! Unless I say otherwise, you are just to watch, and nothing more."

"I won't mess with anything, promise!" Tesla replied eagerly.

"Good." Cleo beckoned for her to follow. "You should watch this carefully, it might be a learning experience for you."

Cleo, Tanis and Tesla entered the photography studio. The walls of the large square room had been covered with black fabric, with several spotlights and reflectors focused on a small raised stage at the far end. Cy Clops, one of Cleo's best photographers, waved to them while he adjusted another spotlight. Next to the stage, Cy's assistant was applying some slight make-up to the face of Himeno Kimihara. A curvaceous centaur with Asian features and long bushy red hair, she looked quite gorgeous in the gold, centaur-sized dress Cleo had supplied.

"Miss Kimihara! How delightful to see you. We're so glad you could come."

Himeno blushed slightly, bowing at the waist to her. "Oh um... thank you de Nile-san. It's an honour to be here."

"Please, the honour is mine." Cleo piled on the praise, knowing it would make the centaur more comfortable. "It's not often I get to meet a gold medalist. And may I say, you look fangtastic..."

"Wow! A centaur!"

All eyes looked at Tesla, who was looking at Himeno with awe. She realized what was happening and blushed.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be rude. But I've never seen a centaur before. You look lovely."

"Well, thank you." Himeno smiled. She lightly touched the skirt surrounding the horse half of her body. "I'm glad I look nice too. I don't normally get to wear dresses like this."

"You look amazing!" Tesla complemented.

Himeno chuckled. "She is so sweet. Is she your daughter, de Nile-san?"

"What.. NO!" Cleo retorted, stunned. "I'm just watching her for a friend."

"Ah, sorry." Himeno bowed again. "So, shall we get started?" She stepped onto the stage.

Cy raised his camera. "Alright Miss Kimihara, if you could give me a nice, confident pose..."
As Cy began rapidly clicking pictures of Himeno, Cleo stood with Tanis, quietly seething. "Can you believe her? She thinks I'm Tesla's mother. Do I look like a mother to you? Do I look like some frumpy, stressed out housemonster?"

"Well, you do have a bit of a maternal vibe about you. You're always looking out for the staff, you work hard to keep everything just right..."

"That's being a good boss. It's nothing to do with being maternal." Cleo whipped out a compact mirror from her purse. "Seriously, do I have wrinkles? Bags under my eyes?"

"You look fine, ma'am." Tanis sighed, rolling her eyes.

"Looking great Miss Kimihara, now put your hands on your hips." Cy instructed Himeno as he continued taking pictures. "So how did you get into archery anyway?"

"Oh, my family have been doing it for generations." Himeno replied as she posed. "My grandfather runs a kyudo training camp near my home in Kyoto..."

"What's archery?" Tesla asked.

Himeno blinked. "You've never heard of archery?"

"I've only been alive a week or so."

"Well... archery is a sport where the aim is to fire an arrow at a target. Some do it while standing, but I specialize in shooting while running around a track."

"Whoa.. that sounds awesome!" Tesla gasped. "How do you shoot the arrows?"

"With this." Himeno stepped forward and picked up a well maintained bow from the stage's edge. She held it up for everyone to see. "I thought I should bring it, in case you wanted any shots of me holding it."

"How does it work?" Tesla asked, staring at the bow with wonder.

"Well, I could show you if you want." Himeno said.

"Really?!"

"Now wait!" Cleo stood between the two, hands firmly on her hips. "Miss Kimihara has an important job to do, and we should not interrupt her. She doesn't have time to be playing around with bows and arrows."

"Oh I don't mind." Himeno said kindly, picking up a quiver full of arrows. "I love showing off my craft to those who take an interest. We get more students that way. It'll only take a few moments, I promise."

"I really don't think this is wise." Cleo protested as Tesla moved closer to the stage. Putting a weapon in Tesla's hands did not sound like a good idea.

Cy spoke up. "Actually boss, this could make a really good photo-op. You know, a famous monsterolympian teaching her skills to the next generation. It would look great on the editorial page."

Cleo had to admit, that did sound good. She'd have to ask Frankie for her permission to put Tesla's photo in the magazine, but it would be a great talking point for her page.
She turned and grinned at Tesla and Himeno. "By all means, go ahead."

Standing behind Tesla, Himeno put the bow in her hands, then pulled out a blunted arrow from her quiver and handed it to her. "Now these are blunt arrows for indoor practice, but the real ones are sharp at the end, so we must be careful."

Himeno took Tesla's hands and gently guided her into placing the arrow against the bow string. Cy quietly took pictures while Cleo watched, thinking of how to place this in her editorial.

"Now you use this hand to keep the arrow steady, while you pull the string back with the other." Himeno guided.

"Oh, I see." Tesla marveled. "This is really easy."

"Now you just have to hold the bow steady, aim where you want to shoot the arrow, and let go of the string." She gently turned Tesla toward the rear of the room. "Now, so we don't damage anything, we'll shoot it toward that curtain..."

Suddenly, there was the sound of fabric tearing. The stitches securing Tesla's hand to her wrist were unable to take the strain of the bowstring. Her hand separated from her arm, releasing the string before she had a chance to aim the bow. The arrow and her hand were sent flying.

It bounced off a wall and flew into a spotlight, ricocheting off it and flying over everyone's heads, causing them to duck down. They stayed down as it ricocheted back and forth, until finally it flew towards Tesla. She hopped up and tried to catch the arrow.

Amazingly, she caught it between her hands. "I got it!"

In her excitement, she accidentally touched the arrow against her neck bolts.

The next thing everyone knew, a stream of electric sparks shot out of her bolts though the arrow, shocking everyone around her. Everyone juddered and shuddered until Tesla pulled the arrow away.

Tesla gulped as she looked at the collapsed adults all around her. Mrs de Nile's hair was standing on end, Miss Tanis' bandages were singed, and there was smoke coming from the photographer's camera.

"Sorry." She moaned.

"Uhh, what happened..." Cleo slowly rose, shaking her head. Her eyes shot wide in horror. "Oh sweet Ra! Miss Kimihara! Are you alright?"

Everyone turned to look at Himeno. The centaur's bushy hair was standing in all directions, forming a massive, fluffy afro. She seemed too dazed to notice.

"Ooh... that was refreshing. I feel wide awake now..." She warbled.

"Well, at least we got all the photos we need." Tanis spoke to Cleo, who was standing by one of the windows, glaring out at the horizon. "And Miss Kimihara was able to laugh it off. Well, once we got her hair under control of course..."

Cleo just simmered angrily. "It would have gone perfectly if she hadn't been there." She glanced at Tesla, who was sat at her desk on a spare chair sewing her hand back on her wrist. "Thanks to her,
the shoot had to be rushed, and my hair is ruined!"

"It wasn't her fault. They were just accidents, they happen."

"We never had any problems like this before she showed up." Cleo hissed. "There's no way I'm bringing her to the Natasha Neckinski shoot. She'll probably blow up the whole studio before we even take a photo."

"So we won't bring her. It's probably for the best, I think Miss Neckinski hates children." Tanis smirked. "You know, you have some time before she comes in for her shoot. Why don't you use it to relax?"

Cleo ran a hand through her hair. "After all this, a few minutes of peace wouldn't hurt, I guess. I could take another crack at that editorial..."

"Actually, I was thinking maybe you Iii spend some time with Tesla."

Cleo blinked in disbelief. "How is that meant to be relaxing?!"

"I have a nephew I have to look after for my little brother sometimes. He was quite a handful at first too. But I spent some time playing with him and getting to know him, and we became friendly with each other. After that, he didn't cause as much trouble." Tanis explained. "It couldn't hurt to try it with her."

"Well, if it keeps her out of mischief..." Cleo conceded. She approached the desk, causing Tesla to look up at her guiltily.

"I'm really sorry about shocking everyone..."

"Oh, forget it." Cleo shrugged. She took her chair and sat down next to her.

"Are we going to another photoshoot? Or doing something else for your work?" Tesla asked, excited again. "I wanna help if I can."

"No... I thought we could just relax and maybe play together for a little bit." Cleo replied. "So, what would you like to do?"

"Ooh, can we play dolls? I brought mine with me." Tesla grinned, reaching for her backpack she had left against the desk.

"Dolls? That sounds good." Now this was something Cleo could relate with. She wasn't about to reveal her collection of course, but it would be nice to see what kind of dolls Tesla had.

Then she actually saw the dolls Tesla was pulling out of her bag, and her mind did a complete one-eighty. Their hair was all over the place, their limbs were mismatched in colour, and what the hell was that smeared all over their clothes?

"Why are they so... muddy?" Cleo asked warily, praying to all the Gods she knew that that really was just mud.

"Oh, I was acting out this awesome adventure with them yesterday." Tesla held up two of the dolls. "See, Mary and Shelly's fashion boutique was about to shut down, so they went with Jenny Voltron on one of her trips to explore the Amazon and find a buried treasure so they could get rich and save the shop."
"The Amazon?"
"Well, my Grandma's flower bed. But it's a real jungle if you just imagine it."

Cleo just nodded, still staring wide eyed at the horrible state of those dolls. There was no way she was touching those ghastly things. How could anyone treat dolls so badly?

"Actually... you know what would be a better idea? We could..." She looked around for anything which might entertain the little ghoul, finally settling on Tanis and her diePad. "Watch TV!"

"Oh, okay!"

Cleo approached Tanis and pointed at her tablet. "You can get Hexflix on this thing, right?"

"Yes, but.."

She snatched the tablet from Tanis' hands. "Great, thanks." She returned to the desk.

"Ma'am, I need that." Tanis pleaded. "It's got all of my notes."

"It's just for a little while, I'll give it back when she's gotten bored. You can do without it for a while."

Tanis just sighed in resignation. "Fine. I'll just find something else to do then, provided I don't need my notes to actually do it..."

She left, leaving Cleo to show Tesla the Hexflix app on the tablet. "Alright, what do you want to watch? I think they have Beastenders and Days of our Unlives on here, you kids are into that, right?"

Tesla stared at the screen, her eyes widening as she noticed a certain title. "Ooh! They've got Screech Valley High! I love that show!"

"It's a show?" Cleo knew about the dolls of course, but she wasn't aware there was a cartoon attached to it.

"Yeah, it's about these monsters who go to high school, and they have all sorts of adventures. It's really funny."

"Well, if that's what you like.." Cleo handed her the tablet and returned to her laptop.

"Don't you want to watch with me?"

"I'm rather busy right now..."

"Oh come ooon!" Tesla pleaded. "It's really good. And it's more fun to watch it with someone."

Cleo was about to repeat her answer, but then she saw Tesla staring at her with wide, hopeful eyes, and she knew she'd never get any peace if she didn't join in.

"All right, I'll watch one episode with you, but that's it."

"Great!" Tesla jabbed the tablet to start an episode, and nudged her chair closer to Cleo's side. Cleo sighed and settled into her chair.

"Honestly, a cartoon about teenage monsters going to high school? Who finds that interesting?"
As it turned out, Screech Valley High was far more entertaining that she'd thought. It focused on two twin vampire sisters, the sensible but bossy Elsabeth Stakefield and the flirty, irresponsible Jerrica, as they went to high school and got into various comedic situations with the other eclectic students they befriended. It was actually fairly amusing and well written, and in Cleo's case, strangely familiar.

So much so, that she felt compelled to watch another episode. And another. And another.

"He he.. Oh wow!" Tesla laughed as they watched Elsabeth fly into a frantic screaming match as her boyfriend Toad Wilkins accidentally ruined her homework. "I love it when Elsabeth goes crazy. It's hilarious!"

"I'll say." Cleo smirked. "It reminds me of when your mother was late with her homework. She would fly to pieces trying to get it all done."

Tesla frowned as on the screen, a posh looking harpy in fine clothing entered and sneered at Elsabeth. "Ooh, that's Lila Scowler. She's totally the worst character."

"Really? She seems quite stylish."

"Yeah, but she's always acting mean and snobby to everyone, and she always acts like everyone's beneath her." Tesla intoned.

Cleo gulped. Lila Scowler suddenly sounded a little too familiar. "Well... that doesn't mean she's a bad ghoul. Maybe she acts that way because she has a demanding father who expects a lot from her..."

She blinked as the scene changed to show Jerrica trying to chat up a handsome student. "What's this? I thought Jerrica had hooked up with that unicorn student in the last episode."

"Yeah, her boyfriends never last long. She's always chasing a new one." Tesla shrugged. "It's kinda sad."

"Ugh, she's throwing herself all over him. Is she trying to win the Sluttiest Ghoul in school award?"

Tesla looked at her curiously. "What does slutty mean?"

Cleo gasped when she realized what she'd said. "I meant... nutty! Yes, she's a real nut for giving up on those boys so easily."

"Yeah, I reckon she's jealous of Elsabeth because she's got a boyfriend and she doesn't."

Tesla sighed. "I wish I had a sister. Or a brother. It would be nice to have someone I could play with all the time."

"Oh trust me, having a sibling is not as fantastic as you think."

"Do you have a sibling?"

Cleo flinched. She hadn't talked about that in a long time.

"I did.. I do have an older sister. Nefera." She pointed at the framed picture of her, Nefera and her father on her desk.

"She's pretty." Tesla complimented.
"Yes, she was quite a looker in the day. It's just a shame her attitude couldn't match her looks."

"Was she a pain in the butt like Jerrica?"

"She wasn't so bad when we were your age. Once she grew up, she was a total nightmare. Always stealing my clothes, always trying to get attention, blaming me for everything..."

"My life is ruined! How could you do this to me?"

Cleo paused. That day, the last time she'd seen Nefera... She hadn't thought about that day in years.

"So does your sister work on the magazine with you?" Tesla asked.

"No, she was a model. And a fairly good one until she lost her job for bad behavior. And after that..."

She stared out of the window, lost in thought. "I don't know what she's doing now."

"Don't you talk to each other?"

"I wish I could... I haven't seen her in ten years."

Tesla gasped. "Ten years? That's almost as old as Mom! How come?"

Cleo looked at her sadly. She'd never told the story of that day to anyone apart from Deuce and Ghoulia. She'd never truly gotten over the guilt she felt, and it felt worse when the subject came up. But she couldn't stop thinking about it now.

"Well, Nefera had gotten rather... shall we say, tipsy at a party she was hosting at one of my father's villas. As a result, the whole house was trashed and some rather... unflattering pictures of her had been taken. So, she asked me to ask your Aunt Ghoulia to use her hacking skills to remove the pictures before our father saw them."

"So, did she?"

Cleo stared off into the distance. "No... no I didn't ask her to. I'd gotten so tired of her antics, I wanted to make her face the consequences. The pictures were posted all over the internet, and she became a complete laughing stock. After that..."

She paused, trembling slightly as her sister's angry words came back to her...

"How could you do this to me?!" She clenched a copy of Monster Beat magazine, a photo of her sprawled on the floor in a state of undress on the cover.

"I'm under no obligation to cover up your mistakes! You have no one to blame for this but yourself."

"Do you know what Father's done? He cut me off! My credit cards are gone! The bank refuses to talk to me! He's practically disowned me!"

"Oh please. He'll give your precious cards back sooner or later. Maybe you should prove you deserve them by getting a job..."

"Get a job?! My agency has fired me! I have nothing! You've ruined everything!"

"Everything that's happened is your own damn fault! Why don't you take responsibility for once in your unlife?!"
"You did this to me, you! I will never forgive you! NEVER!"

"Mrs de Nile?" Tesla spoke, jolting Cleo from her reverie. She shook her head.

"After that, she left and I never saw her again."

"Where did she go?"

"I wish I knew. I assumed she got a job modelling in some other country, but no one has seen her anywhere. I've hired detectives to try and find her, but so far... nothing."

Tesla have her a sympathetic look. "You must really miss her."

"It's strange..." Cleo spoke sadly. "When I was younger, I wished that she would disappear so I could get her out of my hair. But when she really did vanish, I wanted her back. I felt I should have done more to help her, try to get her life on track instead of just ignoring her. Maybe then we wouldn't be in this situation."

She sighed, staring at the photograph of her and Nefera. "Now, all I can do is hope that she's alright, and that one day we'll see each other again."

She flinched as she felt Tesla hug her side.

"I hope you find her." Tesla gave her a hopeful smile. "But until then, I could be your friend."

Cleo was honestly touched. She hadn't expected some person she barely knew, let alone a child, to be so caring about her personal issues.

"Thank you Tesla. That's very kind of you."

Tesla pointed at the diePad. "Do you want to watch My Little Bonies? That always cheers me up."

Cleo chuckled. She felt a little better already. "I guess one episode couldn't hurt."

As the two settled down to watch the diePad, there was a knock at the door. Cleo called for the person to enter, expecting Tanis.

"Hey there." Deuce called as he entered. "I'm looking for a drop dead gorgeous magazine editor. Know where I can find one?"

"Deucecy!" Cleo leapt out of her seat and raced across the room, grabbing her husband in a hug. Seeing him always made her feel happier. "What are you doing here?"

"Eh, we finished dinner prep a little early, so I thought I'd stop by."

"I'm glad you did." She pressed her body against his. "It's been a very trying day, and I could do with some... relaxation."

Deuce grinned wickedly. "Think we could have some fun on your desk before Tanis gets back?" His hands traveled down to give her bottom a playful squeeze.

They were interrupted by a set of giggles. Cleo rolled her eyes as she looked as Tesla, who was watching them with amusement.

"Deuce, I'm sure you know Frankie's daughter Tesla. I'm looking after her while Frankie's busy."
"Huh, cool." Deuce approached Tesla and knelt down to her level. "Nice to meet you at last."

"Hi there." Tesla replied cheerfully. She gasped in surprise. "I know who you are! You were on Ready Deadly Cook! I was watching it with my Grandma."

"Yeah, I do a guest slot on there sometimes, to promote my restaurant."

"I helped Grandma make that trilobite stew you showed. It was a little burnt, but totally yummy."

"Well, glad you enjoyed it." Deuce smiled proudly.

"So, are you Mrs de Nile's boyfriend?" Tesla asked.

"Nope. I'm her husband, for better or worse."

"Ooh.. I bet you two are all romantic, like in the scary tales."

"Heh, I try.." Deuce smirked. "So, you're helping Cleo with her work?"

"Not right now. We're watching cartoons."

"Seriously?" Deuce looked at Cleo, surprised. "I thought you said we were too old to watch kids stuff."

Cleo tried to stifle her embarrassment. "Yes well.. I admit they can be amusing sometimes."

"So does that mean I can finally watch Power Monsters without getting some dirty looks?" Deuce asked.

"Ughh, it's like I'm married to a giant kindergartener sometimes." Cleo huffed. Tesla giggled at her expression.

Suddenly, Tanis burst into the office, a frantic look on her face. "Ma'am, we're in trouble! Natasha Neckinski and her entourage are here!"

"Oh really?" Cleo spoke. "She's early, she's not meant to be here until 12:30."

"It's past that now! She's been waiting in the green room for ten minutes, and she is not happy."

"What?!" Cleo checked her watch, eyes widening in horror as she realized the time. "How can it be that time already?"

"You haven't left the office in over two hours, maybe you didn't notice.." Tanis offered, shrugging.

"You mean I've been watching cartoons for two hours?!" Cleo shrieked. She scowled at Tanis "Why didn't you remind me she was coming? That's your job!"

"I'm sorry! I completely forgot."

"How could you forget? You arrange all my appointments!"

"Yeah.. and I couldn't check them because... you have my diePad." Tanis pointed at the diePad Tesla was holding.

Cleo let out a long scream of frustration.

"Relax babe." Deuce spoke calmly. "I'm sure she'll understand you were a little late."
Cleo glared at him. "Have you met Natasha Neckinski? She the biggest, most high-strung diva on the planet since... me! She'll never let me live this down!"

She grabbed the tablet from Tesla and tossed it to Tanis, who barely caught it. She grabbed her handbag.

"Come on, we've got to get down here before she refuses to do the shoot!"

She rushed toward the door, Tanis close on her heels. She looked back at Deuce. "Could you watch her until I get back?"

"Whoa, watch her?" Deuce replied, stunned.

"That's the spirit, thank you darling!" Cleo called as she and Tanis rushed out.

Deuce tried to say something, but gave up and just sighed in resignation.

He turned to Tesla, who was sitting with a glum expression.

"So uh... I guess we're stuck with each other." He shrugged, unsure what to do. "You um... want to play a game? I've got Flappy Bat on my phone..."

"I don't think she likes me." Tesla spoke quietly.

"Who Cleo? Ah, she doesn't hate you."

"But she seems so angry ever since I got here. And I made her late because I wanted to watch cartoons."

Deuce sat down in Cleo's chair and faced her. "Listen, I've been with Cleo for a long time. I know she can be really high strung, bossy, and a pain in the butt sometimes. But underneath it all, she's one of the sweetest, most generous ghouls you'll ever meet."

"Really? She seems kinda mean when she talks to her workers."

"Well, it's only because she wants her magazine to be the best. So she acts all tough so they do everything just right, and goes a bit overboard when things go wrong. But once she calms down, she's totally chill to be with."

He patted her shoulder. "Just give her time, okay?"

"I guess.." Tesla shrugged.

There was suddenly a low gurgling noise emanating from Tesla's stomach. She blushed with embarrassment.

"You hungry?" Deuce asked.

"Yeah, Mommy and me usually have lunch by now." She checked her pockets. "She gave me some money to buy a snack from the vending machine. Have you ever used a vending machine? They're so cool!"

"Yeah I've used them, but I prefer to make my own lunch..." An idea hit him. "Say.. Cleo has a small kitchen nearby for her employees. We could make something to eat there."

Really? I love helping Mommy and Grandma cook." Tesla was excited.
"Alright then." Deuce took her hand and led her out of the office, moving past the other rooms and into a small kitchen, complete with a fridge and a small stove. "Have you ever cooked anything yourself?"

"No, I've just helped. Mom says I'm still too young to be around ovens." Tesla shrugged.

"Hey, you're never too young to start." Deuce headed to the fridge in the corner and checked inside. He pulled out a carton of eggs. "You like scrambled eggs? We could mix up a batch."

Tesla nodded enthusiastically. "Ooh! Maybe we could make some for Mrs de Nile. That might cheer her up. She's gotta be hungry by now."

"Good idea." He returned to the fridge to get some butter. "Check the cupboards for a pan and some forks, and we can get cracking."

"Yes sir!" Tesla cheered.

"Once again Miss Neckinski, I apologize for making you wait." Tanis spoke contritely, bowing slightly. "It was a complete error with my schedule on my part."

Natasha Neckinski, the tall, slender vampire model, looked at Tanis with a disdainful gaze as she sipped a morguetini. "Well, see that it does not happen again. You kept me waiting so long, I was worried the shoot had been cancelled. Worrying does a number on my complexion."

Tanis was about to mutter that being a vampire, nothing could affect her complexion, but a glance from Cleo told her than she should keep that comment to herself.

"Well then!" Cleo clapped her hands. "Let's get started. We've got a fabulous Bark Jacobs gown for you to try first."

"Bark Jacobs?" Neckinski sighed dismissively. "Not exactly the most glamorous line I've worn, but I suppose I must do what I must." She moved behind a screen to get changed.

Cleo and Tanis stepped back as Neckinski emerged, made up and in her new dress, and began to pose for Cy. "You had better make sure the lighting is just right. It'll bleach my skin out."

"I know what I'm doing ma'am..." Cy sighed.

"That's Miss Neckinski to you!"

Cleo quietly growled. "Holy Ra, I hope we can finish this soon so she can get out of here. Have you ever worked with such an annoying, demanding, self absorbed priss?"

"Can't say I have..." Tanis replied dryly. "If that's the case, why did you arrange this shoot?"

"As insufferable as she is, she's still pretty damn popular. And we need a really famous face on the cover to help boost next month's sales. With the autumn lines coming out, we need to get out on top of the competition..."

"Indeeeed..." Cleo stiffened at the sound of the raspy, high pitched voice which sounded like a terrible Peter Lorre impersonation. "I hear there have been some ghastly superior clothes coming out this year. It certainly helps to have the best models to show them off."

Cleo turned to see a squat, blue skinned phantom standing nearby, only as tall as her waist. His wrinkled face, yellow eyes and receding hairline were somewhat offset by the expensive suit he
wore. He was the owner of several companies, including a publishing company which produced Cleo's biggest, if blatantly inferior rival magazine, Ghosmopolitan.

"It's nice to see you again, Cleo."

Cleo crossed her arms and sighed at the sight of this unwelcome arrival. "Well well, J.P Ghastly. If you'd stand on a phone book, it would be nice to see you too."

"Ah, jokes about my height. Haven't heard those before." Ghastly smiled crookedly. "I hope you don't mind my intrusion, I needed to talk to Miss Neckinski about her new book. My bookselling arm is publishing it, and we need to sort out some signing dates. And when I discovered she was here, I thought I'd stop by in person and say hello to an old acquaintance."

"Oh please!" Cleo scoffed. "You and I haven't been acquaintances ever since I scooped you on Alexander McScream's winter collection two years ago. What do you really want?"

"Well, since you asked.." Ghastly shrugged. "I was wondering if you'd given any thought to that proposal for Eternal Ghoul to join with my little empire. We did discuss that a month ago."

Cleo smirked. "Oh, you mean that hilarious joke you made about you taking control of my magazine. You were actually serious?"

"Please, you misunderstood me. I wouldn't be taking the magazine away from you. You would still be in charge, I would merely be an adviser. And with my resources, you could produce better articles and scoops than ever before."

"So by advice.." Cleo's eyes narrowed. "..you mean you would tell me precisely what to print, or face the consequences."

"Well.. I might suggest a few things, is that so wrong?" Ghastly looked apprehensive.

"If it means Eternal Ghoul becomes another trashy, exploitative rag like yours, then yes, it is rather wrong!"

"Hey, I produce a quality magazine..."

"Ha! You print ridiculous stories in the readers advice page, your photo spreads are virtually pornography, you constantly infer that we women care about nothing except clothes and sex, your articles are insipid... By Ra, I still feel physically ill thinking about that story you printed about those hybrid monsters." She gagged. "Half the facts were completely false! You made a mockery of those poor monsters."

Ghastly glared at her. "Regardless of what you think of my articles, you can't deny they get results. It's the reason why Ghosmo is the top selling magazine out there."

"One of the top selling magazines, you mean." Cleo replied with a smug smile. "Eternal Ghoul has beaten you out in sales more times than I can count."

This spurred Ghastly to reply with his own smug expression. "Ah, but it's not been that way for a while though, is it. I've checked the numbers, your sales have been dropping a bit these last few months."

Cleo flinched slightly at that statement, but she maintained her confidence. "Merely a slight lull, you know what the build up to autumn is like, there's hardly anything to report."
"Or its a sign that maybe readers are getting tired of you playing it safe all the time."

"I don't play it safe! I run a classy, regal magazine."

"You need to get with the times my dear." Ghastly sneered. "People don't want class, they want excitement, they want sensationalism! And if you can't give that, your magazine will soon be nothing but yesterday's discarded mummy wrappings."

Cleo bent down, staring Ghastly down with constrained anger. "We'll see about that. The features I've got planned will send Eternal Ghoul right back on the top where it belongs."

"Oh what, you're going to cover the Maximoff-Aensland wedding? Please, practically everyone and their mother is going there to get pictures."

"Yes, but unlike everyone else, I'll be able to get the inside story. It helps to have Countess Aensland as a huge fan of your work."

Delighting in Ghastly's stunned expression, Cleo put on her best royal pose, crossing her arms and grinning at him. "Trust me, J.P, Eternal Ghoul will not be joining your little empire anytime soon. By this time next month, we'll be the hottest thing on the news stands!"

Suddenly, as if perfectly timed to Cleo's comment, the fire alarm rang out with a deafening blare. Everyone in the room stopped and clasped their hands to their ears.

"WHAT THE!" Cleo cried out. "What's going on!?"

Then the sprinklers activated, spraying the entire room and everyone in it with gallons of water. Cleo shrieked as she felt her expensive hairdo go limp. But then someone screamed even louder.

"MY HAIR! MY DRESS!" Natasha Neckinski ran off the stage, water and makeup running down her enraged face. She stood before Cleo, wringing her fists.

"I have never felt so humiliated in all my 200 years in the business! Look at me! I'm a mess!"

"It's.. nothing a towel can't fix?" Cleo replied lamely. " Why don't we just calm down..."

Neckinski stomped off, shoving aside Cy as he tried to keep his camera dry.. "Get me some dry clothes! I am never setting foot in this shoddy excuse for a magazine again!"

The alarm and sprinklers came to a stop, leaving the room a dripping mess. Ghastly slicked back his wet hair and quickly waddled after Neckinski.

"Oh Natashaaaa! Let me get you a hot drink, darling! Perhaps we can discuss a photoshoot in my nice, dry office..."

He gave Cleo a triumphant grin before he left the room.

Cleo just stood still, fists clenched as she seethed with rage. Not only was the photoshoot ruined, but now her most annoying rival was going to snatch a world famous model from her.

"Umm.. ma'am?" Tanis spoke nervously. "Maybe we should check if there's actually a fire..."

"Yes..." Cleo hissed in a sinister tone. "And lets hope that its still burning... because I'm going to find whoever started it and throw them into it!"

Deuce and Tesla entered the room, both equally soaked. Tesla was carrying a plate covered with a
Everyone alright?" He asked.

"Do I look alright?!" Cleo screeched, wringing her wet hair in her hands.

"Whoa, sorry babe. This was totally our fault." Deuce held up his hands.

"Your fault?" Cleo narrowed her eyes at them, particularly at Tesla. "What did you do?"

"Well, Tesla wanted a snack, and it gave us the idea to make some lunch for you. So I thought I'd teach her how to make scrambled eggs in the kitchen."

"Yeah. We wanted to cheer you up with a nice hot meal." Tesla spoke earnestly. "But I think I turned up the heat on the cooker too high, because then the eggs started smoking, and then there was this loud noise and it started spraying water everywhere..."

She held out the plate and yanked the towel off it, revealing a pile of scrambled eggs, burnt into a black, crunchy glob. "But I saved the eggs for you. Do you want to try them?"

Deuce swallowed nervously as he watched Cleo's left eye twitch.

Cleo marched into her office, using one hand to dry her hair with a towel, the other to hold Tesla's hand as she led her into the room. Deuce, Tanis and Cy were close behind, wondering what she intended to do.

"Right." She dropped the towel and left Tesla by her desk, turning to face the others. "Here's what we're going to do. Cy! I want you to dry out the studio, dry off the clothes, and get it ready for shooting. I don't care how much overtime you need, but we are getting this cover shoot done today!"

"Sure thing boss, but who am I going to shoot? I don't think Natasha's coming back.." Cy shrugged.

"Don't worry about that. Tanis. I need you to call Bonita Femur's agent."

"She's going to be the cover star?"

"Sure. She's hot right now, she's in town, and she owes me a favour."

Tanis produced her phone from her jacket. "I'll be happy to. She's much better to work with than Natasha."

Cleo nodded in agreement. "But for the love of Ra, don't leave her unsupervised with the clothes! The last time she was here she ate a $200 Gorevinchy gown!"

She looked at Deuce. "Darling, I need you to calm the rest of the staff down after that drenching. Could you make up some lunch for them..?" She frowned. "Without burning down the kitchen this time?"

Deuce winced. "Okay, I asked for that. I'll order in some pizza."

"Can I help?" Tesla piped up, a hopeful look on her face.

Cleo spun around, picked Tesla up, and dropped her onto her desk chair. "You've caused enough trouble for today. You are going to stay right here, and not mess with anything." She raised her voice. "And I mean it this time. You do not touch anything! Understood?"
Tesla's eyes were downcast. "Can I still play with my dolls?"

"Yes, the dolls are fine. Do whatever you want with the dolls, but everything else is off limits." Cleo spun around and marched forward, beckoning for the other adults to follow her. "Let's go people! We have work to do!"

Twenty minutes had passed since Mrs de Nile and the others had left her alone. Tesla sat at the foot of the desk, posing her dolls to play out her new story of Mary and Shelly exploring a deserted island. (The colour of the tiles were the same colour as sand.) But this time, she just couldn't get into her story as much as she wanted to.

She couldn't stop thinking about Mrs de Nile. She felt terrible about making her so angry. Normally when she played with her aunts or tried to help them with whatever they were doing, they were really nice and never got mad at her if she did something wrong. They got annoyed maybe, but she always apologized, and that seemed to make them smile. But no matter how much she apologized to Mrs de Nile, she just got even angrier. All she wanted was to be friends with her, like all her other Aunts.

Oh well... maybe if she stayed out of her way and didn't bother her while she did her work, Mrs de Nile would be nice again. As long as she just stayed here and played with her dolls, nothing bad would happen.

"Come on Shelly!" She mimed the voice of her Mary doll. "Let's explore this cave. Maybe we can find something to build a raft and escape."

She walked the two dolls along the floor, tapping their feet on the tiles. She moved them underneath the desk. "This cave is huge..."

She tapped a doll onto a tile, and it pressed down like a button.

She jumped back, afraid she had broken the tile somehow. She then heard a whirring noise behind her. She got back to her feet and looked at the wall behind her. Part of it had slid aside, revealing a set of shelves. And on the shelves...

"Oh. My. Ghoul..." She gasped.

"Okay guys, tuck in!" Deuce called as he dropped a large stack of pizzas fresh from Papa Groans on a table before the Eternal Ghoul staff. "And uh, make sure you keep busy while you eat. You know what Cleo's like."

The staff, still shaken and damp from the false fire alarm, looked very grateful for the free food, and began crowding around the table to get their slices. Deuce left them to it, thankful that Cleo's expense account for the magazine would cover the delivery.

He headed down to the photo studio and slipped inside. Cleo and Tanis were there, watching Cy as he took photos of Bonita Femur, who looked resplendent in the patterned dress she modeled.

"Yo, Bonita!" Deuce waved to his old school mate. "Looking good."

Bonita smiled giddily at him. "Oh, it's so nice to see you Deuce! I was at your restaurant the other night. Thanks for substituting that spaghetti with strips of silk. It was delish!"

"No problem." Deuce smiled back, thinking of that night. Cooking fabric had been a first for him,
but he was never one to shy away from a challenge.

"Ahem!" Cleo coughed. "Let's stay on track please. We still have a lot of outfits to show off."

"Oh, sorry." Bonita flitted her wings a little before resuming her pose.

Deuce approached Cleo. "Got the staff all fed and back to work."

"Oh, thank you darling." Cleo sighed with relief. "Now we just need to get these pictures done, and we'll finally get back on track."

"Cool.." Deuce glanced behind him. "So uh... shouldn't we check on Tesla?"

Cleo waved her hand dismissively. "Oh, she'll be fine until we finish up here. It probably won't be long until Frankie comes back anyway. Then I can get her out of my hair for good."

"Oh come on. You can't just leave her cooped up in your office for ages, it's not right. You're supposed to be keeping an eye on her." Deuce replied.

Cleo frowned. "Well, I tried keeping an eye on her, and she almost wrecked every bit of work I've tried to do today. The ghoul is a jinx! Trust me, it'll be better for everyone involved if we keep our distance."

Deuce crossed his arms and glared at her. "Aren't you being a little hard on her? It's not like she caused those accidents on purpose."

"She didn't exactly behave herself either."

"She's just a kid, and one that's only a few weeks old at that. She doesn't know what she's doing."

"Well, she should! How on Earth is Frankie raising that child?"

"She's doing better than you are right now." Deuce sighed. He held his wife's shoulders and looked her in the eye. "Look, I know it's been a tough day, but you can't take it out on her. And staying angry isn't gonna fix things either. The least you can do is try to make up with each other."

Cleo glanced away. "Do I have to?"

"You never know, one day you might have to look after her again..." Deuce said.

"Oh trust me, that is never going to happen!" Cleo spoke vehemently, pouting. As she felt Deuce's gaze on her, the pout faded and she let out a resigned sigh.

"But I suppose you're right... Frankie won't be pleased if Tesla goes home unhappy."

"Um, Ma'am.." Tanis spoke up, holding up her iCoffin. "I just got a call from Michael Goomacher. You know, the race car driver. He said you wanted an interview about his Undead 500 victory."

"Oh yes, he's our Eligible Bachelor of the month." Cleo gasped. "Pass the call to me."

She took the phone and walked out of the studio, Deuce and Tanis following her.

"Michael, darling, how are you?" She spoke gaily as she strode towards her office. "Oh no, you're not bothering me, It's lovely to hear from you. I haven't seen you since that party at Moanaco..."

She threw open the doors and walked inside, still engrossed in her call. "Yes, it would be
wonderful if we could get together for an interview, maybe we could do lunch around..."

She suddenly froze, making a small, choking noise. Her face was fixed into a horrified expression. The phone fell to the floor. Deuce and Tanis followed her gaze, not sure why what they were seeing was so shocking.

Tesla sat at the desk, happily holding two dolls in her hands and making them dance. Surrounded her were dozens of fashion dolls, strewn all over the desk either standing or on their sides.

Deuce blinked. "Where the heck did those come from?"

Tanis gasped when she saw Cleo's expression. "M... ma'am? Are you okay?"

Cleo couldn't speak, still too mortified at the sight of her collection in array. "Ah... ah...ah.."

Tesla noticed them and smiled. "Hi Mrs de Nile. I didn't do anything but play with dolls, like you asked."She held up the dolls in her hands. "Your collection is amazing! I've never seen so many dolls."

Cleo's eyes bugged out when she recognized the dolls in Tesla's hands. They were her new Elsabeth and Jerrica Stakefield dolls.

She'd taken them out of the box.

She'd taken them out. Of. The. BOX!

She finally snapped. She ran towards the desk and ripped the dolls from Tesla's grip, standing over her with an expression of pure rage.

"How DARE YOU! How dare you mess around with my things! You... YOU STUPID LITTLE BRAT!"

The room fell silent, save for Cleo's ragged breathing. Tanis and Deuce stared shocked at Cleo as she glared at Tesla, whose lip was quivering.

Then Tesla broke into tears. She let out a loud, pitiful wail as she jumped down and ran away from Cleo. She raced past Deuce and Tanis before they could stop her, sobbing as she left the room.

"I'll get her." Tanis took off after her.

Deuce turned back to Cleo, who was busy picking up the dolls and examining them. He scowled in genuine anger.

"Cleo, what the hell is wrong with you?! You can't just scream at her like that!"

"Oh why not?!" Cleo retorted, pointing at her dolls. "Look at this! She's messed up my entire collection..."

She stopped, suddenly realizing that Deuce wasn't meant to know about the collection. She tried to look innocent. "I mean... she messed up my desk! With all these dolls. Which I have never seen before..."

"Hold on... these are the dolls you've been buying from Skullmart?" Deuce asked.

"You knew?!" Cleo gasped, surprised.
"I found a couple of receipts for dolls in the kitchen a few months ago... but I thought it was only a couple to like, decorate your desk." Deuce explained. He waved a hand at the mass of dolls. "Nothing like this."

"Mrs de Nile." Tanis reentered. "I left her in the bathroom to calm down. I think..." She paused as she took in the dolls again. "Um... ma'am... does this have anything to do with those packages you keep getting?"

Cleo let out a long growl of frustration. "Alright fine! I collect dolls! That's right, Cleo de Nile, the Queen of monster fashion, loves to collect dolls! I think they're pretty, I love their clothes, and I like to pose them! Is that a problem?!"

Tanis was silent in thought for a long moment. "That's... your business ma'am. I'm just glad it wasn't drugs or something..."

"I work hard to keep my collection looking nice! And that ghoul has just ruined everything!" Cleo held up her Stakefield Sisters. "These were mint in box! I had to look for months to find them in that condition! And she just destroys the box and ruins their hair..."

"For the love of Hades, Cleo will you listen to yourself?" Deuce interjected. "Look I know Tesla shouldn't have been messing with your... er, dolls, but you're acting like she just tried to kill me or something. They're just dolls!"

"But they're my dolls!" Cleo hugged several dolls to her chest, pouting. "It's bad enough she had to mess with my magazine, but now she's wrecking my collection."

Deuce sighed. "Look, did she break any of them?"

"Well... no..."

"And were you still able to get everything done for the magazine?"

"More or less."

"So it's not like she ruined anything, she just messed things up and inconvenienced you a little. Kids do that sometimes. You know how many kids I've seen in the restaurant drop their food and drinks on the floor? Way too many to count."

"So what?" Cleo glared. "I'm supposed to just pat her head and forget it?"

"No, you're meant to tell her off and teach her not to do it again. Yelling at her isn't going to help anyone."

"And how would you know?"

"I've been there babe." Deuce sighed, pointing at his glasses. "After the old Medusa vision kicked in, my parents gave me an earful when I stoned my neighbour's cat for fun. After they yelled at me, I felt guilty as hell about it, I even thought they hated me until they talked to me about what I'd done. Surely you got in trouble with your folks once or twice."

"Well... I..." Cleo suddenly thought of Egypt, and her childhood in her father's palace.

She remembered when she was only six. She and Nefera had one day decided to sneak inside the palace's throne room while their father was busy discussing some business with his advisers. They had borrowed some clothes from their parent's hampers and dressed up in them, pretending to be
the King and Queen. They had even found the large jeweled headpieces and scepters that were kept in the throne room for royal appearances, and waved them around, pretending to give orders to their subjects. Then her father had burst in unexpectedly, and she had dropped the scepter in surprise, causing the large jewel atop it to crack.

Her father had been livid, yelling at them until his face was red. It had terrified her. She'd seen him get angry at his subjects before, but never with such rage as this. She had felt awful, as if she had done something unforgivable. It was only when her mother had shown up and hugged her tightly that she was able to stop crying enough to hear her tell Father to calm down. She apologized over and over again, until Father admitted he had overreacted, and apologized for yelled. She and Nefera were still punished of course, but at least she knew her father didn't hate her.

"I guess... I did go a little overboard." She admitted, looking up at Deuce.

"You do sometimes, yeah." Deuce nodded. "But you don't have to tell me that. You do need to tell her though." He nodded towards the door.

"You're right." She sighed. "Tanis, bring her in here please."

Tanis nodded and moved towards the toilets.

"But just to be clear." Cleo pointed at Deuce. "I will apologize, but I will not let her off. I intend to sit her green rump down and lecture her all about touching other people's things until Frankie picks her up..."

"Ma'am!" Tanis burst back in. "She's gone!

"What do you mean she's gone?!" Cleo's eyes went wide

"I went to the bathroom, and she wasn't there."

"Well she can't have gone far. Look for her!"

The three rushed out and began searching the floor, checking in every room. But Tesla was nowhere to be found. After several tours of the floor, they reconvened in Cleo's office, where she slumped onto her chair with a horrified look on her face.

"What have I done? I yelled at her and now she's run away!"

"I doubt she'd just run away, ma'am..." Tanis began."

"Oh please! You saw how I acted! I would have run screaming from the building too." She put her face in her hands. "Oh, could this day get any worse?!"

As if on cue, her iCoffin rang. Dreading what this meant, she slowly put it to her ear.

"He... hello?" She answered nervously.

"Hey Cleo. How are you?" Frankie called.

Cleo's face went pale.

"Oh... Frankie! Yes! Yes I'm fine! How are you?"
"I'm okay..." Frankie replied warily. "How's Tesla? Have you two been getting along okay?"

"Erm... yes! Oh yes, we've been having a ball here! She is such a little darling! No trouble at all!"

"That's good to hear... could you put her on the phone?"

"I can't!" Cleo replied too quickly.

"You can't? Why not?"

"Because... she's..." Cleo racked her brains. "Because... we're playing hide and seek!"

"Hide and seek? Really?"

"Yes, and she is incredibly good at it! I swear, I cannot find her in this office at all!"

Frankie chuckled. "Well, I'm happy you're both having fun. I just wanted to let you know that all the emergency patients here have been taken care off, so I'll be able to pick her up soon."

"Soon?!" Cleo squeaked. She composed herself. "How... how soon?"

"Well, I have to check over a few more patients and finish up all the paperwork... so, about an hour."

"Well... don't feel you have to rush on our account! Please, take all the time you want. Your patients deserve the extra attention."

"Trust me, they're in good hands. Things have calmed down, I'm not really needed here right now, and I'd rather spend the rest of the day with my daughter."

"Heh heh... yes of course."

"So, I'll be there in an hour. See you soon!" Frankie said happily.

Cleo hung up and dropped the phone, her face ashen. "Oh Ra... Frankie's coming here in an hour! When she finds out Tesla's not here... Oh dear Ra!" She started panicking. "What do we do, what do we do?!"

Deuce held her hand. "Don't worry babe, we'll find her. She can't have left the building already. We just gotta look all over."

Cleo jumped to her feet. "You right! There's still a chance! Deuce, run down to the security desk and ask if they've seen her. I'll check the other floors. Tanis, I want you to tell the whole staff to look for her. Tell them the first one to find her gets a day off. And while you're at it, get the closest orphanage on the phone."

"Right away, ma'am." Tanis began to move for the door, then stopped. "Wait... why do you want me to call an orphanage?"

Cleo glared back at her. "Because one way or another, when Frankie gets back here, we are giving her a kid! Now get going!"

For the next fifteen minutes, the offices of Eternal Ghouls were in complete pandemonium. The entire staff, eager to earn the day off Cleo had promised, were running around the corridors, bursting into every room, searching under and behind every piece of furniture they came across in
the hope of finding Tesla. Some of them were even standing on their desks to lift up the ceiling tiles and sticking their heads in the air vents.

But there was still no sign of Tesla.

Cleo banged her head against her desk, tired and frustrated after running through every single floor of the building. "Son of a scarab, the invisible man is easier to find than this child!"

She stared at Tanis with haunted eyes. "Frankie is going to kill me. No, worse. She'll kill me, bring me back to life with some kind of weird science, then kill me again!"

"We've still got some time, ma'am, she's sure to turn up." Tanis checked her watch.

Deuce entered the room. "Hey, I just checked with the security desk. They've been watching all the cameras, but they haven't seen her. But they're certain that she hasn't got past the front doors or the other exits, so she's still in the building."

"Fat lot of good that does if we still can't find her!" Cleo moaned. "Frankie will never trust me again when she finds out what I did!"

"Relax babe, we're gonna find her. We just need to look a little longer.."

"We've looked everywhere in this building!"

"Maybe not everywhere..." Deuce rubbed his chin while he glanced around. "I mean, she's upset. She'd probably want to go somewhere quiet and private to calm down. I know that's what I did when I was upset."

"And where would that be?" Cleo asked.

"Well... when you were a kid, where would you go when you wanted to be alone?" Deuce asked the two.

"Hmm.. I used to hide in the old sarcophagus my dad kept in the basement." Tanis spoke.

Cleo was quiet, thinking back to her childhood. She could recall running away in tears several times, usually whenever she never got her way or when Nefera did something to upset her. When it had happened, her parents would always find her in the same place. The top of the central pyramid near the palace. Sitting atop it, staring down at the city and desert around her, always seemed to calm her down.

"Did we check the roof at all?" She asked Tanis, inspiration striking.

"I don't think so.." Tanis replied. "I know some of the staff go up there to smoke, but the door onto it only opens one way.."

"She could be trapped up there!" Cleo got up and rushed toward the door, beckoning to the others to follow.

They jogged up the steps leading to the rooftop fire escape. Cleo pushed the door open and looked around.

It didn't take long to spot Tesla, sitting atop one of the air conditioning units, staring out into space.

"Oh, thank Osiris!" She gasped in relief.
"Yo, Tesla!" Deuce called out. "You okay?"

Tesla turned to look at them. Her face was damp with tears, and when she saw Cleo, her expression turned to a look of fear.

"Tesla! Lets come in now, it's dangerous up here." Cleo called to her.

"Leave me alone!" Tesla hopped down and hid behind the air conditioner.

"Tesla, come on. You can't stay up here!"

"No!"

Cleo could hear her sniffling, as if about to cry again. She looked at Deuce and Tanis, who simply nodded towards Tesla, urging her to do what she knew she had to do. She sighed.

"Tesla... I'm sorry. I'm sorry I yelled at you."

There was no response.

"I mean it! I'm really sorry!" Cleo pleaded. "I didn't mean what I said! You're not a stupid brat! I was just upset about my dolls!"

Tesla peeked around the side of the unit. "You don't hate me?"

Cleo smiled. "Of course not. You've driven me crazy all day, but I don't hate you at all."

"I don't believe you." Tesla frowned. "You haven't wanted me here ever since I got here."

She sat down, turning her face away from Cleo. "I only wanted you to like me, like my other aunts do. I thought if I helped you with your stuff, we'd become friends. And I know I messed up a few times, but I wanted to make it up to you. But no matter what I do, you still hate me!"

Tears began to trickle down her cheeks. "I can't do anything right..."

Cleo felt her heart break for her. All Tesla had wanted was to be friends. Maybe if she had been a little more accepting toward her, they wouldn't have reached this point.

"Tesla..." She spoke gently, kneeling down to her level. "I'm telling the truth when I say that I don't hate you. And I really do want to be friends with you."

Tesla blinked. "You do? But you're always so mean to me..."

"That's a bit strong. I was... brusque with you, I admit. But it was only because I tried to ignore you and do my work without considering your feelings."

She edged closer. "You see Tesla, I'm..." She paused, feeling a cringing feeling up her spine as she struggled to say the last thing she ever wanted to comment about herself. "I'm very... ugh... old."

Tesla frowned in confusion. "Really? You don't look much older than Mommy."

Cleo smiled slightly. "Oh trust me darling. I was old when your great grandfather was just a baby. Anyway... the point is, it's been a long, long time since I was your age. And I had forgotten what it's like to be a child."

Tesla inched closer, prompting Cleo to continue. "I'd forgotten that everything is so new and
exciting to you, and that you want to try all these new things out, even if adults tell you not to. And that sometimes, you want to prove to everyone that you can be smart and helpful, and you only want to impress people and make them proud. And sometimes, you don't realize that what you're doingannoys people, and you don't understand why they're so angry..."

She stared at Tesla, a slight sadness in her eyes. "I'm not really an expert on children. I rarely spend time with them during my work. I don't really know how to talk to them or what to do when they misbehave.. or even behave nicely. I thought if I just ordered you about like my employees, that would be an ideal way to look after you. But I realize now... I should have tried a little better, been more responsible for your care..

"But you were!" Tesla spoke. "You've been really nice to me! You showed me all the cool things you do here, and you let me meet that archer lady, and we got to watch cartoons. I loved doing all those things! It's all my fault things were messed up!"

"You're young Tesla. You're expected to mess up. But it's up to us adults to teach you why you messed up and how not to do it again. And I completely failed to do that. So how about this?"

She extended her hand toward Tesla. "Let's admit we both made mistakes, and try to be better friends from now on, okay?"

Tesla wiped her eyes. "You mean it?"

Cleo smiled. "I really mean it."

Bolstered by those words, Tesla stepped forward and was taken into a hug. Nearby, Deuce and Tanis smiled with pride.

"Come on, lets get off this roof."

A short walk later, they were back in Cleo's office, Cleo holding Tesla's hand. Tesla looked worried as she spotted the dolls still strewn about the desk.

"I didn't break your dolls, did I?"

"Oh, no you didn't." Cleo replied, sitting back down and picking up her dolls to stand them upright.

"I thought I had. I thought that was why you were so mad."

Cleo picked up her Elsabeth and Jerrica dolls and looked them over. "No no, you didn't I just... liked them a certain way, that's all. And these ones were in their original box."

Tesla raised her eyebrows. "But you're meant to take toys out of the box to play with them. Isn't it silly to keep them in the box all the time?"

"When you think about it... I guess it is." Cleo sighed. "I just wanted to keep them perfect forever..."

"I'm sorry... but don't worry." Tesla smiled encouragingly. "We can brush their hair and fix their clothes so they look good as new! Then we can play with them!"

"Sounds like fun to me." Deuce agreed. He knelt down and picked up a doll. "Kinda like when I played with He-Monster figures when I was a kid."

Tesla looked at Cleo. "Do you want to play dolls?"
"Well, I don't normally play with them. I just pose them and admire them..." Cleo spoke warily. But then she looked at the dolls in her hands for a moment, and shrugged. "But, I guess I could give it a go, just this once."

"Great!" Tesla cheered. "I have some awesome stories we can act out."

"Wait a moment..." Cleo looked over to Tanis, who had been standing nearby, quietly observing. "Tanis, are there any more appointments I need to take care of?"

Tanis checked her tablet. "Well, we need to call Michael Goomacher back, and you're meeting a few financiers in a few minutes..."

"Push them all back an hour." Cleo ordered, holding up her dolls and grinning. "We can meet them once we're done playing here."

Tanis smiled back. "Gladly."

"Yay!" Tesla cheered and grabbed her own dolls. "Come on! Let's have an adventure!"

Despite her fatigue from being on her feet and without a charge for several hours, Frankie walked briskly into the Eternal Ghoul offices. She was eager to see Tesla again, not just because she had missed her all day, but she had a feeling that Cleo would be begging her to get Tesla out of her hair. Knowing how excited Tesla got about new experiences, she could imagine Cleo was having a difficult time keeping up with her.

As she approached Cleo's office, she found Tanis waiting to greet her.

"Miss Stein! It's nice to see you again. I hope things went well at the hospital."

"Yeah, it took longer than I thought, but we were able to give everyone the help they needed." Frankie replied. "I hope Tesla wasn't too much trouble."

Tanis paused for a moment. "Well... not too much. But Mrs de Nile was able to keep her occupied."

"Gosh, I really feel bad for putting her on the spot like that. We must have really disrupted her work."

"Oh, she doesn't mind." Tanis grinned. "In fact, I think she might be reluctant to let Tesla go home now."

Before Frankie could ask what she meant, a loud cry was heard behind Cleo's office door. "BWA HA HA! You fools, you fell right into my trap!"

They entered the office, where Frankie was met with a strange sight. Tesla, Cleo and Deuce were all sat around Cleo's desk, which was covered with dozens of fashion dolls. Tesla and Deuce were holding up two in each hand, while Cleo stood over them, waving around a small Anubis statue and cackling like a manwoman.

"Your lame little charity fashion show was the perfect distraction I needed to kidnap the President of Maslaya!" She gloated. "Now he can never abolish children's sweatshops, and I still produce cheap clothing and charge whatever I want for them!"

"You fiend Ralph Goren! You'll never get away with this!" Deuce spoke in his best high pitched,
feminine voice. while he moved one of his dolls.

"Ha, and who's going to stop me?" Cleo laughed.

"We will!" Tesla declared, moving the legs of her dolls to look like they were kicking. "While we were getting the fashion show ready, we learned Maslaysian martial arts! We're gonna kick your butt and save the president!"

"Do your worst, you have no chance against my magic!" Cleo waved her statue towards Tesla's dolls.

Still surprised at the sight of Cleo, of all people playing with dolls, Frankie raised her voice. "Um..Cleo?"

Cleo dropped her dolls with a frightened gasp. Tesla exclaimed "Mommy!" and ran over to hug her mother tightly.

Frankie laughed and picked her up. "Oh, i missed you so much. Did you have a nice time with Aunt Cleo?"

"I had the best day ever!" Tesla cheered. "I mean, Mrs de Nile and I didn't get along at first, but we did all these awesome things together! I got to meet a centaur who taught me archery and I got to watch cartoons. Mr Deuce taught me how to make scrambled eggs, and Mrs de Nile let me play with her doll collection!"

Frankie blinked and looked at Cleo, sitting at the desk full of dolls with a guilty expression on her face. "Cleo.. are those your dolls?"

Cleo looked at her friend with a haughty glare. "Well, what's so strange about that? I love fashion, why shouldn't I have be able to collect dolls that wear the fashion I like?"

"Yeah! Everyone can like dolls, no matter how old they are." Tesla agreed.

Cleo smiled, appreciating the complement. She then cast a pleading gaze at Frankie. "Incidentally, please don't tell anyone else I collect these!"

Frankie stared at Cleo and her dolls for a few moments, before she shook her head. "Well, if that's what you like, who am I to argue?"

She put Tesla down and approached Cleo. "Thank you so much for watching her. I really hope we didn't disrupt your day."

There was a worrying pause before Cleo spoke. "Well... there were some... teething problems. But I must say, watching her was quite an eye-opening experience."

"Aw, I knew you two would have fun," Frankie smiled. "You know, if you want to, I'd be happy to let you watch her again if I need a babysitter."

"I'd be deadlighted to. In fact..." Cleo looked down at Tesla. "As long as you check with me beforehand, you can come over whenever you want."

"Really?!" Tesla's jaw dropped. "That would be awesome! Can I help you with your magazine work?!"

"If I need it, and you promise to behave, I'm sure I can find something for you to do."
Tesla squeaked in delight, while Frankie was amazed. "Wow... that's so nice of you."

Cleo shrugged. "Well, what can I say? The idea of looking after kids is beginning to appeal to me."

"Better be careful there, babe." Deuce spoke up. "Next thing you know, Laura will be asking you to babysit her baby. And then you'll be looking after everyone's kids."

Cleo went pale at the thought of dozens of monster children crawling around her office. "That... that wouldn't be so bad..."

"Don't worry Cleo, I think it'll be a while before we all have kids." Frankie spoke. "But I think you'll be a great auntie to them all."

"Mom!" Tesla piped up. "Mrs de Nile doesn't like being called Auntie."

"Actually, you can call me that if you want." Celo replied. "Really?"

Cleo sighed. "Oh, everyone will start calling me that once Laura has that baby. I might as well get used to it."

Tesla ran up to Cleo and gave her a hug. "Thanks Aunt Cleo! I'm so glad we could be friends."

Cleo patted her head. "I'm glad we could too."

Tanis smiled as she observed the cute scene. "Well, looks like everything worked out in the end..."

Just then, there was a knock on the door, and Bonita Femur nervously poked her head in.

"Oh, Cleo. I'm really sorry but... I had a little accident with that Vera Fang dress..." She held up a dress with several bite marks on its sleeves, a guilty expression on her face.

Cleo sighed and slapped her forehead.

That night, Frankie entered Tesla's bedroom, ready to administer her daily dose of aging serum. She found her daughter sat on her bed, dressing up her dolls in clothing.

"Hey sweetie, could you put those aside for a moment? It's time for your dose."

"Okay, just lemme finish dressing her." Tesla quickly tugged the rest of the doll's clothes on. Frankie noticed the doll wore a purple business suit and skirt, and was holding a little bow made out of a cotton bud and dental floss."

"What's with her outfit?" She asked.

"Well, I wasn't sure if I wanted Mary to be an archer or a magazine editor like Aunt Cleo." Tesla replied. "So I thought she could be both!"

"Huh, good thinking." Frankie sat down next to her. "I guess spending the day with her rubbed off on you."

Tesla nodded. "Yeah, she was kinda mean at first, but once you get to know her, she's one of the bestest monsters I've ever met."
"You know, when I first met her at Monster High, it was kind of the same thing." Frankie glanced out of the window. "Cleo is a royal pain sometimes, but I can't imagine not having her as a friend."

Cleo let out a long, tired groan as she flopped down onto the massive bed which took up most of her and Deuce's bedroom.

"Uuugh, what a day." She moaned as she stretched out. "I'm seriously considering finding the nearest tomb and spending the next week asleep in there."

Deuce climbed onto the bed and sidled next to her. "Hey, it wasn't totally got to meet Tesla at last. I really enjoyed hanging out with her."

"Yes." Cleo looked thoughtful. "I must admit, when she's not messing around with things, she's quite delightful. Did you see how her face lit up when I told her I would send her a list of all the new dolls coming out? That was so adorable!"

"Looks like you really had some fun looking after her." Deuce smiled.

"I wouldn't say it was all fun..." Cleo shrugged. "But I enjoyed the experience for the most part." She smiled wistfully. "Especially playing with her, that was fun."

There was silence for several moments, before Deuce spoke up again. "You ever... think about doing it for real?"

"Doing what?"

"You know... looking after a kid. Having one of our own."

Cleo's face fell, and she looked away. "Not really... you know that's not really an option for us."

Sure it is." Deuce replied. "I mean, we can always adopt..."

He cut off when he saw the look in Cleo's eyes as she stared back at him. Though her face was neutral, he could see the sadness and disappointment in her eyes. He'd seen that look before when the topic of children came up.

The first time he'd seen it was years ago, shortly before their wedding, when they had asked Doctor Stein about the chances of a mummy being able to bear children. When he said that it simply wasn't possible, she hadn't said a word about it. She'd just thanked the doctor and they returned home. She'd that it was just unfortunate, and asked that they just move on in their lives. And so they had. But he could never forget the night shortly afterward, when he heard her quietly sobbing when he thought he was asleep. He"d never felt more useless than before than night.

"Deuce.. I do think I'd like to have children one day... in whatever way possible." Cleo spoke softly. "But I just don't think it would be wise right now. I mean, you have the restaurant, I have Eternal Ghoul... we're both way too busy to give a child the proper love and attention. We barely have time for each other these days. Look at what happened between me and Tesla today. I don't want to be that kind of person who can't be a good mother because I'm too focused on other things."

Deuce let out a small sigh of agreement. "Yeah... I think I understand." He wrapped an arm around her shoulders and cuddled her. "But for what it's worth, I think you'd be a great mother, no matter how busy you were."
Cleo gave him a grateful smile. "I wonder about that... but thank you."

She rested her head against his shoulder. "Besides, we have forever to think about starting a family. It's one of the perks of being immortal. But until then... I think I'll be content to be an aunt for Tesla and everyone else's kids." She grinned. "I'll be the favourite aunt who spoils everyone, of course."

"Of course." Deuce smiled. "Plus, we've already got a couple of little ones we need to look after..."

At that moment, loud footfalls were heard. A large dragon, about the size of a small horse, stumbled into the room, trying to shake off the large cobra which was wrapped around its neck. The scaly beast jumped around, shaking its head and breathing small gusts of flame from its mouth in an attempt the scare the determined snake off of it.

"Hissette! Smokey!" Cleo shouted, causing the two animals to cease their fight and look at her.

"I have told you two time and time again to stop fighting over who gets to sleep on the sheepskin rug! There's room for both of you to share!"

Smokey flattened his ears back in shame, while Hissette looked as embarrassed as a snake possibly could.

"Now you two go downstairs and behave, or you can both forget about getting any treats tomorrow." Cleo ordered.

The two pets lowered their heads and slowly walked and slithered out of the room.

Cleo let out a huff of annoyance. "Sometimes I really regret finding that de-petrification potion. You know Smokey's the one who always starts things."

"Well, he's still young, relatively," Deuce reasoned. "I mean, he was only five years old when I stoned him. He'll grow out of it."

"I hope so..." Cleo relaxed into Deuce's arms. "At least he's good practice in case we do ever have a kid..."

Deuce chuckled and kissed her forehead.

It was almost midnight. Cleo lay under the sheets staring at the ceiling, unable to sleep. She couldn't stop thinking about the day's events, both good and bad.

Feeling restless, she carefully sat upright. She looked over at Deuce, who was sleeping soundly with a white cap on his head to keep his head snakes warm. Nearby, Smokey slept next to the bed, resting his head on Deuce's lap.

Cleo smiled as she watched her husband sleep, and stroked her fingers gently against his cheek.

She then reached over and picked up her laptop from the bedside table. She opened it, switching it on and opening the blank editorial she had been struggling to write.

As quietly as she could, she began typing.

_I have had to take on many roles in my years; as an editor, a writer, a leader, a wife... but recently I've become something else entirely. An Aunt. And while I've only had this role for a short time, it's proved to be one of the most enlightening roles I've had in a while._
Allow me to explain. A dear friend of mine recently became a mother, and rather foolishly, I offered to look after her daughter for a day.
I say foolishly, because prior to this I had absolutely no experience in looking after a child before. As a result, there were a few tantrums, many messes and... well, let’s just say this issue very nearly didn’t make it to the printer.

But despite all the... distractions, I’m glad that I got to have this experience. While spending time with my friend’s daughter, I got to play games I hadn’t played in years, and actually had some fun. It was also quite endearing to watch this child, still very innocent in the ways of the world, be amazed and fascinated as she followed me around the office and observed many of the articles and photoshoots from this very issue take form.

It reminded me of my own childhood, back in my old home in Egypt. I can recall watching the comings and goings of my father’s palace. It was always so exciting and new, even if eventually I found out there these were just mundane, normal everyday things.

I felt the same thing when I emerged from my tomb after several centuries and found myself in a strange, modern world, with technologies and advancements I had never imagined in my wildest dreams.

That feeling of excitement, of innocence and wonder, is something we all seem to feel less and less as we get older and become accustomed to the world and our roles in it, such as career or family. But as this little ghoul showed me, sometimes it’s a good thing to stop being so serious and experience a bit of that wonder, whether it be through spending time with a loved one, or just indulging in a pastime you love.

Summer is often considered a quiet, boring month for us in the fashion world, as we wait for the new autumn lines to dazzle us all over again. But why wait? Depending on how long you intend to live it, life is always exciting, interesting and different, no matter what the season is. We should all embrace the innocence of childhood once in a while, and enjoy life, or unlife, as much as we can.

As you read this issue, I hope that you can be inspired by the articles within to find something to get excited about.

Yours Sincerely, Cleo de Nile, Editor and Chief.

Cleo stared at her editorial, feeling proud of herself... and grateful.
"Thank you Tesla." She whispered as she put the laptop away. She lay down and snuggled against Deuce, finally drifting into a deep sleep.

END OF CHAPTER 6

Author Notes

1: Thanks to everyone for being so patient for this chapter. Other responsibilities, plus getting distracted by shiny things and struggling to write about the fashion world, something I know little about, mean this chapter took longer than expected. But I intend to stick with this story for the long run. The next chapter may take a while though, as I would like to attempt some MH fics set in the current doll continuity. Look out for those in the future.

2: Some more characters from other monster-based series who appear in the story.

Reginald Moonshroud, J.P Ghastly, Natasha Neckinski: Gravedale High

Himeno Kimihara: Centaur’s Worries

Tanis: Scooby Doo and the Ghoul School
Screech Valley High: Sweet Valley High
Outline of Monster Life

Chapter Summary

An outline of future chapters.

Outline of Monster Life
(Warning: Spoilers)

Chapter 1: The Reunion
Ten years after graduation, the Ghouls reunite at a school reunion, and Frankie makes a decision which will change her entire life.

Chapter 2: The Graduates
What have Monster High's students been doing for the last ten years? Spectra reveals all.

Chapter 3: The Secret
Draculaura and Clawdeen attempt to find out the mysterious project Frankie has been working on.

Chapter 4: The Birthday
Frankie's grand plan to become a mother comes to fruition, but not in the way she expected...

Chapter 5: The First Week
A week after her birth, Frankie's daughter Tesla celebrates her birthday, and meets her first friend.

Chapter 6: The Babysitter
Frankie asks Cleo to look over Tesla for the day? Can our favourite diva handle it?

Chapter 7: The Lovers
Draculaura and Clawd decide to tell Tesla the story about how they fell in love... after they broke up during college.

Chapter 8: The Partners
Clawdeen retells the story about how she opened up her boutique... right next to Catrine's gallery, and how it led to the two becoming lovers.

Chapter 9: The Return
Andy Beast returns to Salem, and attempts to rekindle his friendship with Frankie. But have things changed too much for them?

Chapter 10: The Dual Destinies
Jackson and Holt have decided to ask Clair for her hand in marriage. One problem: They have to convince Clair's parents, who are oblivious to their dual nature.

Chapter 11: The Catch Up
The ghouls and the guys get together to catch up on what everyone has been up to.

Chapter 12: The First Day of School
Tesla begins her first day at Monster Elementary, while Andy starts his first day as a teacher at Monster High.

Chapter 13: The Dinner
Clawdeen invites Catrine to a dinner with her family to celebrate Clawdia's engagement, but tempers fly when they meet her fiance..

Chapter 14: The Doctor
Frankie goes about a busy day at Salem General Hospital, but risks missing out on Tesla's school sports day.

Chapter 15: The Parent
When her daughter falls ill, Toralei is forced to turn to the unlikeliest person for help: Heath Burns. But will Heath bear the responsibility?

Chapter 16: The Date
Frankie and Andy decide to have a nice simple date. But things are never quite so simple.

Chapter 17: The Vacation
Cleo and Deuce head to the country of Devilia to attend a royal wedding. But Cleo's drive to cover the event could drive a wedge between them.

Chapter 18: The Sister
Cleo and Deuce take another journey, this time to discover where Nefera has been for the last ten years.

Chapter 19: The Past
Clawdeen discovers the painful secret behind Catrine's reason to move to Salem.

Chapter 20: The Schoolmate
Frankie helps Tesla to get along with her snobby classmate Mallory, but they both discover Mallory has a few issues with her unusual family...

Chapter 21: The 13 Wishes
Determined to get her mother and Andy together, Tesla gets some help from a familiar genie...

Chapter 22: The Academy
Draculaura and Clawd go to Transylvania to attend the 400-year class reunion at Laura's old vampire school, where past regrets and old grudges reemerge...

Chapter 23: The Wedding
Gil and Lagoona's wedding is finally underway, but a series of unexpected events threaten to ruin the day.

Chapter 24: The Moonlight Ghost Gorebilee
The town of Salem celebrates Halloween in it's own special way.

Chapter 25: The Field Trip
Frankie and Andy take Tesla and her Ghoul Scout friends to a trip to Abbey's home in the mountains, where they soon get lost... and meet a new friend.

Chapter 26: The Storm
Frankie and Andy settle into their new dynamic, Clawdeen makes a big decision, and Draculaura
gets ready to give birth... just as a massive storm hits Salem.

**Chapter 27: The Ties that Bind**

As the storm rages on, Frankie and her friends must work together to save lives...

**Chapter 28: The Future**

TBA

In addition to these chapters, I plan to interject some shorter chapters, mostly focusing on small minor events and newer characters introduced to the MH canon as time goes by.
Chapter Summary

What's happened to some of the newer students to join Monster High since their graduation? Read on to find out.

Monster Life
By Toby Danger

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Chapter 7: The Other Graduates

Spectra frantically typed as she neared the end of her article about the Monster High 2014 Class Reunion. After some intense editing, it was nearly ready to go up on her blog. She couldn't wait to see everyone's comments and reactions.

As she checked her notes one last time, she suddenly noticed another sheet of paper poking out beneath the pages the interviews she had conducted with the former students. She pulled it out and looked at it, frowning as she realized what was on it. Some more interviews with former students, most of whom had only joined in the last couple of years of Spectra's time at Monster High.

"How did I miss this?" She wondered aloud.

Oh well. She would be remiss if she neglected to include these students in her article. Cracking her knuckles, she started typing once again.

Iris Clops was perhaps one of the most multi talented ghouls to ever attend Monster High, not only performing in the Fearleading squad for a short period and winning Scream Queen in her junior year, but also starting the school's first Astronomy Club, which still goes strong today, and winning a Mad Science award for an essay on space. Iris always dreamed of becoming an astronaut and going up to the stars, but while she didn't quite reach that lofty dream, she's found the next best thing by becoming a pilot for Nightmair Airlines.

After she set the controls of the passenger jet to automatic, Iris let out a sigh and leaned back in her chair, gazing out of the cockpit window.

At this altitude, there were no clouds to block her vision, giving her a wonderfully clear view of the night sky. The stars shone brightly, creating a beautiful display against the darkness. And she could even make out a few constellations.

Many monsters considered her crazy to constantly volunteer to fly the redeye flights. But getting to see the stars up close like this made it all worth it.

Noting the distance they had flown so far, she picked up the intercom and spoke softly into it.
"Good evening everyone, this is your captain speaking. I'd like to inform you that we are currently flying over the Carpathian Mountains, and will be arriving in our layover stop in Transylvania in about an hour."

She glanced at the stars again. "While we wait to make our final approach, if you look out to your right, you'll be able to see the star constellation Perseus, often used throughout the ages as a guide for travellers to find their way across the mountains. Thankfully, we have GPS and radar, so it should be a little easier to find our destination. Please relax, and enjoy the rest of the flight."

"Good grief.. You do this every time." A tired voice spoke next to her. Iris frowned at her co-pilot, a vampire named Fletcher who was monitoring the controls. "Can't you give the whole constellation thing a break once in a while?"

Iris crossed her arms indignantly. "Hey, what's wrong with wanting to educate people on the wonders of astrology? I'm giving them something to look at on these boring flights."

"I get that, but it's the middle of the night." Fletcher replied. "Most of those poor souls are probably asleep. Last thing they need is you blathering on about stars."

Unwilling to let her favourite hobby be besmirched, Iris turned in her seat to face him and crossed her arms indignantly. "Well, excuse me for trying to be a friendly, helpful pilot. At least I cheer the passengers up. You always stand like a grump whenever we're greeting boarders."

"Well excuuuse me!" Fletcher scowled. "I'm here to fly planes, not be the welcome wagon."

"That's the problem with all the pilots I see these days." Iris retorted. "Everyone's so focused on flying from A to B that they completely forget about everything else. Sometimes it's about the journey, not the destination..."

"Uhh..." Fletcher suddenly looked paler than usual. "Could we focus on the flying right now?"

"Don't try to change the subject!"

"It's just... that mountain's getting pretty close..."

Iris spun to look out the cockpit window. Her eye widened at the sight of a large mountain peak rapidly getting closer.

"Ahhh!" She grabbed the controls and tilted it hard to the left. The plane banked to the side, missing the mountain by a few feet.

Iris straightened the plane and let out a deep sigh of relief. She looked over at Fletcher, who was staring at her with an annoyed look.

"You were saying something about how it's bad to only focus on flying?"

Iris' face flushed an angry red as she heard the voices of startled passengers behind the door. She picked up the intercom.

"Erm... sorry about that everyone. We hit a slight bit of turbulence. Nothing to worry about."

She sighed and looked out at the stars again, deciding not to reply to Fletcher's comment. Her embarrassment was probably all the response she needed.

_Speaking of Clops, Iris's brother Cy Clops, while not quite as prolific as his sister, became a minor_
celebrity when he, along with other students, helped uncover a dastardly plot by an agent of the anti-equality group ASOME to overthrow the school. Once that settled down, Cy seemed to slip back into obscurity, but made a name for himself in the Photography Club, where many of his superb pictures still grace the walls. He's still taking pictures today as a full time photographer for hire.

Bonita Femur, along with her close friends, was one of the first true Hybrid students to attend Monster High in years, and while they had a few teething problems at first, it didn't take long for them to become some of the most well liked and admired students in their year. Bonita herself became a darling of the school's fashion scene after joining the fashion club, her beautiful wings and talent for making vintage designs look cool again turning many a head. (Though she had a serious problem with eating said designs...) Today she has become a fashion model, showing off the latest clothes in magazines and runways all over the world.

Cy had a spring in his step as he walked down the hallways of Eternal Ghoul, paycheck in hand. His recent gig for the magazine, photographing the new Gorsace Autumn line had helped the magazine be the top seller for that month, and Cleo had been generous enough to give him a bonus on top of his usual fee. After putting up with her rather demanding orders for how she wanted the models posed, he felt he deserved it. If he stopped by the maul now, he could pick up that new high quality lens he'd been wanting to get for a while...

He suddenly heard a noise, like someone quietly sobbing. He turned to the direction of the sound, and found himself before one of the large closets Cleo used to store outfits for fashion shoots.

Cautiously, he nudged open the door and peered inside. He was surprised to see none other than Bonita Femur sitting on a small stool. The skeletal moth hybrid was munching on a red dress, with tears running down her face. Judging by the tattered pieces of cloth around her, it seemed she'd been here for some time. Cy wasn't sure what was more alarming: Seeing the usually cheery model looking so distraught, or the fact that she had munched though an entire season's worth of Cleo's clothes.

"Miss Femur?" He spoke gently. Bonita jumped in her seat as she noticed him.

"Oh, Mr Clops." She looked guiltily around her. "I'm sorry, I know I shouldn't be in here..."

Cy stepped in cautiously. "Are you okay? What happened?"

"What happened?" She sobbed. "Everything's gone wrong, that's what happened!" She shoved some more fabric into her mouth and started chewing.

"Er... maybe you should ease up on those..."

"Oh what does it matter?! I don't care if it ruins my figure. It doesn't matter anymore!" She wailed.

Cy knelt down next to her. "Please... tell me what's wrong. Maybe I can help."

Bonita wiped her eyes and looked at him. "Can you tell me why Devlin doesn't want to see me anymore?"

Ah, that made sense. Everyone knew Bonita had been dating Devlin Warrgh, the famous goblin television actor for a few months now. There wasn't a gossip magazine that didn't feature them on the cover.

"He dumped me... he said he needed some space to concentrate on his career.." She wringed her fists. "Yeah right! I've seen his acting! He must be seeing another monster!"
"Damn... I'm sorry to hear that." Cy consoled, gently reaching over and patting her shoulder. "Though it sounds like he's done you a favour. If he's that petty about being with you, you're better off without him."

"I guess... it's just." Bonita sniffed. "It's so hard to find someone special. I mean, I already scare off guys because of the whole hybrid thing..." She glared at her bony arms for a moment. "...but I've been so busy with shoots lately, I haven't had time for any real companionship, outside of the people I work with. I really thought I had something good with Devlin, something that would last." She sighed. "But I guess it wasn't to be."

Cy gave her a sympathetic smile. "I get what you mean. I've been on my own for a while myself. But you know, being alone isn't totally bad. You get time to work on your hobbies." He indicated his camera.

Bonita finally managed a small smile.

"And... well... if you don't mind my saying..." Cy gulped as he found the courage to continue speaking. "You're a really, er... lovely person to work with. Everyone at the magazine loves it when you show up for a photoshoot. So don't think you're ever alone, okay? You have a lot of monsters who care about you."

"That's very nice of you to say." Bonita smiled warmly as she wiped her eyes. "Thank you... I feel a lot better."

"Ah no problem." Cy helped her to her feet. He glanced around at the ruined clothing. "Maybe we should get out of here before Cleo sees this."

"Yeah... Thank goodness she can afford a few spares..." Bonita watched as Cy gathered up the clothes and shoved them in a corner, biting her lip nervously.

"Um... Mr Clops... I mean, Cy?"

"Yeah?" Cy turned to look at her, which made her even more nervous. She flapped her wings slightly.

"Well... forgive me if I sound a bit forward, but... would... would you like to you have lunch with me?"

Cy blinked. "Lunch? Really?"

"Um... sure. It's the least I can do to repay you for your kindness." Bonita blushed.

Cy rubbed the back of his head as he smiled "Then, I'd love to."

"Great! I know this lovely place down the road behind the laundromat. They serve some nice cotton sandwiches."

"I can wait to see it." Cy said.

He extended his hand out to her, and the two walked out of the closet, side by side.

_Avea Trotter, a fellow Hybrid, was both simultaneously liked and feared for her stubborn attitude and frank demeanour, never letting an insult or complaint toward others pass without either a stern talking to or a mule kick to the pants. Not surprisingly, she was a very determined member of_
Monster High's Debate team. But her true passion lay in running, and her 400m track record is still unbeaten today. These days she works as a manager in Screattle, but has also been training to compete in the National Monster Athletic League.

Neighthan Rot will probably go down in history as the clumsiest student to attend the school, spending a lot of time either on the floor or in the nurse's office, either healing himself or any unfortunate victims of his mishaps with his magic abilities. Despite these upsets though, Neighthan soldiered on with a upbeat attitude and quiet confidence most monsters could only dream of having, and became a well liked member of the sports teams and school committees. Still committed to helping others, he has since become a medical practitioner, using his magic and all natural healing remedies as an doctor and counsellor at Screattle University.

There was no shortage of beautiful, dark forest around the outskirts of Screattle, but for many couples, the high, jagged cliffs which divided the coast from the ocean were considered the best place for a romantic getaway. Being inaccessible via roads, one had to make the long trek through the nearby forest to get there.

Right now a large creature was rushing through the forest, its rainbow mane of hair streaming behind it as it dodged trees and branches. It looked like a unicorn, but instead of a white coat, it's body was grey with streaks of jaundice here and there.

The unicorn finally emerged from the forest, panting for breath as it came to a large rock situated near the cliffs. A bright glow surrounded it's body, and in a few seconds the unicorn transformed into a humanoid figure dressed in a shirt, jacket and slacks.

Neighthan doubled over as he tried to catch his breath. He couldn't remember running so fast in his entire unlife. He'd thought that by challenging Avea to a friendly race though the forest, he would have enough time to get to the other side and set up his surprise before she got here. Then he remembered his ghoulfriend had recently broken the track record for running at her local gym, and could possibly get there before he did. So he'd turned into his more equine form and run as fast as he could. It was a miracle he'd made it through without tripping or running into something.

Thankfully, he'd made it here before Avea with some time to spare. He rushed to a bush and pulled out the large picnic casket he'd hidden there earlier. It was untouched thankfully.

"Son of a... you beat me?" He turned around to see Avea stepping out of the forest, appearing to hardly be out of breath. He quickly stepped in front of the casket to hide it from view.

As she ran a hand through her hair, Neighthan took the opportunity to admire her. Even with her hair tousled, and dressed in a worn t-shirt and lycra leggings around the horse part of her body, she still looked stunning.

"I must be getting out of shape, normally I get ahead of you four times out of five." Avea continued.

"Well... I've been getting more practice with the unicorn form. Plus you had all those trees and stuff to dodge." Neighthan shrugged nonchalantly.

"True.." Avea gazed out at the horizon. "So, why did you ask me to come here, besides the amazing view?"

Neighthan quickly smoothed out his hair before speaking. "Well, we had our first date here about two years ago to this day, so I thought we should celebrate." He stepped aside to reveal the casket.
"Oh wow!" Avea gasped "I didn't even know today was the day of our first date." She looked sheepish. "I kinda lost track..."

"Hey, its okay. People forget dates."

Avea smiled brightly at him. "I'll never forget that date though... it was a really wonderful night."

Neighthan whipped out a large cloth and laid it out on the grass. "Well, I promise this night will be even better than that one. Starting with the finest dinner around." He brought out some pots and laid them on the cloth, opening them to reveal several cooked meals.

Avea sniffed the air. "Mmmm, tomato and oats casserole. Fastest way to my heart."

"And that's not all." Neighthan pulled out a bottle of champagne and two glasses.

He then got up and extended his hand toward her. "May I take you to your seat, Miss?" He took a step toward her...

And almost like clockwork, his foot snagged on the edge of the blanket and he fell over, landing face first onto the ground.

"Oh my.. are you okay?!" Avea trotted forward and knelt down to help him up.

Neighthan rubbed his forehead, grimacing in pain. "Ow.. right on the horn."

Avea looked at the bottle of champagne and came to a conclusion. "Hold on, I'll get some ice." She moved to the casket and started looking through it.

"No, wait!" Neighthan called out, trying to get up..

But it was too late. Among the food items and plates, Avea found a small black box. She held it up, staring at it with confusion for a few seconds before she realized what it was, and gasped.

She slowly turned to look at Neighthan, her eyes wide. "Oh..oh my.. is this..."

Neighthan sighed, shaking his head. "Damn it... I wanted to do this properly, make it something special." He stared down at his feet in embarrassment. "Couldn't even do that right without falling over..."

"Neight.." Avea breathed, looking at him hopefully. "Are.. are you really serious about this?"

"I've never been more serious about anything." Neighthan smiled, stepping closer. "A lot of crazy stuff has happened in my life, but through all of it, you've always been there. You've always helped me, made me laugh, and inspired me to be a better monster. And I've wanted to make you as happy as you've made me."

"You always do." Avea said softly.

"And if you'll let me, I'd love to be there for you for the rest of our lives... even if I do mess up once in a while." Neighthan spoke with conviction. He looked at her hopefully. "So.. what do you say?"

"Hey, hold up." Avea held out the box toward him. "You went to all this effort. We ought to do it properly at least."

"Oh, right." Neighthan took the box, then knelt down on one knee. Even though he had a good
feeling about her answer, his fingers were still trembling as he opened the box, revealing a shimmering gold ring with a ruby crystal embedded it it.

"Avea Trotter... will you marry me?"

He'd hoped that she would say yes. He hadn't expected her to leap toward him and hug him tightly, with the unfortunate side effect of putting the entire weight of her horse half against him, causing them both to fall to the ground.

Avea tried to get up, but ended up straddling Neighthan's body, her legs on either side of him. She looked down at him, the joyous smile on her face becoming a more salacious grin.

"So.. what were you planning to do before you got the ring out?" She leaned down closer to him.

"Well, you know.." Neighthan replied, looking into her eyes. Realizing he was still holding the ring box, he took Avea's hand and slipped the ring onto her finger."Have a nice picnic, read you some poetry, watch the stars..."

"Hmm..." Avea moved closer and kissed him on the lips. "I have a few more ideas you might like..."

With his fiancée pinning him down - and taking her top off - Neighthan was only to happy to agree.

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*Sirena Von Boo may have been one of the flightiest students to ever attend the school, joining a record number of clubs in an attempt to discover which hobby suited her best. In the end, she decided to start her own club devoted to her favourite hobby, antiques. While it didn't last long before being dissolved, more than a few students came away with a new appreciation for antiquing. While Sirena is still the carefree spirit she was in school, she's a little more focused now, and is the proud owner of her own antiques store in Salem.*

*Finnegan Wake hailed from the deep underwater city of Atlantica before transferring to Monster High, but having to spend most of his day on land didn't stop him from being one of the most active and enthusiastic students to roam the halls. Often seen speeding around on his customized wheelchair, his fondness for showing off before his peers was tempered by his SKRM participation and his passionate beliefs in more equality for merpeople living above water. These days he works as a physical trainer, but still finds time to train for the Monster Paraolympics, and spend time with his wife Sirena.*

With his iCoffin blaring 'Life in the Fast Grave' at full volume, Finn pumped his arms to send his wheelchair speeding down the road into Salem's port district. Today had been a pretty rad day. His clients for the day had done plenty of strenuous exercise today, he'd gotten in a few sets on the weights, and because of another client cancelling, he could go home a little early. He was already thinking about what to do with the free time.

He hoped he could convince Sirena to close up the store a little early. Usually at this time of the week, there weren't a lot of customers, but that would usually only push Sirena to work even harder to get people in the door. Sirena could be pretty ditzy most of the time, but when it came to selling antiques, she was a pretty shrewd business-monster.

He reached the shop, Boo-nique Antiques, and wheeled himself inside.

"Hey babe!" He called out as he manoeuvred through the piles of boxes and shelves full of antiques. "I got off a little early, so..."
He paused as he reached the back of the showroom. Sirena was floating behind the counter, wearing a long dress and the old leather jacket she'd taken to wearing recently, claiming it was lucky. It didn't seem lucky at the moment though, for standing at the counter, glaring at her in a threatening manner were two monsters. One was a rather short, squat skeleton in a pin striped suit, with a pencil moustache drawn across his upper lip. The other was a massively muscular Frankenstein-esque construct, with huge arms and shoulders crammed into a tight jacket. A small bowler hat adorned his large head, and he might have looked comical if it wasn't for the large batball bat he held in one hand.

"Oh honey!" Sirena cried out, smiling nervously at him. "Kinda come at a bad time..
"

"And who is these?" The skeleton asked in a very overdone Spanish accent.

"Uh, I'm Finn." He glanced at his wife questioningly. "Who are your friends?"

Sirena frowned. "Well, I'd like to say they're customers, but I doubt they're planning to pay for anything. They think I've got some kind of rare artefact in the store." She glared at the duo. "You know, I'd be a little more helpful if you guys would stop being so threatening..."

"Silence!" The skeleton ordered. He narrowed his eyes at Finn. "So, Meester Wake, is it? Perhaps you can help us, since your wife is being disagreeable. We are looking for a very valuable statue, which your wife recently came into possession of."

"Uh.." Finn looked clueless. "Can't help you there bro. Reenie's the one in charge of all the inventory..."

The skeleton thumped his fist against the counter. "Do not trifle with me Meester Wake! My sources tell me that your wife bought, from auction, one of the few remaining statues of Luis Scaramanga."

"Aw yes, Hexico's first ever president." Sirena spoke knowingly. "After his inauguration, he commissioned a few statues of himself to commemorate the event, which have been passed down through his family for centuries. Unfortunately some were sold by family members when they found themselves in financial straits."

"Yes, very astute of you."

"So, are you a member of the Scaramanga family, looking to get your family heirloom back?" Sirena asked.

"Oh dear me, no." The skeleton chuckled. "But with the statue and a few forged documents, it should be child's play to convince everyone that I am a descendant of Scaramanga..."

He shook his head and glared at her. "I don't have time for this. Either you tell me where the statue is, or my associate here.." He gestured toward the giant construct, who raised his bat in a menacing fashion. "...will be forced to reduce your inventory to little more than broken firewood."

Sirena sighed, seemingly unfazed. "Looking even if you weren't threatening me, I don't have this stupid statue. Mexican history isn't even my field of expertise. I wouldn't even know what it looked like..."

"Is that it?" This came from Finn, who was pointing at a large object on a shelf behind Sirena, partially hidden behind some books. It was a bronze statue of a skeleton warrior brandishing a sword, with several pieces of paper impaled on the sword.
"The skeleton gasped. "Santa Maria..."

"THAT'S the statue of Scaramanga?" Sirena gasped. "I thought that was just a note spike."

The skeleton signalled for his henchman to raise the bat. "Hand me the statue now!"

Sirena crossed her arms. "Nuh uh! Not after the way you've treated me."

"Then I'm afraid my associate here will have to get rough.." The skeleton threatened.

"You do know she's part ghost, right?" Finn spoke. "You can't touch her."

The henchman experimentally prodded Sirena with the end of the bat. It phased right through her, and she giggled from the sensation.

The skeleton blinked at this, then yanked his henchman in the direction of Finn. "I'm pretty sure we can hurt you though. Surrender the statue, or your husband will need a stretcher instead of that wheelchair."

Finn looked at the henchman, worried, then glanced at Sirena. His wife's usually wide eyes were narrowed in a very angry gaze toward the skeleton. She floated upward and picked up the statue. "You want me to give it to you?"

"Yes..." The skeleton extended his hand.

Sirena smirked slightly. "You reeeeeally want me to give it to you?"

"What are you, deaf?!" The skeleton spat back angrily. "Give it to me!"

"Well... if you say so."

And with that, Sirena took the statue in one hand and flung it as hard as she could at the skeleton. It collided with his skull with a heavy crack, knocking him to the floor. The henchman turned to him, alarmed.

It was all the distraction Finn needed. Gripping the hand rests of his chair, he pushed his entire body upward, giving him room to swing his tail up. It struck the henchman at full force, sending him flying forward and tripping over an old footrest. He slammed to the ground next of his boss.

Finn looked them over to confirm they were knocked out, but was interrupted by Sirena, who flew over the prone thugs and hugged him.

"Oh sweetie are you okay?!" She cried, holding him at tightly as her ghostly arms could manage.

Finn smiled and patted her back. "I'm fine babe, really. Now how about we call the cops and get these jackasses out of here?"

"Sure thing." Sirena began to return to the counter, but then noticed something on the floor. She swooped down and picked up the statue of Scaramanga, examining it for damage.

"I'd better put this somewhere safe, especially now I know it's really valuable."

Finn just sighed, amazed that his wife could still be so chill after such an event. "And I used to think antiques were boring..."
Rudy Kipling suffered a rather horrible adolescence, being forced into the employ of a normie carny with a severe disdain of monsters, forced to hide his face under a mask. Thankfully, he eventually turned the tables on the creep, and with some support from the Fear Squad, became a student at Monster High, living with Mrs. Kindergrubber. Finally able to live a life where he was accepted by others, he excelled in Dead English, Art and Phys Dead, especially when it came to wrestling, and found love with Manny Taur's sister Minnie. He asked me to keep his current occupation a secret, though he did mention it's something related to a popular sporting event...

In the small dressing room underneath the stadium, Rudy sat quietly as he wrapped some bandages around his hands. The room was silent save for the quiet hum of the air conditioning. It gave him a chance to compose himself before the big event. He picked up the red and white leather mask resting on the table and admired it.

It was somewhat ironic. For most of his life he'd worn a mask to hide his face out of fear and shame, fear than he would terrify people, shame that people would never look past his looks and see him as a person. Farnum had repeatedly told him that no one would ever accept him, and he'd put up with that fiend's abuse because he was the only person to ever give him the time of day. It was only after that incident on Skull Shores when he began to realize there were people out there who could appreciate him for who he was, inside and out. He ditched the mask and proudly showed his face to the world, and life turned out pretty good after that. He finally got an education, met the ghoul of his dreams, and even had a family.

And now here he was years later, about to put on a mask and hide his face once again. But this time, he wore this mask out of pride, to inspire others and provide a little mystery. And unlike working for Farnum, at least he was getting paid for it this time.

His manager poked his head in the door. "It's time to head to the ring! You ready?"

Rudy got up, pulled the mask on, and adjusted his leotard. "Ready as I'll ever be."

He followed the manager into the hallways, the sound of the crowd getting louder as they approached the main arena. They walked up some stairs leading to the balconies overlooking the arena.

Just before they entered the balcony, Rudy spotted two familiar figures standing by the door. His wife Minnie, and their son Max. While Max took more like his mother, a minotaur, he had inherited his father's ears.

"Good luck honey!" Minnie leaned in to kiss his cheek.

"Kick their butts, Dad!" Max cheered.

Rudy gave them both a thumbs up, before he stepped out onto the balcony. There was a harness attached to a long zipline leading down to the wrestling ring in the center of the arena. The packed crowd were eagerly cheering and booing as they watched a minotaur wrestler battling against two other muscular foes.

"Bah Gawd, I've never seen anything like this!" The commentator Jim Gross dramatically bellowed. "Macho Monster Grundy Savage just jumped into the ring to help his old rival Brick Brogan take on the Brahma Bull! What an turnabout! This could be the greatest upset in World Monster Wrestling history!"

Sure enough, the older and rather more gaudily dressed zombie and gargoyle wrestlers were giving Brahma Bull a good beating, despite the younger minotaur's best efforts to fight back. Grundy
Savage shoved him toward Brick Brogan, who promptly grabbed him and slammed him to the ground.

"Har har! Looks like it's game over, brother!" Brogan planted a foot atop Brahma's chest. "The Championship belt is as good as mine!"

As the referee began counting down, Rudy knew it was time to act. He tied himself to the harness, took a breath, and leaped off the balcony, travelling down the zipline. He let out a mighty yell as he zipped down, alerting everyone in the arena to his presence.

He released the harness and landed in the ring running, charging toward Brogan and knocking him down to the floor with a lariat.

"Bah Gawd!" Jim Gross bellowed again. "It's the Masked Mammoth! He just swung in out of nowhere to turn this battle around!"

The crowd cheered their approval, and Rudy couldn't help but raise his arms in triumph. He almost didn't notice Grundy Savage charging toward him. Just in time, he spun around and grabbed Grundy in a tight hold. He then swung him around before flinging him out of the ring, and right onto the Spanish announcer's table.

Now in the clear, Rudy moved to help Brahma Bull to his feet.

"Whew, thanks for the save, man."

"Hey, it's your first title defence match." Rudy replied. "Only right you fight for it fair and square."

"No arguments there. Didn't think Brogan would be gutless enough to call in a partner."

Brahma's eyes narrowed as he watched Brogan and Grundy stagger back on their feet.

Rudy cracked his knuckles. "Wana show these guys some real wrestling?"

"I'd be honoured." Brahma and Rudy did a quick fist-bump, then with a mighty yell, they charged toward the two older wrestlers, ready to slam them down for good.

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Jane Boolittle travelled from the far reaches of the Amazon jungle to attend Monster High, after spending years isolated from modern civilization. While her first months at school were somewhat awkward and usually spent in the company of the animals which live in the catacombs, she soon learned to open up to others and became quite a social butterfly, even opening a grooming parlour in the catacombs for students to bring their pets in. Still, she couldn't keep away from the lure of the jungle, and returned to her home in the Amazon. While, unable to attend the reunion, she sent me an e-mail detail how she has become a fully qualified biologist, and works full time with her father at his research facility.

The sun was high in the sky over the Amazon jungle. As was his usual habit, Doctor James Boolittle was sitting at a fold-out table under the shade of the large parasol, pouring himself a cup of Earl Grey tea. Taking a sip, he used his other hand to open the Deadger Rice Gorerooughs book he had started last night. It was a lovely, quiet morning and he was not about to waste it.

The quiet was shattered however, by the sound of something stumbling through the jungle foliage nearby. Expecting a possible threat, his hand hovered over a blunderbuss resting against the table.

His worries ceased however, when a young monster clawed his way out of the jungle, nearly
whacking his head on a tree branch. He was about Jane's age, with dark skin, small horns protruding from his forehead, large bat-like ears, and from what he could see of his arms exposed by the shirt he wore, wings made of skin membrane running from his arms to his torso. Handy in case he needed to fly, which he probably should have done to get over the jungle.

"Er, hello? Doctor Boolittle I presume?" The monster called in a British accent.

James got up and walked toward him. "Ah you must be the new intern." He shook his hand. "Jack Springheel, was it?"

"No, that's my dad. I'm Jeff." The monster replied, slightly out of breath. "I'm sorry I'm late, I had trouble figuring out where to go from the map I bought from the airport, and when the taxi driver said the research centre was on the other end of the jungle, I thought it would be quicker to walk. I never realized the jungle was that big..."

James patted his back. "Yes, the size of this place surprises everyone at first. Let's get you some tea, my boy."

He led Jeff to the table and poured him a cup of tea, which he sipped gratefully.

"So Jeff, the essays you sent me were quite impressive. Very thorough. Has Cryptozoology always been an interest for you?"

Jeff gave a small shrug. "Well, when you're the son of London's most famous Cryptid, you can't help but be curious about what else is out there. I've always wanted to know if there are others like me somewhere in the world. I figured studying other unusual creatures might help me find the answer."

"Well, you've certainly come to the right place." James smiled. "Doctor Moreau and myself have been exploring this continent for years, and we're still discovering new species out there. We're finding so many, we needed the extra help just to document them all."

"I'm honoured to be able to help. I have to say, when I heard I would be working alongside THE Doctor Boolittle, I nearly fainted." Jeff grinned.

In the distance, the sound of heavy footsteps could be heard.

James blinked. "Oh... did I not make it clear in our correspondence? You won't be working with me, at least most of the time."

"I'm.. not?" Jeff was confused.

The footsteps got even louder, thumping the ground, and were joined by the sound of something large pushing through the foliage.

"No, you'll be working with my daughter Jane."

"Oh yes. You mentioned a daughter, but I didn't know she worked here."

"She just got her doctorate a few months ago, you know." James smiled proudly. "Been doing some marvellous work charting the habits of spider monkeys living near the cities. In fact, she should be here soon."

The stomping noise was now incredibly loud. Jeff looked at the jungle. "What the deuce is that.."
Suddenly there was a deafening trumpet noise, which jolted Jeff out of his seat. An enormous elephant charged out of the jungle, and ran right toward the two monsters. Jeff shrieked and ran for cover, only stopping when he saw Doctor Boolittle was sitting calmly, drinking his tea.

Just when it looked like he was about to be flattened, someone yelled "WHOA, TIM!", and the giant beast slowed to a stop, just before the table. Jeff looked up with amazement, and realized there was someone sitting on the elephant's back.

"Hello Dad!" A young woman with purple skin and dark reddish hair hopped off the elephant and landed before Boolittle. She wore a sleeveless safari shirt and shorts, a long staff tucked into the backpack she carried. "Ooh, am I late for afternoon tea?"

"Just in time my dear." Boolittle moved to pour her a cup. "How did the wildebeast migration go?"

"Oh, it was fantastic! They were well on their way by the time I got there." Jane took the cup of tea from her father and took a sip. "They were all singing a song to keep themselves in rhythm. It was really catchy.."

She then noticed Jeff, performing a double take as she fully took in his features. "Oh... hello."

"Ah, allow me to introduce you. This is Jeff Springheel, he's the new intern we hired to help you out. Passed first in his class on biology." James said.

Jeff stood still, eyes wide as he looked at her, before realizing he was being addressed. "Oh, yes! Sorry, erm... pleasure to meet you Miss.. I mean, Doctor Boolittle!" He hurriedly took her hand and shook it.

Jane looked at Jeff, surprised. "Oh, it's you! I er...Nice to meet you." She kept shaking his hand, eyes fixed on him. "I um.. Dad told me he was hiring someone from Londoom University, but I never imagined you'd be so... handsome."

Her eyes went wide went she realized what she'd said. "Oh Lordy, did I say that?! I meant... er... smart! Yes!" She blushed hard.

"That's... nice of you to say. I think you're pretty... I mean, smart too!" Jeff stammered, a nervous smile plastered on his face. "Your father told me about some of your work."

"Well, I look forward to going out with you..." Jane flinched. "In the field! Out with you in the field!"

"Yes.. I'd love to take you out..." Jeff blushed, realizing what he'd just said. "To the jungle! To work with you."

Awkward silence passed for several moments before James politely coughed. "I say, are you two going to stop shaking hands before you do yourself an injury?"

The two realized they were still shaking hands, and abruptly stepped back from each other.

"Say Jane, why don't you take Jeff on a little tour of the place, help him get his bearings?"

Jane shook her head. "Yes, yes that's probably wise."

She smiled at Jeff. "Mr Springheel, would you like me to handle your sack for you?"

Jeff's face went pale. "I.. I beg your pardon?" He squeaked.
"I meant... your rucksack." She pointed at his bags.

"Oh! Of course! I.. I can handle it." He picked the bag up.

"Alright then." Jane smiled nervously, "Let me show you to my room... I mean your room!"

The two walked together toward the research center, both blushing madly. James watched them go, shaking his head in amusement, and a bit of sadness.

"She's really grown up... I may have to keep an eye on those two..."

Not many world famous pop stars would temporarily give up a life of fame and fortune to attend an ordinary high school, but Catty Noir was all too happy to do so, in a bid to take a break from the constant pressures of fame and fan attention. It turned out to be a good call, as not only did Catty add a touch of star power to every class she attended, but she was incredibly active in both music and drama class, even going as far as organising concerts and helping compose the school musical, "A Screechcar Named Desire", which received rave reviews from the local paper. Since then, Catty has returned to being a full time musician, and despite changing music taste, still remains a constant fixture in the charts. She recently mailed me to let me know she's planning a new tour, and hopes to stop by Monster High.

The streets of Los Fangeles were crowded, customary of monsters going out to enjoy the nightlife. It was a perfect opportunity for Catty to take a walk through the city unnoticed. Clad in a full length black coat and her hair hidden under a large fedora, she looked fairly innocuous.

She separated from the crowds and walked down a dark alley, heading toward the building at the end. A large neon sign with the letters 'The Cauldron' illuminated the entrance with a bright green glow. Catty entered and stepped down a flight of stairs, hearing the sound of a sultry jazz beat in the distance.

She entered a large, darkened room, where several tables were set up surrounding a stage. Several patrons were seated, all of them focusing on the stage at the back of the room, and the green skinned woman in a tight evening dress singing into a microphone. A group of ghostly spirits performed on a piano, saxophone and drum set, creating a slow, sultry beat which the performer sang to in a throaty voice.

Other dancers may be on the floor

Dear, but my eyes will see only you

Only you have the magic technique

When we sway I grow weak

Catty had to admit, Casta was seriously good when it came to slow songs like this. Her voice had just the perfect seductive tone which drew people in. She supposed that she learned how to do it by performing in clubs like this, in between her concerts with her group the Spells.

Casta made a dramatic turn and pointed toward the audience.

I can hear the sounds of violins

Long before it begins
The song ended, and the audience, Catty included, all gave a rapturous applause. Casta took a bow.

"Thank you, thank you..." She suddenly blinked and looked at her bandmates. "Oh crap.. did I say 'now' or 'owl' at that last part?"

Her question was answered when she heard a hooting noise from one of the tables. She sighed as she saw a confused werewolf staring at a grey owl, perched on the chair where her date had been sitting.

With as much dignity as she could, Casta moved to pick up the owl and address the audience. "We'll be back in twenty minutes everyone. I just need to help this gentlemonster out... please enjoy the bar."

She rushed backstage, and Catty couldn't help but collapse into giggles. It seemed even after all these years, Casta still had trouble pronouncing her words.

As the Spells floated over to the bar, Catty quietly moved to the backstage and walked toward some dressing rooms. On the way she passed a rather startled looking werewolf, who was pulling feathers out of his fur. She reached the door and peeked inside the room. She could see Catty angrily pulling off her dress in preparation of putting on a new one.

"Son of a chimera, how to I keep doing this?" She ranted to herself. "Five years worth of vocal training and I still mess it up."

"But it's a part of your charm." Catty spoke up, entering the room fully. "It's one of the reasons your fans love you."

Casta gasped with surprise. "Oh my Goth! Cattyyyy!" She rushed over and the two embraced each other. "It's been so long!"

"I know. I'm sorry I haven't kept in touch." Catty replied.

Casta shrugged. "Hey, no worries. Part of the job, you know?"

She quickly moved to offer Catty a seat. "So, how's unlife?"

Catty sighed as she sat down. "Busy busy busy. Between my concerts and all the tv shows I've been doing lately, it gets so much harder to find time for myself. I kinda want to kick myself for wanting to star in movies in the first place."

"I know what you mean. Still, it's worth it for the experience." Casta smiled. "There's nothing quite like being immortalised on film."

"Yeah, I guess. I get so stressed out though, and it kinda filters down into my music."

"That would account for that whole rebellious look you went through a couple of years ago." Casta smirked.

"Oh lord.." Catty put a palm to her head, recalling the 'raunchy wild child' look she had adopted in her music after her 18th birthday. "I still can't believe I did that... I looked like a complete idiot."

"Hey, at least you grew out of it before you completely turned everyone off, unlike Miley Slimeus."
That ghoul will do anything to get in the headlines."

"Speaking of headlines.." Catty straightened up and looked at Casta with a serious look. "I need to ask you for some help."

"Let me guess, you want me to open your next concert? I need to talk to my agent..."

"It's not that." Catty interrupted. "It's something a little more personal."

Casta noticed the intense look on her face. "Uh, sure? What do you need?"

Catty took a few seconds before speaking. "You know all about magic, right? Is there some kind of magic that can change how I look?"

Casta raised an eyebrow. "Well, sure. But why do you need to change how you look? You look fabulous. You've got eight lives left before you have to start worrying about your fur going grey."

"I know, but... I really do need it. You see..."

Catty took a nervous pause before she moved closer and whispered into Casta's ear. The witch's eyes went wide, and she stared at Catty with a dropped jaw.

"No way! Are you serious?! You're really.."

"Yes." Catty let out a small sigh of relief, glad to get this secret off her chest. "And I'd really appreciate it if you kept this under your hat. I don't want the press knowing about this and causing a frenzy."

"Oh, of course." Casta nodded, still incredulous. "But... wow, I can't believe it."

"I can barely believe it's happening myself..." Catty spoke, tears of joy in her eyes. "But I don't think I've ever felt so happy..."

Casta held her in a warm hug. "Aw honey, you deserve it. And don't worry, I'll make sure no one knows about this until you're ready. I'll create a glamour, and know one will have a clue."

"Oh, thank you so much!"

They held each other for a while before Casta grinned at her. "So, since you're here, fancy singing a duet with the Spirits and me?"

Catty thought about it. "Why not? Who knows when I'll get another chance."

"Alright then!" Casta snapped her fingers, and a microphone appeared in her hands "You'd better be ready to keep up with me."

Catty smirked and took the microphone. "Oh I am."

The two strode off together toward the stage.

END OF CHAPTER 7

Author Notes: Hey, I'm back! I really want to apologize for not adding something to the story for so long. A busy life has kept me from working on it as much as I should. While I'm still working on the next main chapter featuring Draculaura and Clawd, I thought I should add a little something
about some of the newer characters to join Monster High, such as the Hybrids.

I'm really grateful to everyone who continues to enjoy and support the story, and I hope to not keep you waiting so long for more content in the future.
"Mommy... what are we doing here?" Tesla asked as she and Frankie stepped out of the car.

Frankie frowned as she looked at the large abandoned church they had just come to. The old building was situated out near the forest, some distance from Salem, and clearly it had been left to rot for some time. It's stone walls were covered with moss and vines, and the roof was partially collapsed. In all, it looked rather spooky, not helped by the fact that it was night time, with only the moon providing any illumination.

Frankie took her daughter's hand. "I'm not entirely sure, sweetie. But my friend Spectra must have a good reason to call us here."

She thought back to an hour ago, when she had received a text from Spectra with directions to this church, and an urgent request to come here right away. She hadn't explained why, just insisted that it was important that Frankie came. And that she dress nicely.

That was odd in itself, but then some of her friends had contacted her, saying they had received similar texts.

Frankie turned back to see her friends and their significant others exciting their own cars. Draculaura, who was being helped out by Clawd, Clawdeen and Catrine, Lagoona and Gil, Ghoulia and Moe, Twyla and Billy, Operetta and Johnny, and Cleo and Deuce. Surprisingly, it seemed Cleo's assistant Tanis had decided to join them, stepping out of Cleo's gold-trimmed Howls-Royce.

"Oof.." Laura huffed as she waddled forward, a hand on her back. "I hope this is really important. Vampire strength or not, I should not be walking around."

Clawdeen nodded in agreement. "Yeah, sure is a weird place to hold a party, if that's what this is." She glanced down at her purple dress. "Sure hope we didn't get all dressed up for nothing."

Cleo sneered at the sight of the church. "Ugh, what a ghastly place to meet up. I certainly hope Spectra doesn't expect us to actually go in there."

"It's doesn't look that bad, ma'am." Tanis spoke up. "It just needs a little fixing up.."

Frankie looked at the younger mummy. "Actually Tanis... why are you here? I mean, it's nice to
see you again, but I didn't know you knew Spectra."

"Actually, I was called here by Phantasma. You know, Spectra's ghoulfriend? She and I used to go
to school together. I got a text from her, the same as you did."

"So I guess the two of them are in this together." Laura spoke, pulling her silk shawl tighter around
her shoulders. I hope they show up soon, it's getting cold out here."

Suddenly, there was a loud bang in the distance, causing everyone to jump in fright. The noise was
then replaced by the sound of a motor vehicle approaching. A rather old, noisy motor vehicle by
the sound of things.

Eventually they saw an old panel van drive up the road. Despite the engine sounding like it was on
its last legs, the van itself looked well maintained, brightly coloured in green and blue. As it pulled
up, they saw the words 'Mystery Machine' painted on the side.

The van's door opened, and a tall, lanky man with brown hair stepped out. He wore a smart suit,
but had neglected to shave the stubble around his chin. He was followed by a large, dopey looking
Great Dane.

"Who is that?" Twyla asked. She looked to the others. "Anyone know him?".

Her friends all shook her heads. But Tanis gasped in surprise. "Oh my ghoul! Mr Rogers!"

She rushed over and hugged the man warmly.

"Hey Tanis!" The man looked her over. "Like, wow! I can't believe how tall you've gotten. You
were up to my knee the last time I saw you."

Tanis playfully swatted his arm. "I wasn't that short... but what are you doing here Mr Rogers?"
She glanced at the old church while she patted the dog's head. "Are you and your friends
investigating this place? Is some normie running a scam here?"

"Not that I know of." The man shrugged. "Like, what with me and Scoob running our restaurant
and Fred, Daphne and Velma looking after their kids, we haven't had time to look into a mystery
for ages."

"So why are you here?"

The man grinned and opened the back door of the van. "I was asked to bring a few old friends
here."

Tanis let out a surprised squeak as three young female monsters exited the van. A voluptuous
vampire with purple hair and lilac skin, a tall, thin Frankenstein-style construct with black and
white streaked hair piled into a large updo, and a petite werewolf with frizzy orange hair.

The three of them squealed and rushed toward Tanis, all hugging her at once.

"I can't believe you're all here!" She exclaimed."

Of course we are." The vampire smiled. "We could hardly refuse after Phanty contacted us."

"Getting the old gang together? No way we were gonna pass that up." The werewolf smirked.

"Tanis." Cleo spoke in an authoritative voice as she stepped forward. "Care to introduce us to your
friends here?"
"Oh, right." Tanis composed herself and indicated the tall man and his dog. "This is Mr Rogers and his pal Scooby. He was my gym teacher back from my old school, Grimwood Academy."

"Like, call me Shaggy. Everyone does." The man waved to them.

"Your gym teacher was a normie?" Frankie asked.

"Hey, I know he doesn't look much, but he can run as fast as any monster. He kinda has to, he works as a paranormal investigator on the side."

"Paranormal investigator? Seriously?" Billy stared at the man incredulously.

"Actually, I have heard about this group of normies who chased after people who pretend to be monsters to pull off property scams.." Twyla spoke up. "Mystery Inc, or something like that..

"...and these guys are my old classmates." Tanis introduced her friends. "Sibella, Elsa and Winnie."

The three ghouls eyes were wide with surprise and recognition as they fully took in the assemble ghouls before them.

"Draculaura..." Sibella breathed.

"Is that... Cousin Deenie?" Winnie blinked.

"Omigod, omigod! Is that Frankie Stein?!" Elsa started hyperventilating.

She rushed forward and took Frankie's hand, shaking it vigorously. "I am such a huge fan of yours! It's an honour to meet you in person!"

"Um.. thank you." Frankie replied. "I've never had a fan before... how do you know me, exactly?"

"I've read all the news articles about you, of course. That time you helped save Boo York from the comet, when you stopped Monster High from being destroyed by Van Hellscream... you're a legend!" Elsa exclaimed. "I've felt so inspired by you! I used to think that because I'm stitched together I couldn't do much, but you've proved that anything's possible. Now I'm studying to become a Emergency Monster Technician, and it's all thanks to you!" She hugged Frankie tightly, causing Frankie to cast an embarrassed look of help to her friends.

Clawdeen had her own problems however, in the form of an overjoyed Winnie.

"Don't you remember me?! I'm your cousin Winnie!" The smaller werewolf hopped up and down. "I'm your Uncle Hairrison's sister's kid. We met once at your older brother's wedding."

Clawdeen was drawing a blank. "Uh... which brother?"

"The older one, Howlard! Do you remember? We snuck some champagne and did this awesome dance under the full moon.

Clawdeen suddenly remembered attending her brother's wedding when she was twelve years old. and getting drunk on champagne when no one was looking. And dancing in the fountain along with a frizzy haired werewolf who had encouraged her to take the drinks in the first place.

"Oh.." She cringed. "You're THAT Cousin Winnie."

Meanwhile Laura and Sibella were glaring coldly at each other.
"Laura." Sibella greeted simply.

"Sibella." Laura replied in kind.

"So... I see you're pregnant. Congratulations."

"Thank you."

"So... are you still writing novels?"

"Are you still pretending to be me?" Laura said with an edge in her voice.

Sibella grimaced. "Oh for the love of Akasha, are you still hung up on that?! That was 500 years ago!"

"Your dad stole my dad's identity and ruined his reputation all over Transylvania! I'm supposed to just forget that?!" Laura yelled back.

"I'm sorry, alright? We thought you were both dead, we didn't know you were just entombed all that time."

Laura put her hands on her hips. "Didn't stop you telling everyone you were the daughter of Dracula, did it?"

Sibella looked away, ashamed. "I just liked the attention..." She mumbled.

"This is all very charming." Cleo raised her voice. "But where in Duat is Spectra?"

"We're heerrrrrrrrrrre!" Two voices wailed in unison. Spectra and Phantasma suddenly appeared. Spectra was dressed in a simple white dress, while Phantasma wore a similar style purple one.

"Well, it's about time." Cleo frowned.

"Hey Phanty, lookin' clawsome!" Winnie cheered at her old friend. "But why the howl did you call us here?"

Phantasma chuckled. "Sorry about all the subterfuge. But we wanted to make sure you were all here together."

"So, why are we here?"

"Well..." Spectra held Phantasma's hand and smiled. "Phanty and I have been thinking about our unlives together, and we've come to a decision..."

"We're getting married!" The two declared in unison, Spectra holding up her hand to reveal an engagement ring.

The assembled friends gasped. They all moved closer to give the ghostly couple congratulations and hugs. (As best as one could hug a ghost, at least.

"Aw, congratulations!"

"Like, way to go Phanty!"

"I'm so happy for you guys."
"So have you two set a date already?" Frankie asked.

Spectra smirked. "Oh yes. We were thinking... right now."

Frankie was taken aback. "Wait... we're here for the wedding now?!"

"Gotcha! Never saw that coming, did you?" Phanty laughed.

Spectra spoke. "Actually, we didn't want to have a big event. We are waaaaay too busy with our work to worry about planning a wedding. So we're gonna have a small ceremony with just our parents and closest friends."

"Well that's great but..." Cleo looked at the dilapidated church again. "You're not getting married in there, are you? Surely there's somewhere less..." She grimaced. "...rustic?"

"Oh don't worry, this is just the meeting spot." Spectra replied. "We're waiting here for the Captain to bring the boat and our parents here."

"Captain? Ship?" Cleo was baffled, especially since there was no river, or any kind of water source, for a boat to arrive.

Suddenly, there was a massive ripping sound, like a knife cutting through fabric but at a deafening volume. Everyone looked up to see the very sky itself split open, and a huge portal surrounded by wispy smoke appear.

Just a moment later, the prow of a huge wooden ship burst out of the portal. As it fully emerged, it began to float down toward them. Its sails and the skull and crossbones flag atop its mast flapped dramatically in the breeze.

Simultaneously, Cleo and Scooby jumped into Deuce and Shaggy's arms.

"Zoinks! A g-g-g-ghost ship!"

The others were only mildly surprised, especially once they noticed the name *Salty Specter* written on the side of the hull.

The ship floated down just above the ground in front of them, and the sound of laughter was heard. A ghost with green glowing skin, long sea-green hair and a wooden leg flew out of the ship and circled around the group, cackling triumphantly as her long coat flapped behind her. She swooped down to hover before them, putting one hand on her curvaceous hips and using the other to pull out a wooden sword from her coat. Frankie felt Tesla hide behind her legs.

"Har har, ye landlubbers!" She bellowed as if on a stage. She looked at the terrified Cleo and Shaggy. "Ye look nervous. Well, ye should be! Ye be standing in the presence of the most daring, most fearsome, and if I may say so, most gorgeous pirate to ever haunt the Dead Seas... Vandala Doub..."

She was cut off by the loud sound of a phone ringtone emanating from her pocket. A ringtone which sounded remarkably like 'You Are A Pirate'.

Vandala sighed and pulled out the phone. "Hold on, I gotta take this." She turned away, annoyed.

"What the bloomin' hell is it? I'm at work right now... you want me to pick up dinner.. yeah, okay."

She suddenly sounded agitated. "No, I'm not getting bloody noodles again. We've had noodles the
last two nights. I'm getting boo-bique ribs, some proper pirate food, alright? And tell Kitana and Lance they'd better be done with their homework when I get back, or it's Davy Bone's Locker for the both of 'em! Alright?" Her tone lightened. "Great, see you soon. Love you!"

She made a little kissy noise before hanging up and turning back to the group, an embarrassed look on her face. "Sorry bout that. Little advice, never marry a ghost ninja, no matter how handsome he is. Now, where was I..." She raised the sword again. "I'm the fearsome Vandala Doubloons..."

Clawdeen waved. "Hey Vandala. Nice to see you again. How are the kids?" The other ghouls (save for Cleo) were equally nonchalant.

"Dammit!" Vandala stamped her foot. "Could you be a little intimidated here?"

A light voice giggled, and a short, plump ghost with shimmering blue and pink hair floated down next to her. She wore a black cloak around her shoulders, which contrasted with the silvery dress she wore. Also very noticeable was the large scythe strapped to a harness on her back.

She patted Vandala's shoulder. "I think the moment's passed." She faced the others, her face full of excitement. "Oh fab! I'm so glad you ghouls all came!"

"Glad to see you too River." Twyla smiled, pointing at the scythe River carried. "I guess you finally passed your Reaper exam, huh?"

"Darn right I did!" River pulled out the scythe and twirled it around, careful to keep the edge away from everyone. "And my dad got me an awesome gig providing trips to and from Boo Orleans! Working in the city where every day's a party, how cool is that?!" She pumped her fists excitedly. "Now if I could just get my yacht license back, it would be perfect."

"Without a license, She's only allowed to rent a yacht from the Reaper Association, and only for work purposes, so I had to give her a lift here." Vandala remarked. "After what she did to the last yacht she got to drive, I'm not surprised."

River glared at her. "Hey, that yacht was awesome once I modified it with confetti cannons and a turbocharger! It's not my fault the Reaper Association doesn't appreciate my unique style." She pouted. "Man, it'll take me ages before I can buy my own boat..."

"So you're here for the wedding?" Draculaura asked.

"Damn right. I'm the one marrying them." Vandala grinned at Spectra and Phantasma. "As a ship captain, I'm fully ordained to marry anyone I want. And can you think of a better venue to get hitched than the Salty Spectre?"

River raised an eyebrow. "Didn't you have to fill in a form to be allowed to marry someone?"

"Quiet you."

"Hey Spectra! Where are you ghoul?!" A youthful male voice cried out from within the ship. A familiar green skinned ghost, clad in a suit jacket which clashed with the brightly coloured shorts he wore, floated through the hull and approached Spectra. He flashed a grin at her. "Lookin' good.. I'm tempted to break out the paints and do a portrait of ya right here and now."

"Still as charming as ever I see." Spectra chuckled.

Phantasma looked at her oddly. "You invited your ex-boyfriend to our wedding?"
"Yeah, that's kind of awkward..." Clawdeen raise an eyebrow.

Porter raised his hands. "Hey, chill out. I'm not here to steal Spectra away or anything. I know you two are tight, obviously. And besides, me and Spectra haven't been a thing for years."

"True, not since we went our separate ways." Spectra added, looking at Porter curiously. "So are you still living in Boo York? Did you break into the art scene like you planned."

"Ahh... not really." Porter sighed. "Not for lack of trying, but when you've got guys like Cranksy to compete with, it's hard to get noticed, no matter how many walls you spray. After the cash ran out I went back home and..." He shivered. "...Revenant gave me a job as Haunted High's art teacher."

The solid ghouls looked surprised, and gave Porter a sympathetic look. They all knew how much he'd suffered under Principal Revenant's iron regime before their adventure at Haunted High.

River just rolled her eyes. "Oh come on Porter, it's not that bad. Revenant's really nice now that she's actually trying to redeem herself."

"Yeah, but you don't have to work under her." Porter groaned. "She's always looking over my shoulder to make sure I'm sticking to the curriculum. And ever since that Spectre Prep school opened nearby, she's been really competitive about our test scores being better than theirs."

"At least you get to teach what you love." River smiled.

"Yeah, that's true." Porter shrugged, a proud smile crossing his face. "And hey, coming back home did help me create my greatest masterpiece."

"Your greatest masterpiece?" Laura questioned.

"You mean, our greatest masterpiece." A soft, airy voice spoke up. Laura turned to see a familiar face - or rather, a familiar projection of eyes and a nose over a blank face - floating down from the ship.

"Kiyomi!" Laura gasped, rushing forward to greet her old friend whom she hadn't seen in a long time. "Oh I haven't seen you since your wedding..."

She gasped again when she realized Kiyomi was carrying a small form in the crook of her arm, wrapped in a blanket.

"Omigod! You have a baby!"

Kiyomi floated over to Porter, smiling proudly as he wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "Yeah, this is little Lala. I hope you don't mind, but considering you helped me and Porter become a couple in the first place, we felt it was just right to name her after you."

"I'm honoured..." Laura took a closer look at the baby ghost. "Oh, she's so cute! She has your..."

She paused when she realized that the baby, like her mother, was lacking a face. "...um... ears."

Porter shrugged. "Yeah, we've been getting that a lot. But don't worry, I'm gonna teach her how to project a face until she's as pretty as her mom."

"Aww..." Kiyomi gave him a small kiss on the cheek.

"Uhh, hey... Captain?" A nervous voice spoke up. It belonged to Shaggy, who was staring at the Salty Spectre. "Not to like, interrupt everyone's happy reunion, but how about we get these two
hitched already? He cast a proud smile at Phantasma and Spectra. "They've been waiting long enough. Plus I'm starving."

Phantasma laughed. "You never change, huh Mr Rogers?"

"Har har, well said!" Vandala snapped her fingers and a long gangplank extended from the ship onto the ground. "All aboard everyone!"

"This is so awesome!" Tesla cried as she looked over the side of the Salty Spectre. The ship was currently floating high in the sky, and she could see the distant lights of Salem and New Salem, and the vast forest that surrounded them below.

Frankie smiled and nodded in agreement. She had to admit, holding a wedding on a ghost ship was a really good idea. This high up, with few clouds in the sky, they had a perfect view of the night stars, with a full moon illuminating the ship.

"Come on sweetie, it's time for the ceremony." She took Tesla's hand and led her to the rear of the ship, where the former students of Monster High were gathered on one side, and Shaggy, Scooby and the Haunted High and Grimwood Academy students on the other. In the center stood Spectra and Phantasma, side by side and flanked by their parents. Vandala floated before them, having removed her hat to look as dignified as possible. She looked at a small book in her hand.

"Fearly beloved.." She spoke in a dramatic tone. "We are gathered here today to bear witness to the unholy union of Spectra Vondergeist and Phantasma Goria. Um..." She flipped through the pages. "Er... there's some other stuff I'm supposed to say here, but frankly it all sounds boring as hell, so..."

She flung the book over her shoulder. "Let's get straight to the good stuff! Spectra, Phantasma, say your vows!"

Spectra and Phantasma look surprised for a moment, before deciding to just roll with it.

"Okay then... Phanty.." Spectra looked into Phantasma's eyes. "I'm normally pretty good at writing, but I don't think I could possibly write down how much you mean to me, at least not without taking up a dozen notebooks. But I would definitely write down that you're the best thing that's ever happened to me. Ever since we met at college, you've given me strength when I needed it, made me smile when I'm sad... I've never felt quite so alive, so to speak, than since I met. And I can't wait to spend the rest of eternity with you, and make you as happy as you've made me."

Phantasma blinked away tears from her eyes. "Oh man... I'm usually so bad at giving speeches... I'm just gonna say that I'm so , sooo grateful that you're in my unlife. You've taught me so much, you've made me a better phantom, and I'm so excited to see what the future brings with you by my side... I love you so much."

Vandala sniffed and wiped a tear from her eye. "Aww, now that's some true romance right there."

She addressed the audience. "Now then, does anyone object to this union? Speak up now or forever hold your peace." Vandala pulled out her sword from her coat. "And as a bonus, I won't cut ye to ribbons."

No one said a word.

"Well, if that's the case..." She put the sword away and threw her arms wide. "By the power invested in me, I pronounce you wife and wife! Now kiss already!"
The two ghosts took each other in their arms and shared a deep kiss. The assembled guests cheered and applauded, and River somehow pulled out a large confetti bazooka from her cloak and fired it into the air, showering the wedded couple with coloured paper.

Kiyomi was the first to meet them, giving her old friend a tight hug. "Congratulations you two. I'm so happy for you."

"Thank you..." Spectra was in joyous tears. "I don't think I've ever been so happy."

Porter joined them, smirking. "Hey, don't say that. You two still have the honeymoon to enjoy, right?"

Spectra and Phantasma blushed, and Kiyomi's face turned pink as she glared at her husband with embarrassment. "Porter!"

"Congratulations guys!" Frankie approached them, smiling. "So, what happens next?"

"Well, we have a lovely honeymoon vacation in Hy Brasil to look forward to." Spectra replied. "But I guess we should throw a party to celebrate before we leave."

"We didn't have time to plan anything though." Phanstasma shrugged. "Every restaurant will probably be closed by now."

"I think I can help with that." River popped up behind them. "I know a perfect place that is all about hosting the best parties."

Cleo looked around the room with disbelief, before settling her gaze on River. "Seriously? This is your idea of a reception?"

River grinned widely. "I know, isn't it just the best?"

"It's a kid's restaurant!"

"It's... different, I'll give you that." Clawdeen commented.

They were seated inside a large, brightly coloured dining room, with several long tables taking up most of the floor. One side of the room was filled with arcade machines, and a large stage took up the other. Streamers and ribbons had been hastily hung on the walls, but overall the room looked quite festive, if not exactly geared toward adults.

"Okay, I know it mostly caters to kids." River explained. "But they do some great events for monsters of all ages. And look around, everyone's having fun."

Cleo did look around. Frankie was playing on a Dead-tona USA driving game with Tesla sat on her lap, while Clawd, Billy and Winnie were challenging each other on a House of the Living machine. Kiyomi, with little Lala in her arms, was watching Porter with amusement as he tried to get a plush toy out of a claw machine. Most of the party were sat enjoying some freshly served pizza, with Spectra and Phantasma cutely feeding each other pieces of ectoplasmic pizza, while Shaggy and his dog were chowing down on massive piles of calzones. The rest were on the dance floor, jiving away as a dance tune played over the speakers.

A mechanical whirring sound alerted them to a figure walking toward their table. It was a large animatronic robot, dressed in a bear costume.
It was one of the first things they had noticed when they entered the restaurant. Apart from a couple of servers, most of the staff tending to the guests seemed to be fur-suited robots.

The robot bear tipped his small top hat to the group.

"Hey hey, everybody!" It spoke in a deep, jovial voice. "Are you all having a good time?"

"Uhh... yeah, sure." Clawdeen answered warily, a little unnerved by the bear's robotic stare.

"We're having a great time." River smiled. "Thanks for setting this up for us on short notice, Freddy."

"Hey, anything for you River. Always wanted to see if we could throw a wedding reception here.."

The bear nodded.

"Excuse me... Freddy, was it?" Cleo spoke up.

"Uh, yes ma'am."

Cleo raised her glass of sparkling water, a look of annoyance on her face. "I specifically asked for my water to be chilled, but this is distinctly room temperature! And this pizza..." She prodded the slice of pizza on her plate. "It's got mushrooms in it, which I asked to be excluded."

"Oh, I'm sorry ma'am. I guess the orders got mixed up."

"What kind of excuse is that?! Do you know who me and my husband are?" Cleo spoke indignantly.

Deuce sighed and put his head in his hands. "Babe, seriously, it's not a big deal."

"Just because you're some kiddie restaurant is no excuse for skimping out on the service. I demand to see your manager."

The robotic bear looked awkward. "Um... ma'am? I AM the manager."

Cleo's jaw dropped. "Wha.. but.. but you're just the mascot that entertains the kids! How can you be running this place?"

River floated up over the table. "Actually, he's the spirit of a former patron of this restaurant, who's possessing the mascot. The same as all the other mascots." She indicated the other animatronics. "There was a murder here like, 30 years ago and their souls were trapped here..."

She paused when she noticed the horrified looks of the others. "Um... so, long story short, my first job as a Reaper was to come here and take their souls to the Ghost World. But they were so attached to this place and didn't want to leave..."

"As much as we hated being stuck there, it was still our home, and it was sad to see to go downhill over the years." Freddy added. "Then River suggested we revamp the place, but cater towards monsters instead. Made sense, since regular folks wouldn't touch this place with a ten foot pole..."

"So I convinced my dad to invest some money, I gave them some ideas on how to host awesome parties how to make better pizza and stuff..."

"And we've been a huge success ever since." Freddy finished happily. "It's certainly a lot more fun than chasing the security guard..."
Suddenly, there was a loud record scratch. Everyone turned to the stage to see a rather worn looking fox robot, wearing an eyepatch and a metal hook on its right hand. It was using said hook to scratch a vinyl disc on a DJ desk.

"Yaar, me hearties! It be DJ Foxy in the house. Get ready to shiver your timbers on the dancefloor, as I'm bringing down some banging tunes!" The fox cried out.

Many of the group cheered, especially Vandala. "I love you DJ Foxy!"

"Yarr, but first, I hear we have two newlyweds with us today" He indicated Spectra and Phantasma. "So I say they take the lead and have the first dance."

He then pointed at Freddy. "Freddy, ye old scallywag! Get yer fat arse up here and sing us a song, yeah?"

Freddy looked as bashful as a animated bear suit could look. "Aw gee, it's been a while..."

"Ah go on Freddy!" River cheered. Some of the others joined in.

"Well, if you insist." Freddy stepped onto the stage and picked up a mic. "Will the newlyweds step forward for their first dance."

Spectra took Phantasma's hand and led her onto the dance floor, to the hoots and cheers of their friends. They stood in the center, staring adoringly into each other's eyes as they waited for the music to start.

Freddy began singing in a deep voice as a familiar bass tune played.

"I've heard people say that
Too much of anything is not good for you, baby
Oh no.. But I don't know about that
There's many times that we've loved
We've shared love and made love
It doesn't seem to me like it's enough..."

Spectra and Phantasma began waltzing together, floating up toward the ceiling as they continued to focus only on each other. Moments later, Clawd led a waddling Draculaura onto the floor to slowly dance with her, and some of the other couples followed suit.

Tanis joined Cleo, Deuce, Clawdeen and Catrine at their table.

"Well, it wasn't exactly your regular wedding, but it all turned out beautifully."

Cleo nodded. "Oh yes... I won't be forgetting this night any time soon." She cast a disparaging gaze at her pizza. "Though I won't be recommending this place in Eternal Ghoul's next bridal special, that's for sure."

"There are such a lovely couple..." Tanis sighed happily as she watched the newlyweds dancing in the air. "I hope I'm lucky enough to have something like that one day."

"Oui... Normally I think marriage isn't all that necessary..." Catrine commented. "But watching
those two, I admit, it does have appeal."

Deuce smirked. "Well you know, Vandala's right there." He pointed at Vandala, who was dancing atop a table with Sibella and River. "And we've got the ship parked outside. She could pick up Tanis' boyfriend and you guys could get married tonight."

Clawdeen, Catrine and Tanis all suddenly had surprised blushes on their faces.

"Well.. um... maybe it's a little soon... we haven't really talked about that." Tanis mumbled.

"Ah... Not that I maybe.. wouldn't want to... one day.." Catrine's blush grew deeper as she felt Clawdeen's bemused stare on her.

Cleo chuckled and patted Tanis' shoulder. "As fun as it would be to see you ghous get hitched on a pirate ship, I think I’d rather wait until you do it the way you want to, when you want to. And before you ask, yes, I would be honoured to be a bridesmaid."

"Oh.. um.. thank you ma'am." Tanis replied, touched.

Clawdeen squeezed Catrine's hand. "Hey, lets worry about our weddings later. Tonight's all about them." She looked up at Spectra and Phantasma, who rested her head on Spectra's shoulder, a content smile on her face.

"I can't get enough of your love babe

Girl, I don't know, I don't know why

Can't get enough of your love babe.."

As Freddy continued crooning, Cleo raised her glass in a toast to the ghostly couple. "To love... in this unlife, and the next."

Author Notes: It's been a while since I've updated, I know.

While I'm still working on the next main chapter, I felt inspired to write a short chapter after watching Haunted. I loved the characters from that movie, and wanted to do a little piece on what they're doing in this future timeline. I may do other short side chapters like this in the future, especially once Boo York Boo York is released...

And yes, those were characters from Scooby Doo and the Ghoul School, and Five Nights At Freddy's making guest appearances here.

Thank you once again for sticking around with this story. Hopefully it won't be too long before I have a new chapter up.

End Notes

Author notes
1: Apologies to any fans of certain pairings, but not all pairings as presented in the webisodes/movies will be present in this story. Realistically, not every couple who met in high school would still be together several years down the line.

2: There are a few mentions of characters from other monster based cartoons/movies in this chapter and future chapters. Can you spot them.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!