

TRUST



Cover drawn by Raza-rays@tumblr.com

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Edited by:

Vander | MangoSass | Curry | ArgentDandelion

Thank you guys for fixing my broken grammer!

Undertale © Toby Fox
I am just playing in the sandbox.



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For small creatures such as we the vastness is bearable only through love.
- Carl Sagan



Chapter One

Snowdin was a town of many different monsters living under perpetual snow. Here it was cozy, not as cramped as New Home, but still full of several charming businesses and houses. Though they all knew of the nigh-unbreakable barrier that kept them all trapped Underground, they still tried to go about their days as cheerfully as they could. One of the cheeriest places was Grillby's bar and grill, a quiet little tavern where most towners (and the gaggle of Canine Royal Guards) spent their nights. Grillby had a reputation of running a classy establishment, and he took pride in such.

Grillby, for the most part, insisted on having the most tidy and clean trash area of any Snowdin business. Whereas the Snowed Inn or other shops would just throw their trash out in piles, Grillby prided himself on having a professional business, no matter what end one looked at. He always put bags into metal trash bins, leaving them outside until the garbage dog (perhaps of the Greater clan) came to collect them. Clean, precise, and professional: Grillby kept those tenets on all things he did.

However, lately he had begun to notice that his usually tidy trash area was, for lack of a better term, being trashed. Over the next two weeks, his cans were being knocked over, their bags ripped open and rifled through. At least the culprit didn't spread trash everywhere; Grillby was sure nobody wanted to look at crusty old napkins and leftover dry dog kibble. Still, it was a pain to have to perform an extra cleanup step before opening in the mornings. It seemed whatever the culprit was after was food, as the contents of the bags were usually picked clean of anything remotely edible. It had to be some hungry animal, but Grillby wasn't convinced that it was such a simple answer.

He had asked some of his more chatty patrons if they had noticed anything odd. Since many of them were Royal Guards, it made sense that they would be hyper-vigilant of any strange goings-on in the town. Dogaressa claimed she had seen what she thought was a small child behind buildings, but they would run away before she could take a closer look. Dogamy claimed that it wasn't a child, but some sort of strange doglike bone creature, slinking around in the dark. Others piped up to add that no, it was two children actually, an older and much younger child. Another said it was a dog-like bone monster, but accompanied by a small child. Or even just two small bone monsters.

Grillby had to intervene before the more excitable of his patrons got in a fight over who was right or wrong, literally erupting into barks as the canine population became overexcited

It still didn't solve his problem, but it got him thinking.

His trash cans weren't knocked over every night. There didn't seem to be a distinct pattern at all, other than that the cans were never plundered twice in a row. Spread along the upset cans were tiny footprints in the snow, impressions of little shoes that would fit a very young monster. Along the footprints, oddly enough, were strange tracks, unlike anything he had seen before, looking like the jagged paw prints of some animal. Sometimes the tracks would be interchangeable, stopping and starting and sometimes melding together.

Very puzzling indeed. It was troubling to imagine a young monster out all alone in the cold, rooting through trash cans for a meal. It was no secret that Grillby adored children; he couldn't just stand by and let whoever this was suffer all alone in the cold.

Judging by the care this mysterious child took in raiding cans of garbage, they must be scared or clever. A combination of the two was not a good thing. Grillby decided to carry on his routine: eventually he would be able to catch them in the act.

It took another week before his patience was rewarded. He had taken out the trash and closed early, letting the back of the bar be completely dark. He waited inside by the back door, listening carefully.

It didn't take long before the sound of scraping metal and tearing plastic could be heard. He sighed and steeled himself, then prepared to face whatever was out there.

Despite being made of fire, Grillby moved so quietly that his patrons often joked he could teleport. Grillby stepped quietly out into the chilly air. It was times like these he

cursed himself for being so luminous, for his light cast out warm yellow and orange shadows on the snow. He was sure to be spotted... but maybe not. He crept as quietly as he could towards the rustling sound. There, he could see a small shadow digging into one of his trash cans. The creature raised its head in the darkness, suddenly alert. Grillby's luminous flames must have caught its attention.

The shadow turned around and looked right at Grillby fearfully. The mysterious raider turned out to be a very short skeleton monster. They looked to be extremely young and dressed in a dirty oversized hoodie. Judging by their cheekbones and the exhausted way in which he stood, both haven't had a good meal in a long time.

They were in overall terrible shape. The way they shook in both cold and fear clenched Grillby's heart in pity.

What made it worse was that, clutched protectively in the child's arms, was a tiny toddler. A skeleton like the older child, siblings perhaps? The youngest skeleton was bundled up snugly in a thick, but tattered blanket and held close to the older child's chest.

It was worse than he thought.

For a split second they stared at each other. And then the little kid began to slowly step backwards, never taking their eyes off the fire monster. Grillby took a breath, preparing to say something to the frightened child. Before he could utter a single word the child quickly turned and ran with surprising speed into the darkness.

He would have to try again.

Yet again Grillby was forced to wait. This time it took a whole week for the kid to feel brave enough to come back. This time he was prepared. This time, when he walked out to confront the children, he was armed with a plate of hand-cut french fries and a large burger, still steaming hot. Again the kid ran away, but this time didn't completely vanish into the darkness. Obviously, they were curious at what Grillby was doing and the smell of hot fast food goodness helped too.

Grilly took a breath and spoke in his usual soft whisper of a voice. "I'm sure this will be much more...palatable, than what is found in my trash cans."

There was no response, but little white pupils watched him from the shelter of the darkness.

"This is for you." he continued, and slowly set the plate down. Moving too quickly caused the skeleton to flinch and back further away into the shadows. Once the plate was set down he carefully and slowly walked back inside, leaving the skeletons and the meal alone. It would take some time, he figured, to earn their trust. He just hoped this was a good start.

The next day, to his surprise, the meal was completely untouched. It was left exactly where he set it: there weren't even footprints near it.

He didn't know what could cause the children to reject an obvious act of kindness, but whatever it was couldn't have been good.

He began to leave a plate of food every night, occasionally changing up the contents. It was heartbreaking to him, to see the outlines of shoes get closer and closer to the plate with each new day. Eventually the prints became long smears, signs of pacing, as the poor kid agonized over what to do with a simple plate of burgers and fries. The trash cans remained un-raided.

Reports of strange children and creatures petered off during this time. Perhaps they were becoming more careful and taking greater pains to remain unseen?

It took two long weeks of untouched food before, eventually, he came out to find an empty plate—a small victory in the attempt to help these poor children. He continued to leave food and conveniently ‘leave’ blankets outside. Those along with the food disappeared as well, much to his relief.

Eventually the older child began to linger around the bar with the younger in tow. Grillby didn’t always see them, but he knew they were watching him. It made him feel better to know that they were beginning to trust him enough to simply be near. Looking at them directly made them nervous, a thing which he understood himself. He occasionally spoke soft words to them, attempting to greet them and try to establish some form of familiarity. Eventually they grew used to that as well, never coming out of the shadows but at least not running away.

One day however, the weather turned harsh and stayed as such for days. It became almost unbearably cold and fresh snow was falling by the bucketful. The children sometimes didn’t show up, obviously attempting to stay sheltered during the worst of the weather. He kept leaving food for the children, including hot chocolate and other warming dishes. If they didn’t trust him enough to come inside, he would find other ways to help him.

Things became more dire when the usually cleaned plates were suddenly turning up half-eaten. After two days of the food barely being picked at, he resolved to do something.

That night he left a plate as usual and quickly found somewhere to hide. He had left some boxes out that would do well to conceal his light. He knelt by them and waited, glad that all his clothing was enchanted to be waterproof.

It didn’t take long for them to come, and judging by how badly the older child was walking, things weren’t going well. The skeleton was shaking as he slowly crept closer to the plate, his younger sibling clutched protectively in his arms. It seemed that all the extra blankets went straight to the toddler, the eldest keeping none for himself.

The toddler looked alright...but the older child was in some obvious distress. He trembled and shook in the frigid air. The lights in his eye sockets were dimmed and he just seemed to radiate exhaustion. In the dim light he could see that he had accumulated more scratches and dents on his skull and hand bones. Occasionally a deep cough would rip through his rib cage, making his eyes clench in pain.

The child wearily sat down next to the plate and carefully positioned his smaller sibling in his lap, not allowing him to touch the cold snow. He picked up a french fry and began to patiently feed the fries to the toddler, one by one. The toddler babbled happily as he was fed, seemingly unaware of just how much in danger they both were in.

The child dutifully fed his brother, occasionally looking to the food almost with longing. He didn't eat a single bite. That solved the mystery of the half-eaten food, the child was feeding his sibling before himself. Grillby watched and waited.

The child rested, and when he struggled and failed to get back up again, Grillby knew it was time to move. He slowly stepped out from behind the boxes with his hands held out to show that he wasn't holding anything that could be considered threatening to them.

"Hello." he greeted softly. It was best to start out simple.

The older child was started when he heard the voice. His attempts to get up continued to fail, snatching up his brother protectively and trying to scoot away in the snow. He wouldn't be able to get far doing that.

"Please don't....run....I'm here to help you." Grillby continued forward, one careful step after another.

The child looked up fiercely and actually growled at him. Perhaps it was a trick of the light, but his teeth seemed sharper than before. Instead of the normal white pupils, there were instead round, glowing cyan eyes.

Grillby continued his careful trek forward, trying to placate the terrified child. However, his efforts were in vain as the child growled again.

The little skeleton boy suddenly pitched forward towards the snow. Grillby thought at first that the poor kid had collapsed out of sickness, but he changed his mind when the boy suddenly...began to change, accompanied by soft pops and the sound of stretching rubber. It was so smooth and so quick that one minute there was a young skeleton boy and the next was something he'd never seen before.

Still wearing the hoodie and shorts was a very small quadrupedal bone monster, looking like a cross between a dog and a lizard. His bottom jaw was bisected and his muzzle was lined with tiny, blunted teeth. His shoes were kicked away to allow for his longer and somewhat bigger paw-like feet. The change of form didn't change his situation, as he panted and shook, occasionally making quiet moan-like whines. Despite this, he looked at Grillby fiercely. Since he was obviously unsteady on two legs, he had swapped them out for four sturdier ones.

He opened up his little jaws and let out a loud puppylike growl; never once taking his glowing eyes off the fire elemental. His bony tail was held stiffly behind him, trying to look as threatening as a tiny bone monster could. It would almost be comical if it wasn't for the dire situation he was in. He positioned himself directly between Grillby and the confused toddler, who had rolled into the snow when his older sibling changed shape. The younger watched the goings-on with wide eyes and with eerie silence.

Grillby was surprised at first. Well, that certainly explained the strange reports from the Royal Guards. He looked over at the still-growling little monster. Shape-shifting was a rare ability among monsters, so much so that there hadn't been a single one in the past few centuries. But, before Grillby's eyes, were a pair of them. Not only that, they have seemed to have mastered the ability at such a young age.

He had no idea why such talented children were out by themselves in the cold. It didn't change or help the situation, and he filed those thoughts away for later.

Grillby carefully and slowly knelt down on the snow. Moving too quickly caused the little bone monster to growl louder and click his jaws in distress. He continued to protectively stand over his sibling, shaking and watching.

"It's alright..." Grillby spoke slowly and softly, trying not to frighten the monster more than he already was. *"I'm not going to hurt you or your brother."*

His words earned him another high-pitched growl. The little monster dug his paw-like hands into the snow as he tried to appear more threatening.

"I was worried." he continued to speak, *"When you were only eating half the plate. I thought that, perhaps, you did not like my cooking."* He tried adding a little humor to his words, wanting to put the distressed monster at ease. *"I can see that you have obviously been too ill to eat much, am I right?"*

The little monster whined in response. His shaky legs and labored breaths were testament enough.

"You aren't well..." he continued. *"Why don't you and your brother come inside with me where it's warm? I'm sure you'll feel better then."*

The little monster looked back at the toddler behind him and made soft confused noises.

"I know... I know...you've been very brave looking after your brother so well. I understand." he nodded to the monster. *"I have a little cousin, who I look after occasionally. It's hard work, isn't it?"*

The monster gave the barest of nods. Tears pricked at the corners of his eye sockets. Grillby nodded back understandingly.

"You shouldn't have to do this all alone. If you like, I can help you both. It's your choice." Grillby slowly extended a warm luminous hand out towards the frightened children, making the gap between them only a few feet wide. *"You don't have to do anything you don't want to do."*

The little monster stared, flinching back a step as the hand was extended. For a long time he stared at it as he continued to silently cry, agonized noises occasionally escaping his tiny muzzle. He rocked on his small paws as he struggled internally with the choice. Sensing his brother's distress, the toddler babbled softly.

Grillby waited patiently, completely still. He offered gentle words to the monster, trying to help soothe his worries.

"It's alright, come on now. It's okay."

Slowly the bone creature began to take hesitant stumbling steps forward, flinching all the way and occasionally backing up again as fear overwhelmed him. Grillby continued to encourage him as the distance between them grew less and less, until finally he was in touching distance.

Grillby stayed absolutely still, his hand still extended. Slowly and shakily, the creature reached out and touched his hand with the tip of his muzzle. He immediately closed his eye sockets and flinched; bracing himself as if expecting to be hurt. Grillby instead slowly and gently began to pet his skull. He frowned internally at the child's sweaty brow; no doubt he had a fever. As Grillby petted the bone monster, they began to relax slightly as they understood that there would be no pain. He looked up at Grillby, confused that someone was being kind to him.

"There we go. See? I'm not here to hurt you. I'm here to help you. You don't have to be alone anymore."

The creature's eye sockets bristled with fresh tears. He made a few strangled sad noises, but once again he transformed smoothly. Where once was a small bone monster there was now a small barefoot skeleton child. He continued to cry as he abruptly pitched forward and hugged the fire monster around the middle, burying his face into his vest. Grillby could scarcely believe it as relief washed over him. He carefully wrapped his arms around the frightened child, rubbing his back comfortingly.

"There, there. It'll be okay now. You're safe now."

The child clutched at him like a lifeline. Grillby continued to soothe him as he sobbed. Suddenly he felt a tug on his pant leg. Looking down in confusion, he was surprised to see the toddler there. Apparently he had shaken free of his swaddling and crawled all the way over. Judging by the look on his little face, he wasn't too pleased that his brother was getting a hug and not him. Once he had Grillby's attention, he held up up his arms in the universal 'pick me up' gesture.

"Ablabl." he demanded in a high-pitched voice. "Blapt blapt."

Grillby obliged and scooped up the toddler with one arm, which caused the little one to giggle happily. He picked both of them up, wincing with how light they both were. The older sibling continued his death grip, burying his face into Grillby's collar. It took some careful maneuvering, but he got the back door open with his arms full. He carried them inside where the warmth washed over all three monsters. The toddler babbled, clearly pleased to be indoors and out of the snow and cold. He carried them over to the couch he kept in the back, attempting to set them down on it.

At first the older child didn't want to release his grip. He eventually allowed himself to be put down after some more soft reassurances. Once free he immediately snatched up his younger sibling and held him close, watching Grillby again with white pupils. Grillby grabbed a throw blanket and began to wrap them up, causing the older sibling to sigh almost contentedly.

"Do you have a name?" he softly asked as he bundled them up.

The boy looked up at him. Perhaps he couldn't speak? He looked around nervously, shooting glances into the darker areas of the bar.

"It's just us, there is nobody else here."

The boy took a few soft breaths, sinking back into the warm couch and blankets. Then he spoke in a rough, but painfully young voice.

"i...i'm sans."

Grillby nodded, pleased to see that the child...Sans...was speaking to him.

"And your...little brother?" Grillby tilted his head to the toddler, who was curled up in Sans' arms and currently fighting sleep.

"papyrus." was the rough answer. Grillby had to suppress a chuckle. What was with skeletons and their love of fonts for names? Sans let out a soft yawn as his exhaustion crept back up on him.

"Why don't you two rest." Grillby suggested. *"I promise I won't allow anything to happen to you or your brother."*

His words seemed to put Sans at ease. *"you...you promise?"* he asked in a small voice.

"I promise." Grillby replied. With that, Sans couldn't fight sleep anymore. He closed his eye sockets and nearly fell asleep instantly, holding his sleeping little brother in his arms. Grillby made sure they were comfortable before leaving the room and heading to a cabinet. There he began to look for any cold medicine he might have left inside.

He found a bottle of liquid medicine and held it in his hand. He studied the directions carefully; he planned on offering it to Sans tomorrow. It wasn't as good as a trip to the doctor, but it should help the skeleton feel a little better.

When he returned, he saw that Sans once again had transformed into the strange bone creature again. He was wrapped comfortably around his little brother, both buried snugly under the blanket. Both looked to be at peace and content, perhaps for the first time in their lives.

Grillby sighed and sat down on the floor in front of the couch. It was obvious they were more than what they appeared to be, but he supposed it would be a mystery that would take time and patience to solve. He had made a promise to the children that he would protect and help them.

And Grillby didn't break his promises.

Chapter Two

Grillby startled awake.

At first he didn't quite know exactly where he was. A dull ache in his back and the distant smell of lingering grease and dish cleaner let him know he was still in his bar. He sighed and removed his askew glasses with one hand and rubbed his eyes with the other. Once clear he replaced his glasses and looked to his side. Of course, he had fallen asleep on the floor, leaning on the front of the couch. Despite having no bones and being made of pure magic, it still couldn't be good for one's neck and back. The clock on the wall read 8AM, his internal clock yet again waking him up early to start the day. The events of last night played in his mind and a brief flash of panic crossed his mind. He would need to check on them both, especially Sans, who was in worse shape.

He would have gotten up, but he was aware of a presence pressed into the side of his hip. Slightly confused, he looked down to see a small bone creature and a skeleton toddler pressed to his side, softly snoozing. The blanket had somehow managed to follow them both, cocooning around them as they stole more ambient heat from the resident fire monster. Sans was curled around his younger brother protectively and Papyrus seemed content to be buried in three layers of warmth. He had no idea how he eventually ended up over here with them, but he was glad it seemed to have helped them rest better.

Grillby had to suppress a chuckle; it was downright cute...and touching. Obviously these children had gone through something terrible, but had begun to trust him enough to allow him to be near while they slept. It was a far cry from barely a month ago; when they were running at the mere sight of another monster.

He was snapped out of the reminiscing when Sans was wracked with a painful coughing fit. Papyrus frowned in his sleep, clearly not pleased with being jostled about. Sans would need to take some medicine soon, but it seemed the rest he did was doing him some good. Grillby went about carefully and, slowly removing himself from the couch, tried hard not to disturb both of them. Sans didn't even move as he continued to sleep from sheer exhaustion. Papyrus only stirred slightly, before snuggling closer to his older brother with a soft sigh.

First thing would be to get some breakfast for them. He had no clue how much food they were getting on a daily basis, besides the singular plate he gave them. He would need to make sure they began to eat some regular meals. He strode into the kitchen as quietly as he could and began preparing ingredients.

Papyrus, he figured, would be happy with some easy-to-eat finger food. Tater tots would be a good choice until he could go out later to get something more appropriate. Some celery and perhaps some carrots as well, cooked until softened. He'd need something actually nutritious, unlike scraps from the trash cans. He doubted Sans would want to handle anything heavy until he felt better. So for him, he would make a simple but vitamin-rich broth. Slicing vegetables and stirring pots left him time to think. To be honest, he didn't know really what to do next. He was a bartender and a cook, not a father or anything of the sort. He had some experience with child care with his cousin, but she wasn't two traumatized homeless children.

He would need to ask for help sooner or later.

When the food was done, he ladled a portion of the broth into a mug. It was best to start off small here and save the rest of the soup for later. The tater tots and cut vegetables he put on a plate and carried into the back room, setting them down on the counter. Once the food was safely set down, he went to wake up his charges.

Papyrus, however, was already awake, no doubt smelling the food. He blearily opened his little eyes and yawned.

"Oh.....good morning Papyrus." Grillby greeted the little skeleton.

Papyrus looked up at him and gave him a wide grin. "Ppplt." was his little reply, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

"I will take that as a greeting." he smiled at the little child, causing him to break out in a fit of tired giggles. Sans continued to sleep on, but shifted slightly when he heard his brother. There was another short cough and he screwed up his muzzle in discomfort. *Poor kid*, Grillby thought.

Grillby slowly reached down, picking up the little skeleton. He was met with resistance as Sans was wrapped tightly around his younger brother. Grillby had to carefully move Sans' limbs to free Papyrus, causing the sick monster to make quiet noises of distress. Despite this he still didn't wake up.

"It's alright Sans, I am only seeing to your brother." Grillby didn't know if Sans could hear him now, but his voice seemed to put him at ease. Sans relaxed slightly, which allowed Grillby to free Papyrus from his grip.

Papyrus wriggled in his hands, reaching out to pat the low flames that would occasionally wisp up from his hands. He seemed utterly fascinated by it, erupting in pleased noises and babbles at every new flame. Grillby couldn't help his own chuckle, setting Papyrus down on the floor. He would need to get a high chair later. For now he'd be safer on the floor where he couldn't fall.

He took the plate of cooked vegetables and tater tots, setting them before the toddler. At first Papyrus looked confused, looking down at the plate before glancing upwards.

"That is for you. Go ahead." Grillby encouraged him.

Not needing to be told twice, Papyrus attacked the plate of food with vigor. Food was getting on his arms and face, but a vast majority was getting into his mouth. Grillby watched him for a moment to make sure he wasn't eating too fast. When satisfied that Papyrus wasn't going to start eating the plate, he turned to Sans.

Sans was still sleeping, his breathing slightly uneven. He coughed again, causing him to momentarily become rigid. Grillby frowned, taking the mug of broth and bottle of medicine and setting them beside him. He reached over to Sans' side and shook him gently. Sans grumbled something, but didn't wake up. Grillby shook him a little harder.

"Sans....Sans wake up."

Sans blearily opened his eye-sockets, blinking upwards at Grillby. When he locked eyes with the bartender, he startled hard. With a sharp gasp he tried to flip out from under the covers. The combination of claws, a tail, a blanket, and an illness were against him from the start. He became entangled in the blanket, making panicked noises. Grillby did his best to soothe him, reaching over to free the surprised little monster from the entrapment of the covers.

"Hey now, you don't have to be afraid. You are safe here." he reminded, unwinding fabric from tiny claws. *"Don't you remember me?"*

Sans looked up, going still as he calmed down. He blinked, and then nodded as recognition crept into his features. He coughed again, the excitement rattling his already weak body. He wiped at his skull and eye-sockets with a forepaw, clearly miserable but glad to be freed.

"Better?" he asked. Sans made a small nod again in reply.

"I have medicine here that will make you feel better." Grillby showed Sans the clear bottle, where a thick purple mass moved inside. Sans immediately looked distrustful. He garbled out something, but the meaning was lost to Grillby.

“...come again?”

Sans blinked and sighed. Once again he began to transform, but it took a little longer and seemed more laborious than his attempt last night. Perhaps adrenaline had something to do with it? Or perhaps the illness has caught up to him? In the end though, there sat a tired little skeleton boy, looking clearly displeased at the thought of medicine.

“bleghh.” he said softly, looking a little ‘green around the gills’ as a Waterfall resident might say. “wh...where’s pap?”

Grillby gave him a reassuring smile. “*He is over there, enjoying some breakfast.*” he gestured with a glowing hand towards Papyrus on the floor. The toddler was gleefully mashing the vegetables and potatoes together with his hands, occasionally eating some of the goop. He was giggling and babbling at the plate as he continued his mashing on the poor vegetables. He seemed to be having a grand time.

Sans looked relieved and sank back a bit onto the couch tiredly. He coughed again, covering his mouth with a small hand. Grillby took the time to begin measuring the medicine into a spoon.

“*Here.*” he held out the spoon, the purple syrup shifting slightly upon it. Sans paled at it and shrank back.

“i uh....i....” he grimaced, eyeing the spoon with a measure of fear.

Grillby pulled it back, causing Sans to relax slightly, though he still eyed the spoon.

“*Sans, it is just medicine.*” Grillby tried to reassure the skeleton, but Sans shook his head.

“how do I know if it is?” Sans replied in a quiet voice.

Grillby thought. “*If I prove it to you, will you take it? I only want you to be well again.*”

Sans thought for a bit, glancing to Papyrus and back to the spoon. Slowly he took a breath, and nodded.

Now it was Grillby’s turn to eye the spoon. He slowly opened his slightly jagged mouth and popped the spoon in.

Ugh. Grillby didn’t mind medicine, he actually enjoyed the flavor of grape found in most healing magic infused cold syrups. But this brand....ugh. It tasted *awful*, but it got the job done.

He winced, the flames on his head and shoulders popped from the sheer horrors of the taste, tinting purple for just a split second. He composed himself with one last shudder.

Sans watched, eyes wide and mouth slightly open. He seemed surprised that Grillby actually took it, examining the fire monster for any ill effects.

"It does not taste very good. But I promise it will have you feeling better soon." He said, getting a second spoonful. *"Is this proof good enough for you?"*

Sans nodded, looking a little ashamed. "i..i'm sorry..i..i..."

Grillby hushed him. *"It's okay. I understand. You don't have to be sorry for being on guard."*

Sans smiled, relieved. He took the medicine without complaint then, wincing at the flavor. "ugh."

"Here, this will help too." Grillby handed Sans the mug of broth, holding onto it until Sans' shaky hands steadied enough to hold it. The starved child immediately tried to chug it down, forcing Grillby to hold his hands to halt him.

"No, sip it slowly." he said. *"Slowly."*

He released Sans' hands. Sans obeyed and began to slowly sip down the broth, his hands steadying as he drank. Clearly, good, homemade soup was much better than gross cold medicine. Grillby split his attention between Papyrus and Sans, making sure they were alright as they ate. Sans finished his mug with a yawn, the cold medicine taking effect. Grillby gently took the mug away.

"ank you." Sans murmured groggily, sinking back into the couch and drifting down to lay on his side again. Grillby pulled up the blanket to tuck him in again. The medicine was fast acting, but the price was increased sleep. It wasn't a bad thing, as it seemed Sans needed a lot more rest before the perpetual sense of fatigue around him would be gone.

"You should go back to sleep."

Sans nodded and looked to Papyrus again.

"Don't worry, I will look after your brother."

"...kay..." Sans slowly curled up. He sighed and nearly instantly fell deeply asleep, this time staying a boy instead of the dog/lizard creature. He would need to ask Sans about that later, but for now he would let him rest. Grillby watched for a few minutes, to make sure he was resting comfortably, before turning back to Papyrus.

What greeted him was a mess. Papyrus was covered in bits of vegetables and potatoes. He had even somehow managed to get mashed carrots on the back of his skull. How he managed that would forever remain a mystery. At least he seemed happy. Grillby noticed that he did eat a very large portion of the meal; perhaps the mess was due to his large amount of enthusiasm?

Grillby picked up the wiggly toddler, taking him to the bar counter. Slipping on a rubber glove over one of his hands, he wet a washcloth with water and began to wipe away bits of vegetables from Papyrus's face. In truth, both of them would need a proper bath at some point, but for now it seemed best to get food and rest in them. Papyrus didn't seem to mind the scrubbing, babbling seemingly to nobody. Grillby managed to get the little skeleton's face clean and started work on his little hands.

Somehow Papyrus managed to get goop up into his sleeves. Grillby sighed good-naturedly and rolled up the left sleeve on the dirty onesie. With a few careful wipes, he was clean. The fabric, however, caught on something on the arm. Curious, Grillby adjusted his glasses and leaned down to take a closer look.

What he saw took his breath away. A cold, icy dread dropped to the pit of his stomach and paralyzed his throat.

There, etched deeply on Papyrus's radius bone, was a barcode. Underneath the barcode was etched in big block letters,

'WD.G – E2 – 002 – P'.

All were stained in black, making the bar code and letters stand out strongly against the white bone. Grillby was snapped out of his growing state of horror by Papyrus's confused babbles. The skeleton looked up at the fire elemental with genuine concern; tilting his head to the side and letting loose some soft babbles.

Grillby swallowed thickly, and quickly cleaned off Papyrus's other arm. Thankfully his right arm was free of any letters or codes. Moving quickly so as not to alarm the small child, he made his way back to where Sans was sleeping.

He needed to know.

Sans still slept peacefully in a deep sleep. His breathing was now even, and only soft little coughs would occasionally escape. There was no way he would be waking up anytime soon; the cold medicine would see to that. Grillby carefully set Papyrus down on one end of the couch, and slowly peeled the blanket over Sans' sleeping form. He freed his left arm, held his breath, and slowly peeled back the sleeve of the oversize hoodie. What greeted him was a dirty old bandage covering a portion of his arm. However, it was loose and old, allowing Grillby to slide it upwards.

There, etched into Sans' arm, was another barcode, slightly different from Papyrus's. The letters under it was just as ominous and bold as on the smaller child.

'WD.G – E2 – 001 – S'.

He swallowed again and was very glad he had perfect control over his heat. Internally he was furious, but he did his best to calm himself. He gently pulled the sleeve back down on Sans' arm and went to put it back under the covers. He was interrupted by Papyrus, who had crawled over. He babbled and went straight for the covers, climbing into Sans' arms. He laid down with a content and happy sigh, pressed as tightly to Sans' torso as he could. Sans twitched in his sleep, but a slight smile crept across his features. Grillby placed Papyrus in Sans's arms, allowing him once again to hold his brother as he slept.

Grillby struggled to keep himself under control for the moment. He tucked them in, Papyrus already closing his eyes. He gently patted both their heads, receiving content smiles in return. There he stiffly stood and excused himself outside, making sure the door was shut behind them and stepping out into the cool air.

There, he let go. His flames on his head and shoulders burst as if gasoline had been thrown on them, glowing a hot and angry red. The heat was hot enough that it melted the snow within a three foot radius of himself. The drops of water from the melting snow on the roof evaporated with a sizzle. Grillby grimaced and held his forehead with a hand that seemed to be more flames than a coherent shape, flames crackling and roaring with unbridled anger.

Things just got more complicated. Here he thought it was going to be difficult caring for two homeless children. But now, something more sinister and wrong was part of it. It wasn't the children's fault, of course. But it explained things. The fear. The wariness.

Sans' reluctance to take simple cold medicine. The distrust of food. The odd shape-shifting ability. So far Papyrus hadn't transformed yet in front of him, but the guards had occasionally noted that there was two bone creatures. It was logical to assume Papyrus had the ability as well.

Grillby let himself burn away the anger and disgust he held to whoever...marked...two children. He burned until the backyard of the bar was mostly mud, the snow having melted away. He took some deep breaths, calming himself. His flames returned to normal as he began to let go of his rage. The time for rage would be later, but for now, he needed to think of the children first.

There he noticed Sans' yellow boots still sitting in the yard, forgotten since last night. Grillby took a deep breath and went to retrieve them. For now, at least, they were here and away from whatever hurt them.

Once composed and in no danger of setting anything on fire, he returned to his bar, setting the boots by the door. His first thought was to look at the children. He was relieved to find that both were still sleeping soundly, having not heard or noticed anything amiss with the bartender. Sans and Papyrus laid there under the blanket, holding each other and looking peaceful. Grillby took a few more breaths as the last lingering traces of anger left his system.

Now it was time to be logical.

He glanced at the clock. It was 10 *a.m.*: he would be opening in an hour for lunch. He looked over the children one last time, and once he was satisfied that they would be content for now, he began to prep the bar.

He had quite a few people he needed to talk to today.

Chapter Three

Grillby managed to finish his prepping before it was time to open. He found it hard to stay focused on the task at hand, often drifting over to the back room to check on his two charges. To his relief, they remained asleep and Sans' coughs were becoming rarer with each passing minute. So far, so good. He would let them rest as much as they liked; he figured they were catching up on at least a month of missed sleep.

He unlocked the front doors to his restaurant once it was due to open, and was not surprised to see the entire Canine Unit of the Royal Guard waiting to be let inside. It was time for their lunch break, and to them, Grillby had the best kibble around. Greater Dog barked a cheerful greeting, saluting as his bulk required he go inside first, armor clanking loudly. He was followed by Lesser Dog, Dogamy, Dogaressa, and their newest trainee, Doggo. They barked their own canine language to each other, seemingly in good cheer as they shook the snow off their paws and trudged into the warmth to find a seat. Lesser Dog went to sit at his usual table and began shuffling a deck of cards he pulled from a pouch on his armor. The husband and wife team set their axes against the table, rotating their shoulders once free of their burden. Doggo sat off to the side, a dog treat firmly in his muzzle.

Grillby nodded a greeting to his regulars, earning cheerful barks in return. He made his way over to take their orders. He didn't need a notepad to remember anything, as they always ordered either steak or kibble. Dogs were somewhat predictable in that way.

("Ah, Grillby! How are you doing, dear?") Dogaressa leaned back in her seat and to the side, her head resting against her husband. Dogamy smiled at the bartender himself, leaning over to nuzzle his wife. They really were inseparable.

"Ah, er... I am... okay." Grillby faltered as he tried to find a way to explain his situation. How in the world could something like what transpired last night and this morning even be explained. His uncertainty alerted the two dogs in front of him: it was a futile gesture trying to hide his feelings from the dogs, as they instantly picked up on it.

"You don't sound well, friend!" Dogamy replied.

("Yes, Grillby, you always listen to us. If something's the matter, we have your back.") Both dogs leaned in close, giving Grillby their full attention.

“Hrmm... Yes... it is quite a, hrm... strange situation.” Grillby admitted. He ran a hand through the flames on his head, pausing to word his next sentence.

“Dogaressa, I would appreciate speaking to you alone for a few minutes.”

“Why just my wife?” Dogamy, raised an eyebrow.

“Because, my friend, you often get very excitable.”

Dogamy slammed his hands on the table. **“I DO NOT GET EXCITABLE!”**

The other dogs turned to look over at the commotion. Grillby and Dogaressa both chuckled, as Dogamy realized he just proved Grillby right. “Well, uhhhh...” He leaned back, slightly embarrassed. “Well, yes, my wife can handle anything. Heh heh.” The dog chuckled nervously, until his wife leaned in to give him a kiss on the head. He relaxed slightly with a smile.

(“Don’t worry, dear.”) She gave her husband an extra smooch for good measure, before standing up. (“I’ll be right back.”)

Grillby nodded. *“.....Thank you,”* he said softly.

(“Oh, Grillby, we’re always willing to help out.”) She smiled. (“Now, what’s the matter?”)

“Follow me.” Grillby led her behind the bar counter. In a few strides, they reached the door to the back room, and the rest of the dogs went back to their chatter.

“Now, you must be quiet. They are resting.”

(“They?”) She perked her ears up, intrigued. Grillby nodded and opened the door. He stepped inside and gestured for her to come in. She slipped inside with confidence befitting a Royal Guard and immediately looked around.

Sans and Papyrus were still sound asleep on the couch. When Dogaressa spotted them, her hands flew to her muzzle in shock, stifling a bark of surprise. (“You... you got them in!”) she whispered, once composed. (“How?!?”)

“With patience.” Grillby replied. He went over to tuck the two children in, as a few corners of the blankets were hanging free. *“They came in on their own last night.”*

Dogaressa breathed, running a hand through the fur on her head. (“What a relief. The other Guards and I have been trying for ages to even get them to stop and talk. This is amazing, Grillby!”)

“Yes...,” he fully agreed. He could hardly believe it himself. *“However, there is something..... wrong. Not with them, of course... but their situation.”*

Dogaressa listened fully, her ears perked up as far as they could go. Grillby prepared himself.

“They are, uh... marked.” It made him feel sick just saying it.

(“....Marked...?”)

Grillby sighed. *“Yes... They have...”* He swallowed, the sheer horror of this morning's discovery not having fully left him. *“They have barcodes, etched into their arms. The children... they have serial numbers.”*

Dogaressa's hackles raised on the back of her neck.

“Something much bigger is going on here,” Grillby continued. *“Something absolutely criminal. The eldest, I believe, has had it the worst. He is afraid of being touched. He is afraid of food. He would not even take medicine until I proved it was safe to consume. The youngest is much too wary for a toddler. They are both far too nervous and shy for any child at all.”*

Grillby sighed.

“I need you and the Guard's help.”

Dogaressa's lips peeled back, baring her teeth. Her hands clenched and unclenched in controlled rage. (“I can see why you didn't want my husband back here and why the back of your bar is snowless,”) she admitted.

Grillby nodded. Last time there was a case of child abuse in town, it took every single Guard available to hold Dogamy back from attempting to tear out the throat of the perpetrator.

(“I promise, we'll find out whoever did this to these kids,”) she said fiercely. (“Do me a favor and write down this serial number for me.”) Her voice was strained with her attempt to keep her anger to a whisper and not wake the children.

“I will.” Grillby nodded. *“And there is, uh... another thing.”*

(“Oh no, it's worse?”)

“No, no...” Grillby raised his hands. *“Nothing bad... Well... remember how you and the guards were also seeing... Hrm...”*

("Bone puppies?") she supplied.

"Yes, well... that is... them too."

Dogaressa gave him a look. She struggled to process this information, occasionally looking down at the sleeping children.

"They are shape-shifters."

A look of surprise danced across the dog's features. ("But there... there haven't been monsters that could shape-shift in, well...")

"Ages?"

("Yes.") She frowned hard. ("You're right... there is something rotten going on here. Those poor kids...")

Grillby nodded. *"Yes. I would appreciate you keeping this information strictly within the Guard. They have been running from... something. I do not want whatever it is coming here."*

("Of course.") Dogaressa looked over affectionately at the children. They hadn't stirred once since the conversation. ("And what is to be done about them now?")

Now it was Grillby's turn to be surprised. He fiddled with his hands a second, the flames on his head crackling gently. *"Well....."*

Dogaressa leaned in.

"I was planning to..... care for them myself....." Grillby blushed, his flames turning a soft pink.

("Oh gosh, Grillby, you sweetheart.") She was equal parts relieved and happy. ("I'm sure you'll be a great caretaker.")

"... Yes, well... I'll need help. I've, uh... never done this before..." To say that the bartender was nervous was an understatement.

("And you shall have it! Do you still have that guest bedroom at your house?")

Grillby nodded in reply. *"Why, yes."*

("Give me your house keys.")

Grillby blinked. “...*Come again?*”

(“Your house keys! If you’re going to take in children, you’re going to need to be set up for them.”) She gave the bartender a warm smile. (“The guard and I have you covered.”)

“/...” Grillby was shocked and touched. “...*Thank you...*”

Dogaressa gave Grillby another warm smile and an affectionate pat on the back. (“Don’t worry, we’ll all help you through this. Especially since you say they are puppies too. They can get awfully unruly when young.”) She winked knowingly.

“Ah... yes....” He tried to compose himself. “*Well, shall we return, then? I am sure you and your compatriots wish to eat.*”

She laughed quietly. (“Of course, I can fill them in then.”)

Grillby nodded, checking on the children one last time before exiting, handing Dogaressa a key. She pocketed it with a smile, before heading back to her husband.

Grillby went to prepare their lunches, warming up some kibble and placing them into bowls. He listened as Dogaressa sat down, and in low barks and growls began explaining the situation to the other Guards. A few more customers drifted in, but the secret language of dogs could be understood only by dogs themselves. Grillby drifted about, serving drinks and delivering orders. True to his suspicions, Dogamy stood up with a furious growl, barking loudly. Greater Dog was forced to come up behind him and bear hug him, sitting down with the angry Guard until he calmed down. They discussed what they were going to do in feverish whines and whispers, the meaning lost to Grillby, but not the intent.

After an hour of fierce barking, all five of the Guards seemed to come to an agreement. They stood up, leaving small piles of gold coins to pay for their meals. They then began to file out, with Dogaressa taking the end of the line.

She gave Grillby a wink and a nod, which Grillby returned with a nod. Now all he could do was wait.

The rest of the day went by at the usual pace. There were periods of time where the bar was nearly full and times where it was empty, the patrons drifting in and out with the ebb and flow of their lives. Before, Grillby would just obsessively clean during these slow periods, but now he found himself wandering back to check on the children.

Sans only woke up briefly during the day, his coughs now having become only a minor annoyance. He was still, however, very tired and weak from lack of food. He had needed help sitting up to drink more soup, remembering to drink slowly this time.

To Grillby's relief, the healing magic inherent in all monster food was beginning to fill in the dents and scratches in his skull. He had quickly fallen asleep again after his meal, already looking much better than when he first came in through the door.

Papyrus was.... Papyrus. True, he had an air of wariness about him, but he seemed to be in a perpetual good mood. Grillby gave him something to eat as well, and of course his usual enthusiasm left a mess. After being fed, he seemed content to just stay near his brother. Grillby had made the mistake of giving the toddler some paper and crayons to keep him amused, only to come back later to see he had drawn colorful happy shapes all over his sleeping older brother's skull.

It was amusing, to say the least. He would need to find ways to keep the children entertained during work. At least crayon was easy to wipe off.

Dogaressa came back an hour before he was due to close, handing Grillby back his key with a wink. Grillby took it with a grateful nod. Nothing more needed to be said.

He performed his usual cleanup, stacking chairs on tables and sweeping. He wondered what the guards had done to his home, but he figured he'd find out soon enough. He finished his end of closing chores as quickly as he could and stood by the backroom, putting his coat on. Through the door he could hear Sans, seemingly talking to his brother. Grillby opened the door as quietly as he could, so as not to startle them.

Sans was now awake. The boy had propped himself up against the arm of the couch, Papyrus sitting on his lap. He was speaking to his little brother in a tired, but amused voice. The edges of sleep still clung to the older child.

“Okay, how about another? How many tickles does it take to make an octopus laugh?”

Papyrus looked at his brother, tilting his head.

“*ten-tickles.*” Sans smiled.

“NO!” Papyrus shouted, frowning. Clearly he had heard more than his fair share of bad jokes.

“oh, come on.... ten-tickles? *tentacles?*” Sans shrugged, his smile growing brighter.

“NO!” Papyrus shouted again, this time leaning in to lightly bonk Sans on the head with his little hand. Sans just beamed back, chuckling weakly.

“*Well... I thought it was funny.*” Grillby spoke with a chuckle, moving to stand by the couch.

Sans jumped slightly, but relaxed when he noticed it was Grillby. The boy gave a weak smile, clearly slipping into shyness again. "um... well... it wasn't so good...."

Grillby smiled. *"I am a bartender, trust me when I say I have heard worse. Perhaps I'll tell you some later."*

This earned a bright smile from Sans. Grillby reached down and began to wrap them both up in a blanket.

"Come on, we're going home."

"home?" Sans sounded terribly confused, but allowed Grillby to wrap him up.

"Yes. My home. And, if you would like it to be, your home too."

"....why?"

"Well, I don't think you'd like to live here in the bar."

Sans didn't reply, seemingly lost in thought.

He wrapped up the children snugly and picked them up. Sans leaned his head on Grillby's shoulder as he was held. Papyrus babbled with excitement. With both children secure, he went outside and locked the door.

It was dark out, which put the children at ease. Sans was still nervous, his eyes darting around to see if anyone saw them. Grillby comforted him as best as he could with his arms full. It was a good thing his house was very close by.

It was only a short time in the crunching snow and chilly wind before he arrived at the door to his two-story house. A rather extravagant size for one person, but then again, he ran the most popular restaurant in town, so he wasn't exactly hurting for money.

He unlocked the front door and stepped inside, flipping on the lights. Both children winced at the sudden flash of light, but relaxed when they saw no danger.

"this is your home?" Sans asked.

Grillby nodded. The inside of his house was honestly rather plain, with light yellow walls and plush light purple carpeting. Plush red furniture dotted the rooms, and a cheerful fireplace dominated the living room. His walls were for the most part bare, save for a few photographs mostly of him and his cousin.

He made his way upstairs, so far not seeing any evidence of the Guard's meddling. Sans and Papyrus just held on, looking at everything with wide, but curious eyes. They seemed almost mesmerized by the concept of a house, once again giving Grillby a dark feeling about their past. Eventually, he came to the door to his guest bedroom. He steeled himself, opened the door, and turned on the lights.

Now he could see Dogaressa and the other Guards' handiwork. The plain, boring-looking bed had been swapped out for a more comfortable child-sized one. The wooden posts on the ends made him realize that it was actually a bunk bed, ready for another bed once the time came. Perhaps Dogaressa picked up on the children's reluctance to be separated? There was a toy chest so full, it couldn't be closed. Among the normal children's toys of cars and stuffed animals were little rubber bones, balls, and tug of war ropes; it was clear the guards were considering the skeletons' alternate forms. A more sturdy dresser was shoved into the corner, no doubt with help from Greater Dog. They had done everything they could to give the room a warm and welcoming feeling. Grillby was filled with an overwhelming sense of gratitude. He would have to give them his thanks tomorrow.

Grillby carried the children in, setting them on the bed. Sans and Papyrus looked utterly baffled, patting the fluffy blankets and pillows with awed expressions.

"It's... soft?" came Sans' quiet reaction, pushing down on the mattress with a shaky hand.

"Yes, it's a bed. You... sleep on it." Grillby raised an eyebrow. *Did they... not know what a bed was?* Sans and Papyrus looked completely blown away by this revelation. Papyrus went ahead and flopped on his side, letting out a pleased sigh. Sans, however, seemed to be conflicted and confused.

"This is for you and Papyrus." Grillby knelt by the bed, a spark of anger nestled in his heart towards whoever was responsible for a child being confused over something as simple as a bed. He hid it for now, the Guards were on the case.

Sans looked around, eyeing everything around the room. He ground his teeth a bit in nervousness.

"...all of it?" he asked, uncertain, looking around the room.

Grillby nodded. "Yes."

Suddenly, Sans jerked, as if given a shock. His breathing became slightly heavier.

"wh-what's the ca-catch?" He tried to sound firm, but fear crept into his voice.

"There is no catch," Grillby said gently. He slowly reached up to put a hand on the child's shoulder. Sans watched the hand carefully, but allowed it to touch him. Grillby could feel that he was trembling slightly.

"bu-bu-but..." Sans' teeth chattered slightly.

"Sans, everything in this room is for you and your brother." Grillby tilted his head. Sans only gave him a wide-eyed look in return. *God, the poor kid looks so confused,* Grillby thought. *"In fact, this whole house is as well. This is your home now, if you wish it to be."*

"why?" Sans managed to say. He stared directly at Grillby, searching for any hint of deception.

"Because I want you and your brother to be happy."

Sans didn't look entirely convinced.

"Do you not want to live here?" Grillby asked.

"NO!" Sans answered suddenly. "no, i just.... i just.... i don't know." He held his temples in his small hands, fresh tears threatening to spill from his sockets.

"Sans, it's alright. Nothing here is going to hurt you or your brother. It's safe here."

Grillby gently pulled Sans into a hug. Sans hugged back, once again holding on as if he were adrift at sea. Grillby could only begin to fathom the amount of mental confusion the child was going through, but he hoped he'd put him at ease. Sans seemed to calm down slightly, reaching up to wipe at his eyes. Papyrus watched the exchange silently.

"okay," was his soft reply. Grillby patted his back a few times before breaking the hug. Papyrus instantly crawled over, raising his arms expectantly.

Grillby smiled and gave the smaller skeleton a hug too, causing Papyrus to erupt into happy giggles. His mood seemed infectious, as it got Sans to smile weakly too.

"Now, Sans, if you feel well enough, you and your brother can play while I make dinner."

"i... think I do." Sans began slowly making his way off the bed, sliding down until he stood on his feet. He was still shaky, and needed to hold onto the bed to steady himself, but it was a far cry from last night when he wasn't able to walk at all. He chose to sit down on the floor, rather than keep standing. Grillby picked up Papyrus and set him down by his brother. It didn't take Papyrus long to spot the toy box. Sans seemed content for now to just sit and watch Pap's antics.

"I'll be right downstairs," Grillby told Sans. *"I'll be back up shortly with something for you both to eat."*

Sans nodded before turning his attention back to his brother, watching over him protectively as he moved about the room in exploration.

Satisfied, Grillby made his way downstairs to his kitchen.

Of course, the best room in the house was his kitchen. Grillby was foremost a cook, and he would not tolerate shoddy equipment or sub-par ingredients in his own personal domain. He received a shock when he turned on the lights to see a high chair sitting next to the table. Said shock was quickly replaced with gratitude: it seemed the dogs had thought of everything. He chuckled and opened his fridge, pulling out some ingredients. It was late, so he figured something simple and quick to cook would suffice. Spaghetti and water sausage meatballs seemed like a good fit. Making the sauce and meatballs from scratch gave him some time to think.

It was obvious Sans was going to take a while to adjust to having a home. Papyrus seemed to be fine, but with how protective Sans was over his brother, Grillby could foresee some bumps in the road ahead. He was patient enough to get them inside the bar; he would be patient now too. Even regular children would need an adjustment period, and the two in the room above would just need a little more time and reassurance.

It only took eleven minutes to cook the noodles. He put them into bowls, ladling the sauce over them and grating some cheese. He grabbed some forks, and, with years of practiced balancing, walked upstairs with food in tow.

As he approached the door, he heard soft growling and an occasional excited bark-like noise. Curious, Grillby peeked around the door.

It seemed he was right about Papyrus. He had shifted his shape as well into something similar to his brother, but obviously much softer and smaller. He made sharp little pleased growls, a toy rope held firmly in his tiny muzzle. On the other end was Sans, who had also shape-shifted. He just sat on the floor, looking pleased as punch as he held the other end of the rope in his jaws. Papyrus wagged his tail and tried his best to tug it away from his brother, but Sans remained firm. He waited until Papyrus' eyes were clenched tight in concentration, and then simply let the rope go. Papyrus tumbled backwards, but triumphantly got to his legs again, beaming. He paraded the rope around, clearly pleased with himself, as Sans watched with adoration.

Grillby decided then to enter, bowls in hand. It looked like he wouldn't need any forks.

"Are you two having fun?" He knelt down.

Both children wagged their tails in response. Papyrus ran over with surprising speed. He was probably a little more confident on four legs. Grillby set both bowls down on the floor, allowing them both to come investigate. Sans was still very shaky and stumbled a bit, but managed to come over under his own power.

They both looked at the contents in the bowl, sniffing at it and looking slightly confused. Papyrus was first to take the plunge, shoving his muzzle in and practically inhaling the noodles. He must have obviously liked it, because his tail began wagging so fast it became a blur. Sans ate his portion slower, and to Grillby's surprise, left exactly half the noodles. He began nudging the bowl to Papyrus before Grillby stopped him.

“Sans, you don't have to do that anymore.” Sans looked up and tilted his head, glancing over to his brother. Papyrus had managed to clean his bowl with record speed.

“There is plenty of food. If you want seconds, you may have them.”

Sans whined in response, as if it all sounded too good to be true. Grillby turned to Papyrus, who was sniffing the empty bowl.

“Papyrus, do you want more?”

Papyrus nodded and let out an adorable squeak. Grillby smiled and picked up the empty bowl. Sans watched Grillby carefully until he moved out of the room. The older brother didn't have the ability to follow him at the moment, but Grillby knew he would have if he was able.

It didn't take long for Grillby to make another bowl and carry it upstairs. He knelt down again and set it down before Papyrus. He looked surprised, but quickly attacked it with gusto, getting sauce all over his face. Sans legitimately looked surprised as well. To him, food just seemed to keep coming out of nowhere. He looked up at Grillby with a grateful expression, swishing his tail back and forth.

“See, you two do not need to worry about food ever again. I promise.” He nodded down to Sans' still half-empty bowl. *“Go ahead and eat. If you want more, you will have it.”*

Sans stared downwards for a second, as if coming to a decision. He carefully rose to all fours, then made his way over towards Grillby. His walking was improving, but Grillby could see it still took great effort. He made his way over to the kneeling fire monster and gently pressed his head against his leg. Grillby chuckled and reached down, gently patting Sans on the head. He made a happy rumbling noise in return, almost as if it was a purr from a cat.

Perhaps now, the healing could begin.

Chapter Four

After eating, it was more than evident that the children needed a bath. Papyrus had, once again, managed to cover himself in bits of food. Sans kept himself cleaner for the most part, but Papyrus had to come over to hug him, getting his brother dirty as well.

Grillby looked into the dresser to find it filled with children's clothes. Again, the generosity of the Royal Guard seemed too much for him, but he wasn't about to make a fuss over it. It was, after all, about the children, not him. He found some clothing that he believed would fit them both: thick pants and sweaters, more than enough to keep them warm as they both recovered. With Sans still being unable to walk properly, he simply picked both wiggly bone monsters up and carried them to the washroom.

"Come now, you both need a bath."

He only got confused looks from both as they were carried to the guest washroom.

Being a fire monster, Grillby had no real use for a bathtub. It had been there when he had moved in and he never bothered to remove it. It did serve some purpose - it made an excellent place to soak large troublesome pots and pans overnight if need be. But for the most part, it was left alone. Now, it seemed like it would be able to perform its intended function. Grillby set the children down on the floor, getting some soap and towels from a cabinet. He'd have to shop later for some proper bath supplies, but for now, simple soap would do. He'd especially need to stock up on arm-length rubber gloves, pulling on his last pair then and there.

Giving the children a bath proved to be...a challenge. They seemed to have no clue exactly what a bath was. Trying to get them both undressed proved equally hard, as they seemed almost afraid of the water. Sans outright refused to remove the bandage covering the barcode on his arm. In the end, he only removed it because Grillby promised a fresh clean bandage afterward. Even then he was shy about it, trying to not let Grillby look at it more than he had to.

After a short time in the bath, they seemed to enjoy it. Judging by the dirt in the water, it had been a long time since they had a bath... if they ever even had one at all. Without being covered by clothing, their actual physical condition could be assessed... and it didn't look good. Both their arms had a network of dented pockmarks up and down their bones. Sans had the worst of it.

Old healed cracks and tool marks marred some of his bones, especially in more delicate places like his ribs and spine. Papyrus had some old healed injuries, but not nearly to the degree as his brother.

Grillby made a note to call a doctor the next day.

In the end, the two children were clean, their bones a sparkling white. Grillby helped them dry off and dress, leaving them both to marvel over their new clothing. Sans looked over at his hoodie sitting in a pile with the rest of their old clothing.

“Don’t worry, Sans. I’m going to wash and repair it for you. You will get it back later.”

This seemed to put the older child at ease. They both just sat with each other, grinning to themselves, enjoying the simple feeling of being clean with new clothes.

It made Grillby’s heart ache, but he was happy that they were happy.

Putting them to bed proved to be another new experience for them. Being tucked into a soft bed seemed like such a foreign concept to them. They eventually allowed themselves to drift to sleep after being read a bedtime story. Of course, every single book the Canine Unit had donated were about dogs, but they enjoyed it nonetheless.

He let them sleep peacefully, leaving their door open just in case they called for him. He settled down in his own bed, not realizing how tired he was.

It felt like only a blink before it was the next day. 8 *a.m.*, as usual. It was Saturday, the last day the bar would be open before it would be closed for Sunday. The first thing he did was get up to check on the children, only to find an empty bed.

He nearly panicked, but he noticed the edge of covers peeking out from under the bed. He crouched down to look, to see both Sans and Papyrus wedged into the corner. Sometime during the night, they had dragged the covers and pillows under the bed and made a nest of them. They were both in their alternate forms, curled around each other in their sleep. Sans had his back facing outwards, wrapped around his brother protectively.

He wondered why they decided to sleep under the bed and not on it, but, well, as long as they were comfortable, he didn’t see any reason for alarm.

He woke them up as gently as he could. Thankfully, Sans wasn’t frightened like yesterday, but it seemed to take him a little bit to remember where they were. At the promise of breakfast, he nudged his brother awake and they crawled out from under the bed, shifting to stand on two legs.

A night of sleep did wonders for Sans' walking. He still stumbled, but managed to walk somewhat normally. Grillby carried them both down the stairs, not wanting to risk either of them slipping and falling. That was the last thing they needed.

He fixed some oatmeal for their breakfast. He still didn't want to give them something too rich or heavy, not until he spoke to a doctor. They were puzzled - it seemed everything he did for them was some entirely new experience. Sans managed to clean his bowl this time, but not before Papyrus, who ate like a champ. Papyrus had slowed down enough to not make a complete mess. Perhaps now that he understood food was going to be a regular occurrence to him, he didn't need to rush.

Once finished, he brought them over to the bar, to open as usual. This time he was armed with some puzzles and books, to keep the children entertained as he served customers. Until they were old enough for school, he resolved to keep them in the bar with him. Hopefully, it would help them open up a little. They kept to themselves for the most part, enjoying a particularly tough jigsaw puzzle. Grillby could hear Sans through the door, trying to convince his brother to stop attempting to eat the pieces as they worked on it.

Just hearing them enjoying something put a warm feeling in the bartender's heart.

The Canine Unit were there waiting when he opened for business. He wanted to speak with them all personally, and it seemed they wanted the same. Grillby followed the pack to their usual tables, taking a seat with them.

"I want to thank you all for what you have done. I am truly grateful, and the children are too."

"Aw, shucks, Grillby, it wasn't a problem at all." Dogamy smiled. Lesser and Greater Dog all gave the fire monster thumbs up, their jaws open in happy doggy grins.

("How were the children last night? Any troubles?")

Grillby sighed. *"Well, they didn't know what a bed was, or a bath. I found them asleep under the bed this morning instead of on it."*

Doggo, the youngest member of the group, sucked in a breath through his lit doggy treat. "Oh wow."

The Dogs all nodded agreeingly.

"But they seem to be settling in." he continued. *"Have any of you made any progress yet?"*

("Not yet, but we've alerted the other Guards in Hotland and Waterfall. They have their eyes peeled for anything strange.") Dogaressa leaned against her husband.

"It's not going to be long before word of this gets to the King." Dogamy added. "Heaven help those responsible once he finds out."

All present shared a knowing nod. Once other customers started to come in, Grillby thanked the Guards again and moved to his post behind the counter.

The Guards left soon after eating, seemingly eager to get back to work, not that he blamed them. He took care of the customers until after the lunch rush, where he took the time to make an appointment with an on-call doctor from Waterfall. He knew just one - a particularly jovial fish monster by the name of Dr. Sphyræ, who had treated Grillby before for water burns. With the doctor's insufferable jokes and puns, the bartender believed the children would be at ease with him. Usually, doctors didn't work on Sundays, but when Grillby explained their physical condition, he agreed to come over anyway.

The day went by as usual. People came and went, ordering food and sitting to drink some troubles away. Sans and Papyrus stayed quiet in the back room, enthralled by the jigsaw puzzles they were given. Together they had solved one, and were working on another when Grillby entered to bring them lunch. The way they looked up at him with adoration made him feel warm inside. Perhaps this was what he was missing in his life, the chance to actually nurture something and let go of his past of destruction. He had punished himself long enough.

Of course, there were setbacks.

The day was over. Grillby had locked up and taken the children home. They seemed to have more energy to them than before, the extra meals obviously helping. Once home, they dragged most of their toys downstairs to play in the larger and more open living room. There they amused themselves, playing with each toy in turn and only stopping for dinner. It was amusing to watch them play, and Grillby found himself sitting on the couch and just watching. Their joy was infectious, the flame elemental smiling as he watched them play with one new thing after another.

However, when Sans reached over and picked up an innocent-looking rubber bone toy, things went downhill fast.

He squeezed it, and it let out a loud shrill squeak.

Both children froze at the noise. Sans experimentally squeezed it again, as if to confirm the noise it made. When it squeaked again, Papyrus instantly began to cry and wedged himself under the couch.

Sans stared at the toy in his hands, his expression blank and empty. The normal large white pupils of his eyes were gone, leaving just empty eye sockets staring straight ahead, as though seeing something nobody else could.

“Sans?”

Sans didn't respond, but his hands began to tremble around the toy. Grillby could hear the soft shaky sobs of Papyrus, muffled under layers of foam and fabric. Sans was beginning to breathe heavily in response, as though further aggravated by his brother's cries.

Something was terribly wrong here.

“Sans? I'm going to take that away, okay? Easy now.” Grillby knelt down and carefully reached for the toy. He found that Sans' trembling hands had made a vice-like grip around the toy. Grillby tried to remove the toy from the unresponsive skeleton, but Sans was holding on too tightly. He managed to pull it out of the child's hand, but the pressure caused the toy to let out another loud shrill squeak. Sans abruptly crumpled to the floor, clutching his skull, and started screaming.

Everything seemed to melt for Sans. He couldn't hear. He couldn't breathe. All he could see was an ever-reaching expanse of black in his vision. He couldn't register Papyrus' cries or Grillby's panicked words anymore. There was a pressure in the back of his mind that stung his brain and made everything go numb and distant.

Despite Grillby's efforts to bring him back to reality, Sans slipped away.



{ **“Beginning blaster test on number E2 – 001 – S.”** }

A cold voice rang out in the bare room, echoing in Sans' skull.

Sans lay on a table, leather straps holding him firmly down. There was some slack in them, as though they were meant for a monster of a different shape. Electrodes were attached to his head and scattered throughout his skeleton. The air hummed with the idle sounds of machinery, and the smell of ozone was thick and heavy. The room was nothing but a wide expanse of white walls and metal floors. It was cold in more ways than one here. His head was forced in alignment with a metal box on a pillar, a scant few feet away. There was the sound of shuffling in the box.

There was a sharp beeping noise and a flash of red as his barcode was scanned. He could hear the whirring of the computers, beeping quietly as lines of data appeared on the screens.

He was afraid. He tried to move, but couldn't. The only comforting thought was that it was him on the table now, and not little Papyrus.

{ “The purpose of this test is to study the effects of the blaster on living, non-monster tissue, as well as measure output data and strength.” } The voice moved. Sans couldn't see where they were walking, but could hear their footsteps on the floor. **{ “Unfortunately, trials on human tissue are not able to be made at this time, so we will have to make due with inferior subjects for now.” }**

There was the sound of fingers on keys, hard and sharp just like their owner's voice. With a few input commands, the metal box began to lift.

There, strapped down like Sans, was a large white lab rat. It was orientated vertically, exposing as much of its body to Sans' line of sight. Its red eyes bulged in fear and it began to squeak relentlessly in discomfort. The sound of its terrified noises echoed around the room as it struggled against its own bonds. Its efforts were futile.

{ “001, Shift now.” }

Sans refused. He wouldn't. He couldn't. This wasn't right. He had begun to put the pieces of the situation together, and he did not like the outcome.

There was a sigh.

{ “001, you are making this harder than it has to be. Last chance. Shift. Now.” }

Sans refused again, despite knowing the consequences. He would fight to the bitter end.

There was another sigh.

{ “ For King and Monster Kind” }

Sans jerked against the bonds as the trigger phrase seared across his mind. He tried to scream, to make any sort of sound or movement, but the ability was stolen from him. It was agony to shift against his will, each pop and stretch of bone caused pain to dance across his mind and body. A horrible thick buzzing haze settled over his thoughts. He tried to breathe, he tried to think, but he was trapped. He was outside himself.

Powerless.

It was futile to fight years of conditioning and carefully crafted neural pathways hardwired directly into his skull.

His alternate form fit the straps perfectly. The only thing free was his jaws, lined up towards the helpless rodent on the other side of the room. He screamed in his head, but nobody heard him.

{ “Kill it.” }

Involuntarily, the familiar build of white and blue energy gathered in the back of his throat. Like always, it burned. He tried everything in his power to stop, but it was useless. The energy built with an ominous hum, bathing the room in a bright light and washing out the features of the terrified rodent. All he could do was cry. Large tears dripped from his eye sockets and dropped to the table below.

The energy built to a crescendo, and then released. A crackling white-hot beam of energy escaped his muzzle and lanced forth, striking the poor rat. He could hear it scream, the squeaks reaching a high pitched wail of pain and agony. There was the smell of something burning, and he was forced to watch as its skin and muscle disintegrated into the bright beam. All that remained after a few seconds was charred broken bones and a few wisps of ashes. The buzzing in his skull grew higher and higher in pitch as he tried in vain to fight the mental bonds trapping his rational mind.

The voice behind him made a pleased noise.

{ “Good job, 001” }

Sans screamed.

B u t n o b o d y c a m e



Sans' bones jerked, kicking out at nothing as a loud noise assaulted his ears. Everything seemed to hurt at once, especially his limbs, which twitched and trembled of their own accord. He was aware of being held by something soft and warm, something that wasn't a cold metal table. Occasionally a point of gentle heat passed over his skull, as though trying to comfort him. He was confused and scared. Wasn't he still strapped down? He had no idea, and it made his fear worse. He struggled briefly. A keening wail seemed to come from everywhere, making his skull throb in agony. At first he didn't understand where the noise was coming from, but he knew he wanted it to stop.

The burning in his throat alerted him to the fact the screaming was coming from him. He took a large gasp of breath, and then another. The screaming stopped, leaving a loud ring in his inner ears from the volume of the sound. He took in deep raspy gulps of air, his limbs twitching and aching. He could barely see through his own tears, but he tried. He could make out a blurry shift of orange and yellow in his vision.

"Sans?" asked a familiar voice.

It took Sans a moment to figure out who it was. The edges of reality were blurred. He didn't know what was real and what was in the past. Sans blinked rapidly, attempting to clear his sight. Slowly, a familiar fire monster came into view, looking down at him with concern.

Awareness crept into his aching brain as Grillby came into focus. Sans was confused by the angle, only to discover that they were both on the armchair. He was being held close to the fire monster's chest. Papyrus was also there, teary-eyed and patting Sans with a shaky hand.

"Anns?" Papyrus sniffed back tears.

Seeing his brother in such a state was sobering. Sans couldn't stop his trembling, but he could focus on his own ragged breathing. He tried to say something, but it came out as an agonized moan. His throat hurt. His head hurt. There were lines of pain across his skull and he didn't know where they had come from.

"*Sans, are you here?*" Grillby asked, smoothing a hand over his skull. Sans shook and nodded.

Yes, he was here. Sans had to look around the room, seeing the yellow walls and purple carpet, before the truth was before him. He was home. He wasn't in the labs. He was here. Grillby had promised that nothing would happen to them.

He was still afraid, making quiet raspy noises. He had shifted and didn't remember doing so. Things hurt and he didn't understand why. As if sensing his dark mood, Papyrus climbed over to wrap his small arms around Sans' neck and gave him a big hug. Sans struggled to reign in his emotions - he didn't want Pap being sad over him. He gave Papyrus a nuzzle in return, and for a while, they just sat together, holding each other the best they could.

Grillby just held both of them as though they were fragile pieces of glass. The whole situation was terrifying. He knew Sans had one terror of a flashback - he recognized the symptoms on his own self. Still, it was a powerless feeling, to watch his adopted child transform seemingly against his will and attempt to dig his own skull open. When scratching deep furrows in his own skull did nothing to pull him out of whatever mental hell he was in, he turned to trying to gnaw at his arm, the spot Grillby knew the barcode was etched in. There was no recognition in Sans' eyes, and all Grillby could do was try to restrain him from attempting to hurt himself even more.

He looked over at a small smoking hole punched into his wall. There was also *that* to deal with. He wasn't prepared to see a laser beam come out of the transformed child, but it happened. He was glad the boy's muzzle wasn't pointed at him at the time.

He was relieved to see that Sans was calming down, taking pained gulps of air. His tremors were dying down under the fierce hugs of his younger brother. Just being near each other seemed to be soothing to them. For nearly an hour, Grillby held them both, humming what he thought to be a soothing tune. It seemed to work, as the children grew quiet and still, Sans seemingly having run out of tears to shed.

"Are you two feeling better now?" Grillby asked. They both nodded quietly. Grillby peered down at the now-exhausted bone monster. *"Do you want to talk about it, Sans?"*

Sans opened and closed his jaws, a harsh rasp escaping from them. It seemed to distress the poor skeleton, seemingly forgetting the inability to speak in this form.

"I'm sorry, Sans. Do you feel well enough to change back?"

Sans seemed to think for a moment and screwed his eyes shut. He trembled and began to change. Something was wrong, though. Sans breathed heavily as he slowly changed. It wasn't like the smooth action Grillby was used to seeing from the skeletons. This seemed like it was hurting him again, fresh tears and trembling causing the fire monster to worry. Before he could voice his concerns, Sans finished with a pained gasp.

Well, not entirely finished. He seemed to be stuck halfway through the transformation. He still had a tail and hind legs. His head was slightly bumpy with a slight muzzle and semi-sharp teeth. He had hands again, a bit sharper with claws, and was using them to clutch the fabric of Grillby's vest.

"ah... owwwww..." Sans grimaced. His voice sounded rough and painful, no doubt hurt from all the screaming earlier. There was a distorted growling undertone to his voice, but his words were at least understandable. It seemed this current form was as far as he could go, judging how how his limbs once again began to tremble with exhaustion.

"Sans..." Grillby gently stroked the child's bumpy skull. He almost wanted to just put them both to bed and let them rest. But he needed to know what had set both children off so badly to prevent it from happening again. He knew a flashback when he saw one and he wanted to lessen to suffering the children still seemed to have.

"What happened?"

"nnng... i..." Sans swallowed. "i wassss back in... rrrr... in the bad place..."

Grillby raised an eyebrow, but continued to soothe the skeleton. *"The bad place? Is that where you and your brother came from?"*

Sans nodded sadly. "yeahhhh..."

"What was bad about the place?" Grillby almost didn't want to know, but he knew any information he could get would be one step closer to bringing whoever was responsible to justice.

"ih-the people innnn wh-white coats." Sans stuttered, eyes wide. He tried to keep the growling out of his words, but they dissolved for a moment into terrified whines. It took a few moments for him to compose himself and speak actual words again. Grillby patiently soothed him, encouraging him to try to talk more.

"they hu-hurt ussss." Sans said miserably. *"why?"*

Grillby's heart clenched painfully. *"I don't know,"* he admitted, *"but I can promise, you don't have to worry about them ever again. It's safe here."*

Sans sniffed and rubbed at his eyes, wincing as the fabric of his sweater brushed across the fresh scratches on his face.

"What about the toy made you believe you were back there?" Grillby asked quietly. He didn't want to push Sans but he really needed to know.

Sans took a raspy breath. “th-the n-noise...”

“*The noise?*” Grillby echoed.

“sounded like... sounded like...” Sans was once again getting a faraway look in his eyes. “s-sounded l-l-l-l...”

“*No, Sans. Stay here. Don’t go back.*” Grillby said firmly. He doubted that Sans could handle two flashbacks in a row. His voice seemed to shock Sans back to reality again. He sniffled miserably.

“they mah-made me hurt them...” Sans’ face looked so pained and miserable.

Grillby was silent, rubbing the partially-changed child’s back encouragingly. Despite this Sans began to cry again.

“little rrrr-white rats,” he admitted, as though confessing some terrible sin. “they died.”

The horror of this statement shook Grillby down to his core. No wonder. No wonder Sans was the way he was. The poor kid.

Grillby’s silence only made Sans cry harder. “msorry i-i’m b-baddddd.” He bawled, degenerating into sad pained noises. Grillby hugged him and his brother close to his chest. Papyrus just hugged Sans tighter, refusing to let go.

“*No, no, Sans... you aren’t bad. The people who hurt you, they were the ones that are bad, not you.*” He tried to soothe the skeleton, but he cried harder.

“*Sans, if you believe that makes you bad, then that would make me bad too.*”

Sans sniffed, confused. “wha?”

“*Yes.*” Grillby nodded. “*A long time ago, I was in the war between monsters and humans. You know what that was, right?*”

Sans nodded, snuggling in close.

“*I was a soldier. I had to hurt many humans. I didn’t want to do it, but it happened.*” Grillby continued, deciding not to go into details. Sans didn’t need to hear about that now. He thought about how to put what he was saying into words a small child could understand. “*I thought I was bad too, for a long time. But then, I realized that I was not.*”

This got Sans’ attention. He looked up at Grillby with large eyes.

“The experience hurt me badly. Sometimes, things would make me think I was back there, with the bad things. I thought I was hurting people again, but it was only in my mind. It wasn’t real. Does that sound like what happened to you today?”

Sans nodded. He grumbled a bit, trying to find words again. “h-how does it nnnn... go awayyy?”

“With time. If you allow me, I will do my best to help you through this.”

Sans sniffed and leaned against the fire monster’s chest. “ank youuuu.”

For a while, all three sat in the recliner, resting from the ordeal. Eventually, Sans had regained enough energy to transform back to his child state, but it still sounded too painful to be normal. So they all sat together, just comforting each other. Later, Grillby didn’t like the sound of Sans’ raspy breathing, so he attempted to get up to make something for it. However, both children had refused to let go, and Grillby was forced to carry them both with him to the kitchen. With years of practice behind him, he managed to make a cup of lemon tea with his hands full, adding some honey to it. He carried all three upstairs to their room, managing to get both children to detach from him.

He helped Sans drink the tea, knowing for a fact that it would help soothe his throat. He was very glad he had called Dr. Sphyrae earlier - he would probably have something for the scratches as well.

Grillby tucked the children in and read them a story. Sans was incredibly exhausted from the day’s events, and didn’t take long to drift to sleep. Papyrus stayed up just long enough to hear the end of the story before he, too, was out like a light. Grillby watched over them long enough to make sure they were resting comfortably, before leaving the room and turning off the lights. He left the door open in case, so he could hear if Sans had another episode. He doubted he’d be sleeping at all tonight - the protectiveness he felt would certainly not allow it. He needed to be vigilant. The children had suffered enough in their past, and they deserved to feel protected and safe now.

He stepped out into the hallway, reaching into his pocket to pull out his cellphone. It was an old model, but it was reliable. He quickly dialed a number and waited with anticipation for the receiver to pick up.

(“Hello?”) came the tired voice of Dogaressa.

Grillby sighed. *“Dogaressa, I have some information for you about the children.”*

He could hear over the phone the sound of shuffling as she raced to grab a paper and pencil. (“Tell me.”)

“Sans said the people that hurt him and his brother wore white coats.”

(“That sounds like a doctor, or a scientist. One of them smart professions,”) she hummed over the phone, fatigue vanishing from her voice. (“They are the ones who wear coats like that. Did he say anything else about it?”)

“He remembers white rats as well.”

(“That narrows things down quite a bit, it’s definitely either a scientific or medical thing here. The two major centers for medicine and science are Hotland and the Capital. What made them tell you this?”)

“Sans... had a flashback.” Grillby winced.

(“Oh god, is he okay? What happened?”)

“One of the squeaky toys set him and Papyrus off. And before you even think it, it is not you or the rest of the the Canine Unit’s fault this happened. He and his brother are asleep now, and I have a doctor coming to check on them tomorrow.”

(“I’ll make sure to tell everyone else to not bring them toys that squeak anymore, at least for now.”) Dogaressa sounded regretful. (“I’m glad that they are both alright now.”)

“I am too.”

(“Well, I’m going to call up the rest of the Guard to pass this information on. I promise, we’ll get whoever did this.”)

“I know you all will.”

They exchanged goodbyes and hung up. He looked back to the dark bedroom, and slowly stepped inside. To his relief, both children were still asleep, holding each other comfortingly. He pulled up a chair and sat in the corner. It didn’t feel right leaving them alone tonight. He knew from personal experience just how badly a flashback could affect people.

He had full faith that the Guard would find out whoever was responsible for this. Hopefully they would bring that person, or people, to justice.

Because Grillby knew if he found them first, there wouldn’t be anything left of them.

One way or another, the boys would get their justice.

Chapter Five

Grillby remained on guard for the rest of the night, watching over his charges. He'd gone without sleep plenty of times, and this was more important to him than getting a night of rest. He had hoped the two children would be able to rest that night, but it was wishful thinking. Remembering his own experience, it was nearly impossible to actually rest after a particularly bad mental episode. It took time to recover from those.

Sans proved this thinking true when he abruptly awoke in loud tears, no doubt because of some night terror. Again Sans didn't quite know where he was, fending off Grillby's attempts to comfort him with growls and half-hearted flailing. When he did manage to come back to consciousness, he didn't say a single word, but allowed himself to be hugged. It touched Grillby deeply to know that Sans saw him as someone supportive. He had made a promise to help the child, and he did not intend to break it.

Sans eventually went back to sleep, both him and Papyrus holding onto each other tightly. Grillby stayed on guard until the underground 'sky' began to lighten. He decided to let them sleep in; Sans obviously needed the extra sleep.

Eventually, he had to reluctantly wake them up, once again carrying them downstairs. They needed breakfast, and he wasn't about to let them skip a meal.

He had to tell them a doctor was coming without upsetting them. Sans' scratches hadn't even began to heal, confirming his fears that the children might've been in worse shape than he initially thought.

Sans took a seat at the table, and Papyrus was put into the highchair. For breakfast he made them more oatmeal; this time adding some diced fruit to the cooked grains. The different texture and flavor amazed Papyrus, who once again attacked his bowl with gusto. Sans ate slowly and tiredly, only managing to eat half of the bowl. He pushed the partially eaten bowl away from himself with a sigh.

"*Sans...*" Grillby started.

"I'm not hungry..." Sans leaned over and rested his head and arms on the table. The poor kid just radiated exhaustion. His voice was still rough and pained, but it was a lot better than last night.

"*Are you alright?*" Of course Grillby knew he wasn't alright, he just hoped Sans would be able to admit such to him.

Sans just shook his head no, not saying a single word or raising his head.

“Someone is coming over later, to help you both feel better.” Grillby said, choosing his words very carefully. If the children were victims of medical abuse, he couldn't outright say a doctor was coming without consequences.

Sans jerked to awareness, panic evident in his eyes. Papyrus stopped eating to also look at Grillby, eyes wide. Sans took a nervous breath.

“It's alright,” the fire monster said gently. *“I would not let anyone come here that could hurt you. I made a promise, remember?”*

Sans nodded his head, but he still trembled slightly at the idea of someone coming over. Grillby reached over and gently placed a hand over Sans'. The child flinched at first, but allowed the hand to remain. Sans took another shaky breath.

“The person coming here has helped me before.” Grillby attempted to soothe Sans. *“I was injured badly by water, and he helped me recover. He never hurt me once.”*

Sans looked up in the fire monster's eyes, trying to find any trace of deception. When he didn't find any, he relaxed slightly.

“he...won't hurt us?” he asked in a small voice.

Grillby nodded. *“He will not. He is a healer. Their job is to make people feel better, not worse.”*

“will you um...” Sans abruptly squeezed back on the hand, like he was anchoring himself. “Will you stay there with us?” his voice was still peppered with nervousness.

“I will.” Grillby squeezed the bony hand back. *“I won't leave you and your brother unguarded.”*

“you promise? really promise?”

“I promise.”

Sans was still clearly nervous, but he gave Grillby a small smile in return.

Grillby reached over and gave Sans an affectionate pat on the head, avoiding the scratches. Sans accepted the pat with a soft giggle, his fears temporarily put at ease.

Papyrus, seeing Sans getting a pat, started flailing in his highchair. Grillby chuckled, giving the toddler a pat too, causing the younger skeleton to erupt into peals of laughter. Clearly, Papyrus was finished eating, so he released the child from the highchair.

Papyrus immediately ran to Sans and began tugging on his sweater sleeve.

“ANS!” he demanded in a loud voice. Sans looked down at his brother, amused.

“What is it bro?”

Papyrus tugged harder. “PWAY!”

Sans laughed tiredly. “play?”

“YEH, PWAY.”

Sans looked back over to Grillby, who had begun gathering up the bowls.

“Go ahead, you two have some time to play before the healer arrives.” Grillby nodded at the children.

It seemed best for him to call the doctor a healer for now, at least until more of their past came to light. Both children smiled, and Sans allowed his younger brother to drag him away towards the living room. Grillby cleaned up and washed the dishes as quickly as he could; not really wanting to leave the children alone any longer than he needed to. What if something set them off again? The possibilities were endless, but he felt he needed to let them have independence and choices. It seemed wherever they came from, they had neither.

Today his fears were unfounded. Entering the living room revealed that the two boys were simply playing. Sans still seemed to be very tired and listless, choosing to just lie on the carpet on his belly, propping up his head with his arms. Papyrus was the complete opposite, practically vibrating with pent up energy. He was in his other form, running around as fast as his short puppylike legs were able, occasionally bumping into Sans or the couch. Sans didn't seem to mind, and was happy just watching his brother have a good time.

Both children looked up when Grillby made his way into the room, earning a tired smile from Sans and a bark and tail wag from Papyrus. Grillby smiled back and took a seat on the couch, glancing at the clock on the wall. Even letting the children get more sleep, it still would be a few hours before the doctor came. They would have some time to relax and play before they would have to be subjected to any examination. That is, if they could even handle being around a stranger. He didn't know how both children would react, but he would help them through it regardless.

For the next few hours the children played. Well, Papyrus played. Sans tried his best to amuse his brother, but he ended up falling asleep again. Papyrus wasn't too happy about it. He climbed on top of his brother and began patting his older brother's skull, growling loudly. Grillby had to step in and remove the enthusiastic toddler in order to give Sans some peace. He moved the tired skeleton to the couch where he could rest a little more comfortably without getting climbed on. Grillby took over the playing duties.

When the bone pup was worn out, he shifted back to the couch so he could climb up with his brother. The next hour passed with the soft sounds of sleep and the snores of a tiny skeleton. Everything was peaceful.

Until there was a knock at the door.

The firm knocking on the door startled the children awake. They held each other, eyes wide and bodies tensed. Grillby comforted them with a soft hand.

"It's alright, it must be the healer at the door." Grillby went to stand up, but both children abruptly latched onto him.

"It'll be alright." he gathered them both up in a hug, trying to perhaps lend them some strength. This was going to be a big step for them, and they would need it. *"I will be here to protect you both."*

The children held onto him for a little bit more, but began to relax slightly from the hug.

"I'm going to go let him in, okay?" he said, patting the children's skulls. Sans nodded and scooped up his brother. They were still on edge, but Sans allowed Grillby to stand up. Grillby gave him an encouraging smile, and went to answer the door.

On the other side of the door was a chubby, short fish monster. Technically, he was a fish monster, bore a greater resemblance to a type of aquatic salamander found aboveground. The squat monster was of course dressed in an obnoxious pink sweater vest with a bow tie. A pair of glasses rested on his snout, and in his clawed hand was a medical bag. He grinned widely when Grillby opened the door.

"Hey there, my boy!" the monster replied in a joyful voice. Grillby knew he was the right doctor to call for the job. The chubby monster seemed to radiate good cheer and positive feelings.

"Thank you for coming on such short notice, D...Mr. Sphyrae." Grillby had to remind himself not to use the 'd' word, for now.

"Aw come on, we've known each other for years! Let me be 'Frank' with you, just call me Frank!" the monster snickered, pleased at his own terrible joke. "And it was snow trouble!"

Grillby suppressed a groan, and moved to the side to allow the doctor to enter. Frank chuckled to himself as he entered the house, making sure to shake out the snow from his paw-like feet before coming inside. Grillby directed the doctor to the living room.

...only to see it completely empty.

Grillby, at first, wanted to panic, but was relieved when he saw Sans' head peek out from behind the couch. When Sans spotted Frank, he quickly hid himself again. A few shuffling noises confirmed that both children had somehow managed to wedge themselves between the wall and the piece of furniture.

"Ah, don't worry." Frank patted Grillby on the back. "You warned me they'd be afraid, we just need to be a little patient, that's all." The monster looked around and added in a whisper, "Just let them get curious, they'll come out on their own."

"I suppose." Both monsters sat on the couch. Frank made himself comfortable, situating his large tail and opening his medical bag. Grillby struggled to think of some form of small talk. He could almost feel the nervousness radiating from the children behind him. Luckily, Frank beat him to the punch.

"Did I tell ya about one of my patients? He's a ghost that likes to ride elevators."

"Uh..."

"He said he wanted to lift his spirits."

Grillby groaned, but Frank wasn't finished.

"Well, in other news, there was a robbery at the Capital. The thieves stole a bunch of soap. The guards say they made a clean getaway."

A soft chuckle was heard from behind the couch. Frank smiled and gave Grillby a wink.

"Uh oh, looks like some skeletons thinks my jokes are humerus."

The chuckle turned into a laugh, joined in by a high pitched groan. The children shuffled a little more behind the couch.

"Looks like I may have a critic here! Unfortunately, I can't tickle everyone's funny bone."

Sans outright laughed. Apparently, Papyrus had enough of the terrible puns, because the shuffling of fabric grew louder. Papyrus poked his head out from behind the couch and looked right at Frank with his furrowed eye sockets.

"NO!" he squeaked, before Sans abruptly pulled back behind the couch.

"Well, tibia bit honest, not everyone likes my skelepuns." Frank shrugged, amused. Grillby held back his own chuckle. Well, he knew they were going to have to get the children out eventually, but using terrible puns? That was a mark of brilliance on the doctor's part.

It worked. Grillby could hear the children tussle behind the couch; as Sans no doubt was trying to keep his brother there with him. But Grillby had learned in short time that Papyrus was a very wiggly toddler, and it was hard to get him to stay still for anything. Papyrus eventually managed to escape his protective brother, marching out from behind the couch. Sans emerged, as if to go out to get him, but shrunk back fearfully when he spotted the strange monster. Sans could only watch, rooted to the spot with fear as Papyrus stopped just under Grillby's legs. He peered out from the safety of the fire monster to give Frank one heck of a stink eye.

"NO!" he demanded again in a high voice. Sans watched nervously, wanting to hide again but not willing to leave his brother unguarded. "BAD!"

"Aww, you don't like my jokes?" Frank didn't move, looking down with a wide smile. Papyrus shook his head no. "Well, your brother seemed to like them!"

Papyrus remained under Grillby's legs, seemingly feeling braver than before. "HIS BAD TOO." he shouted. "BAD."

"Well I'm sure he does his best." Frank carefully and slowly leaned down towards Papyrus. The little skeleton stood his ground, watching Frank carefully. "You must be little Papyrus."

Papyrus held on to the fabric of Grillby's pants as Sans continued to quietly watch the interaction. In the corners of his eyes, Grillby could see that Sans' pupils were once again bright blue and round, watching the doctor with eerie silence.

"You have something behind your head there." Frank pointed out. Papyrus immediately used a free hand to start patting at the back of his skull, confused.

"Oh no, you won't be able to get it like that. Hold still, I'll get it okay?"

Papyrus tensed and looked up to Grillby.

"It's alright, Papyrus. I won't let anything bad happen to you." Grillby reminded the child gently. Papyrus steeled himself and then nodded.

Frank slowly and carefully reached back and then withdrew his hand to reveal a lollipop in his claws.

"Oh look what I found back there!" The fish monster grinned and handed the lollipop to the confused child. Papyrus took the treat carefully and stared at it, like it was the strangest thing he'd ever seen. He tried patting the back of his head again, trying to figure out where it came from. Sans was equally shocked, actually inching in closer from the side of the couch, the blue in his eyes suddenly gone.

“Go ahead, it’s good to eat!”

Papyrus didn’t need to be told twice. He left the safety of the Grillby’s legs, going to sit right on the floor between the two monsters. He ended up eating the entire thing, wrapper, stick, and all before anyone could tell him otherwise. He seemed to like it, looking back up expectantly and patting the back of his skull.

“I don’t think there’s any more in the back of your head, but maybe your brother might have one?”

At this Papyrus turned around to look at Sans, patting the spot on the floor next to him. “AANNSSSSS!”

Sans cautiously drew closer, wringing his hands together in nervous tension. It took a few soft encouragements from Grillby before Sans drew close enough to sit under Grillby’s legs. Grillby kept his legs still; the children saw him as a safe area, and he wouldn’t deny them that. Sans looked up at the fish monster, carefully scanning his features.

“Oh, I can definitely see something back there.” Frank chuckled. “Do you want me to get it for you?”

Sans nodded slowly, but held the fabric of the fire monster’s pants in a death grip. Frank, again, moved carefully and slowly, so as not to scare the little monster. Sans watched Frank’s hand carefully with a nervous expression, but that melted to one of wonder when Frank pulled back his hand to reveal another lollipop.

“Goodness, these children have some strange things back there, don’t they?” he chuckled, holding out the candy to Sans. Sans took it slowly, with a shaky hand and wide eyes.

“how?” he asked, barely above a whisper.

“With magic, my dear boy!” Frank sat back and flicked his wrist. In his hands appeared a funduscope. Sans and Papyrus looked on with awed expressions.

“what’s that?” Sans pointed at the tool a little nervously. To him, it was similar to tools he saw in the Bad Place. It didn’t seem too dangerous, being just a thin tube of metal with a plastic knob on the end. Looks could be deceiving, so he prepared himself for what might be coming.

“This? It lets me look into patients’ eyes, or, in your case, eye sockets. That way I can see if they are healthy or not. Do you want to try it out?” Frank handed the tool to Sans, who took it hesitantly.

Sans looked it over, tapping it with the ends of his fingers to get a feel for its texture. He held it up and looked through the small window in the end. To his surprise, everything seemed much bigger while looking through it.

"Good! Now you can use it to look into my eye!" Frank bent down so Sans could take a look. Frank was telling the truth. All Sans could see was the doctor's eye in great detail. It didn't seem to pain the monster, so Sans relaxed a little. He handed the tool back, satisfied it wasn't a threat. Frank took it and proceeded to make it vanish in one hand and then reappear in the other.

"...can you do it again?" Sans suddenly found his voice, completely enraptured by what was happening.

Both children were flabbergasted. Sans was stared at Frank's hands with an intense look, as if trying to decipher the doctor's secrets. Papyrus clapped, impressed! Of course, this was a simple sleight of hand to the older monster, but he was glad to see he was able to pull the children out of their state of fear.

"If you'd like to learn how I can do this, you have to get well first." Frank leaned down with a warm smile. "Grillby said you two weren't doing so good before he took you in, and you've got quite the scratches there!"

Sans merely nodded, looking shy again. "you...would teach me?"

"Yep, if you two work hard on getting better again. I pinkie promise!" Frank winked. Sans only gave him a blank expression in return.

"Here." he elaborated, holding out a claw while extending his small pinkie finger. "You shake pinkies, and that means you can't break the promise! It's got a bit of magic in its own right, to pinkie promise!"

Sans looked at the offered hand for a long time, debating internally. Finally, much to the relief of the two adults, he slowly extended his own hand. The two monsters shook on it. Sans didn't quite know it himself, but it was a huge step for both children. Papyrus threw a fit until he got a pinkie shake too. It was like the two outright refused to do anything that didn't involve the other.

Grillby looked on, immensely proud of the two's bravery, especially through the actual examination.

Of course both children still got frightened, especially when they needed to take off their sweaters so the doctor could assess their physical state. Frank seemed to have a natural talent of changing fear into curiosity, often letting the two children actually hold and examine the medical instruments themselves.

Frank used his magic to heal the scratches on Sans' face and the hoarseness in his voice. Whenever he got antsy, Frank told terrible jokes. If either child started to get particularly overwhelmed, Frank would use his innate silliness to get them smiling again.

Grillby would have to ask Frank later just how he managed to cram so many things up his sleeves. How he managed to keep so many stickers, rubber gloves, and medical devices up there and still manage to perform an examination was beyond him. Perhaps Frank wasn't completely lying when he said it was magic...

Things proceeded smoothly, the last thing to do was examine their souls. Frank pulled out a device (from his sleeve of course), resembling some sort of flat cell phone. He allowed Sans to hold it.

"what's this?" Sans asked.

"That, my boy, lets me look at your soul, without actually pulling it out." Frank winked. "It's very simple to use: you just point it at a monster and push this button." Frank pointed it out.

Sans turned the device around in his hands, looking over it carefully before handing it back.

"Thank you! Now this is the last thing I need to do, so I need the both of you to stay still." Frank lined the device up at Papyrus first. Both children stayed absolutely still, probably glad this whole ordeal would be over soon. Frank took readings of both Papyrus and then Sans.

When he got to Sans, Grillby could see a brief flicker of shock cross the doctor's features. It was quickly masked as the doctor shoved the device back into his bag. Grillby gave him a concerned look, looking Frank in the eye.

'Later', the other monster mouthed back.

Grillby frowned, that did not sound good at all.

"Well!" Frank was all smiles again. "You've both been such good patients for me! I finished faster than I thought I would!"

"Yes, I am very proud of you both." Grillby patted both children on the head, earning tired smiles from them. *"How about both of you play upstairs until lunch?"*

Both children nodded. As much as they seemed to like the doctor, it still must have been very mentally taxing for the both of them. They were already tensing up again, their patience for being around a stranger wearing thinner and thinner. Grillby scooped both of them up and carried them up the stairs.

Once in their room both children let out a pent-up sigh and immediately crawled under the bed. They didn't seem to be overly afraid. They just needed some space to themselves for a while. Grillby handed them some pillows and a blanket, which they took and once again made a little nest for themselves. He left both children to relax, shutting the door and making his way downstairs again.

Frank was still sitting solemnly on the couch, his expression had changed from his usual joyful visage to one of firm resolve. It was a face one would put on before telling someone terrible news. Grillby swallowed and took a seat.

"How bad is it?" Grillby braced himself.

"I'll be honest with you." Frank folded his hands together, as though he was centering himself. "If you hadn't taken them in, Sans would be dust by now."

Grillby swallowed thickly. He knew it was bad. But that bad? Frank turned to look at Grillby's shocked expression.

"The boy has only one HP." he sighed. "I've....I've never seen anything like it. Quite possibly the only thing keeping him alive, is you and his brother."

"He's....very determined, to care for his brother." Grillby almost couldn't believe it. One HP? Had Sans literally been on the verge of death the past few days? How could he not know? The idea of it chilled him down to the core.

"Not to mention the severe malnutrition. Both children are calcium and vitamin D3 deficient, but Sans has it much worse." Frank continued. "Sans' soul is a mess. It's barely holding itself together. Papyrus is also injured, but his soul is more intact. What in the blazes happened to these kids?"

"I don't know." Grillby let out a sigh. *"But the Guard is investigating."*

"I would venture medical abuse. Those marks on their arm bones are from needles, and not gently administered either. Not to mention the marks on their ribs and back." Frank let out a breath. "I'm going to be honest, it's going to take some time to get them well again."

"I am aware of that."

"Unfortunately I can't heal what's already been healed. Their bones are poorly-healed, mind you, but there isn't much that can be done for that. I can get you a soak for them that can help fill in the marks, but most likely they will always be there." Frank began rooting in his bag, pulling out a jar filled with green glittering powder and handing it to the fire monster.

“This, you’ll need to put in their drink or food. Two spoonfuls twice a day. It will help get their bones back in shape and give them more energy. Don’t worry, it’s tasteless. Let them eat normally and don’t let them skip a meal. For their souls... They just need love and safety.”

“*Thank you.*” Grillby clutched the jar in his hands, looking at the grainy medicine within it. Frank gave Grillby an encouraging pat on the shoulder.

“Don’t worry, old friend. I’m confident that they’ll get better with you looking out for them. They seem to care about you quite a bit.”

“*I will do my best to not disappoint them.*” Grillby felt a bit warmer from that statement. To him it felt like he was walking on eggshells around the children, but today proved just how much the children felt for him. He would have never thought he’d be on the receiving end for such feelings, except from his own cousin.

It was a very nice feeling.

“I’ll drop by tomorrow with some more medicine for them.” Frank stood up, packing his bag. “Don’t hesitate to call me at any time.”

Grillby nodded, touched. After the doctor left, he took the time to sit and process the information he was given.

Sans was in an extremely fragile state, and the only way to help him was to provide him a safe environment. It would be tricky, with his mental state the way it was. He was confident that in time, he would be able to help Sans cope with his past trauma and perhaps find a way to move past it all. Papyrus was doing better, but only by a slim margin. True, he seemed more adjusted, but it’d only been a few days. Such things were yet to be seen.

In the end, he went about fixing lunch, giving the children their space. He decided on burgers and fries again, as it was something they’d be familiar with. He didn’t add the medicine for now. Later, he would explain it to the children. He wasn’t about to be deceitful now, not after over a month of hard-won trust. If that were to be damaged now...

Grillby tried not to think of the worst.

He carried the food upstairs on a tray, along with a few bottles of condiments and glasses of milk. The children seemed to enjoy variety, often surprised and awed by different foods, flavors, and textures. He would allow them to try as many new things as they liked: the more choices, the better.

When he entered their room, he found them quietly giggling to themselves under the bed. It was a relief, he had half expected them to be upset after being exposed to a stranger for several hours. He set the tray on the floor and peered under the bed. Sans and Papyrus were both lying on their stomachs, Sans encouraging Papyrus to put cardboard cutouts of letters in order. Papyrus of course, was doing his own thing and instead trying to fit them together. When they noticed Grillby's ambient light and the smell of food, they looked over towards the fire monster's direction, all smiles.

It's time for lunch." Grillby said, smiling at the two of them. They quickly crawled back out from under the safety of the bed to examine the food before them. Both children sat down, puzzling at the sight of the bottles.

"what's this?" Sans picked up a bottle of ketchup, turning it around in his small hands. Papyrus didn't even wait, going right for the fries.

"That is ketchup. You can put it on food to add more flavor to it." Grillby explained, taking a seat himself.

Sans looked at the bottle, unscrewing the top and taking a hesitant sniff. To Grillby's surprise, he abruptly tilted it back and took a huge pull from it. Grillby made a face. Drinking straight ketchup, that couldn't be very good.

Sans didn't seem to be grossed out. He looked at the bottle again in contemplation, before taking another chug out of it. Grillby suppressed a shudder.

"this is really good. i like it." Sans smiled widely. Grillby could almost see little stars in the lights of his eyes. He seemed so pleased about it that the fire monster dashed all thought to taking the bottle away from him.

This was a child that could change shape into some sort of dog-like lizard and shoot a laser beam out of his mouth. The fact he liked ketchup was less strange than all of the above. He would let Sans have something he liked. Having one HP meant that Sans was nearly ready to give up on life.

Grillby would make sure he'd give him plenty of reasons to keep on living.



Dogaressa walked across the hospital's polished stone floors, her foot claws clicking in the silent hallway. She was walking besides a rabbit monster in a lab coat, a large folder tucked under his arm.

"Here's where we conduct our experiments," the doctor said with a smile, unlocking a door with his keycard. Dogaressa followed the rabbit inside, wincing as he turned on the lights.

Inside was a large room, polished white and gray. Several computers were placed against the wall, some of them occupied with other scientists. There were racks of chemicals and various compounds, labeled carefully and locked tightly in cabinets. A few cages with white rats were scattered about the room, being observed by other doctors.

Despite all the activity and items in the room, there was a wide spacious feeling to it.

("Impressive...") Dogaressa replied, moving in to sniff at the air. ("What research are you doing here exactly?")

"We are looking into some new puzzle designs," The doctor led her inside, gesturing with a paw. "We never know when a human will drop down, nor will we know if a trap will work without testing it out first. Usually we use our rats for social and intelligence experiments, but the King asked for some safer traps. A human can blunder into a trap, but so can an unwary monster. We don't want any unnecessary injury."

("Important work then.") she sniffed again, looking at one of the cages. The white rats inside looked up at her with a sense of curiosity. Perhaps it had never seen a canine monster? One experiment that caught her eye were two separate rats in different cages. They both had a button in their cages that when pressed, dropped a treat in the opposite cage. Both were just happily pressing buttons to feed each other. A clipboard on the side of the cage indicated that this was a social experiment. Perhaps it was an experiment to see if humans might be able to share, but it was beyond Dogaressa's head.

"Yes indeed, though I feel you've come here for some other reason." The doctor gave her a smile.

("I'm afraid a lot of that is classified.") she examined the rats closely. ("May I see the tag numbers for these rats you have?")

“Of course.” the doctor went to a filing cabinet, pulling out a folder and handing it to the canine. Dogaressa opened it up and began to read.

Clover – SOC – F - 129v23

Monty – PUZ – M - b33a44

Rose – PUZ– F - oo99743

The list went on. None of the numbers matched the serial number given to her. She frowned and handed the folder back. (“Well thankfully, I haven’t found what I’m looking for here. But I want to know, do you recognize these numbers?”)

She handed the doctor a slip of paper, which he read quickly.

WD.G – E2 – 001 – S

WD.G – E2 – 002 – P

The doctor scrutinized the numbers and hummed. “Well, I don’t recognize the full serial number, but I know those initials.”

(“Whose initials?”) she demanded, her ears pinned back.

“They look like Dr. Wing Ding Gaster’s initials. I went to school with him, he always marked his experiments like that.”

(“Where is he?”) she struggled to keep the growl out of her voice, but it startled the doctor all the same.

“Uh...last time I checked, he was in Hotland. He’s the Royal Scientist.” he gulped. “Is... Is Gaster in some sort of trouble?”

Dogaressa turned to leave.

(“He will be.”)

Chapter Six

That night passed quietly, the two boys deciding to just stay in their rooms and de-stress after the examination. Sans was helping Papyrus solve a puzzle, who was still at the developmental stage where he was more interested in putting things in his mouth than actually solving anything. Grillby helped the best he could, but once Papyrus decided to do something there wasn't much that could be done to change his mind. Still, it was a pleasant and joyful evening. The children didn't seem to have any lingering fears or anxiety from the visit earlier. Grillby hoped this trend would continue: it wouldn't be good for them to be constantly afraid, as it wasn't healthy for anyone.

Not wanting to pop the bubble of safety the two kids were experiencing, he decided to bring dinner upstairs again. He left them alone only long enough to whip up some macaroni and cheese, a relatively fast dinner to make. He took the meals up, along with glasses of chocolate milk. He figured it would be a good time to introduce the powdered medicine to them.

True to form, Sans just looked over the glittering medicine with a critical eye. Once again Grillby found himself having to prove its safety; putting a spoonful over his portion of pasta. When the power settled over the food, it was quickly absorbed, the color fading away. It left behind faint sparkles all over the food. Grillby took a bite: Frank was true to his word when he said it would be tasteless.

With their fears settled, he mixed the powder into their glasses of chocolate milk. That proved to be another experience for them entirely, seemingly having never tasted anything sweet before. It was good enough that Sans nervously asked for seconds, which the fire monster was happy to provide. It showed that Sans was beginning to get comfortable enough to ask for things, which was excellent progress considering how he was only a few weeks prior. Papyrus didn't seem to have much qualms about asking for things, seemingly wanting bowl after bowl of pasta.

It seemed the youngest had a special love for pasta; Grillby filed that information away for later.

Grillby found it strange just how easy it was to fall into a domestic routine. There was a good feeling he thought he'd never get to experience, especially when the children would look at him, smiling. He never thought he'd ever be raising children, but now...

Well...the house always felt somewhat empty and lonely. Before, he was content with the solitude, but now? Hearing the kids laughing spoiled him. He doubted he could go back to just living alone again. He felt like this was what he was missing.

When it got late, he tucked them into bed and read them a story. It didn't seem to take them long to go to sleep, changing shape so they could curl around each other. He made sure they were comfortable before switching off the lights and heading to bed himself, leaving both doors open a crack.

It seemed he was only asleep for a brief moment, before he was awoken by a soft whimper. He jerked awake and turned on the light on his nightstand, illuminating the room. He saw his door being nudged open slightly as another whimper cut through the air. It sounded like Sans.

"It's alright. You can come in." Grillby sat up in bed.

Nervous, Sans slowly nudged the door open a bit more. He was trembling, and there were fresh tears on his face. Papyrus was laying sprawled on his back, having been carried over. He too was teary-eyed, sniffing. Sans shook and whimpered again.

"Did you both have a bad dream?" Grillby asked softly. Both children sniffled and nodded. Grillby patted his bed in response.

"How about you both sleep in here with me tonight?"

Sans blinked and eyed the bed. He glanced down at the threshold separating the hallway from Grillby's bedroom, rubbing at one of his eyes with a paw. He whimpered again. Perhaps their more canine instincts were at play here? Grillby figured it might be a territorial thing; he would have to ask one of the guards tomorrow.

"It's alright." he repeated, patting the bed again. "I'm sure you will feel better in here. I promised I'd make sure you both are safe, remember?"

Sans slowly began walking into the room, still trembling. He made his way over to the side of the bed, looking upwards with watery eyes. Grillby gave both pups an encouraging smile, reaching over to pick them up, as both were still too short to get up on the bed by themselves. They allowed the fire monster to lift them unto the bed. Grillby noted happily that they felt a little heavier than when he'd first picked them up. It seemed the regular meals were helping.

Once on the bed, both pups crawled into Grillby's lap. He gave them a warm hug, wiped away their tears (despite the sting to his flames) and attempted to soothe them. Soon, they both stopped shaking and simply laid there, enjoying the warmth.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Grillby looked down at Sans. Sans blinked and shook his head with a soft murmur. Grillby gave him a warm smile and stroked his skull.

“Alright. Remember, I am here if you ever want to talk, alright?”

Sans wagged his tail in response and nuzzled his hand. Papyrus was already half-asleep again, letting out a tiny adorable yawn, which caused Sans to yawn in turn.

“Let’s get you both to sleep.” Grillby said, picking Papyrus up from his lap. Papyrus simply closed his eyes and allowed himself to be moved. Grillby set him down on one of the pillows, pulling it down so the blanket could cover them. Sans went to join his brother, curling up around him as usual, hugging the smaller skeleton close to his chest. Grillby tucked them both in, giving them affectionate pats on the head. They must have felt safe, as soon they were both deep asleep. Sans was silent, twitching his tail occasionally though the blanket, while Papyrus began to softly snore.

Grillby switched off the light and settled in himself, lulled to sleep by the sounds of the children's gentle breaths.

The night passed peacefully.

Grillby started awake at 8 *a.m* as per usual. His first thought was to check on the children. They were no longer on the pillow but had moved in the night to press against the fire monster’s side. They looked so content and at peace that Grillby felt horrible that he would have to wake them up. Then again, maybe he didn’t have to?

He got up carefully, so as to not disturb them, changing into his work uniform. He took a blanket and began to wrap both children up, intending to just carry them to the bar. Sans wearily opened an eye socket and yawned, jostled awake as he was being bundled.

“It’s alright Sans, I am taking you both to the bar. You can go back to sleep.”

Not being need to be told twice, Sans huffed and quickly fell asleep again, snuggling deeper into the blankets he was being wrapped in. Papyrus didn’t even stir. Grillby put on his coat and grabbed his keys, holding the puppy bundle close to his chest to shield them from the cold. He was glad the area was mostly deserted this early in the morning.

He didn’t have time to be questioned over why he was carrying a blanket full of bone puppies.

Once inside the bar, he deposited them on the couch in the back, carefully tucking them in. They simply curled around each other with soft yawns. When he was sure they were going to be alright, he went about his prep work for opening.

It was easy to fall into a routine, occasionally going to the back to check on the children. Eventually, they woke up on their own, about an hour before he was due to open. He figured they needed the sleep, especially if they had bad dreams the night prior.

He made breakfast for them, scrambled eggs and orange juice, adding the medicine to the glasses. They changed back to their child forms to eat, yawning but happy.

"If you need anything, I am just beyond this door." Grillby repeated, gesturing to the door that separated the back room from the bar counter.

Sans rubbed the sleep out of his eyes with a soft smile.

"okay." he simply said, and went to crack open another jigsaw puzzle as Papyrus tried to climb inside one of the already open puzzle boxes. Grillby smiled and left them to their own devices, going to open the door for business.

Of course, the dogs were all outside, waiting to be let in. Greater and Lesser Dog barked a greeting. Doggo, Dogamy, and Dogaressa all waved.

"Hello Grillby! How are the kids?" Dogamy asked as they all filed in from the cold.

"They are doing much better, thank you." the bartender smiled, leading the pack to their usual seat.

("Good, because we have a breakthrough in the case.") Dogaressa gave the bartender a triumphant grin, showing every one of her sharp white teeth.

"R-really?" Grillby was surprised. *"That was fast."*

"Of course, we don't want the man who did this walking free any longer than he has to." Dogamy replied. "The whole guard knows about this now."

("We just need to compile evidence to take to Captain Gnash.") Dogaressa continued. ("Would it be alright if we talked to the kids soon?")

Grillby frowned. *"Well...you can try. I have to warn you, they are still very shy."*

"I wouldn't be surprised." Dogamy shrugged. "Luckily we got help in that front too."

Dogamy reached over and patted Greater Dog on one of his large shoulder pads. Greater Dog gave a cheerful yip and a thumbs up. Grillby raised an eyebrow.

("Greater Dog is a certified therapy dog.") Dogaressa explained. ("He's worked with a lot of abused and traumatized pups. He knows what he's doing.")

Grillby looked over the large canine. *“What made him decide to become a guard?”*

Greater Dog yipped.

“He says to stop things at their source.” Doggo translated. “The more scumbags in jail, the less kids end up being hurt, or falling through the system.” It seemed like a pretty good reason to Grillby.

“Oh...well...I can close down tomorrow. I will need to tell the boys there will be someone coming over. They need time to prepare.”

(“Thanks, Grillby.”) The dog nodded.

The conversation was interrupted by the bell above the front entrance chiming. All present stopped talking to look over to the newcomer. Grillby sighed in relief when he saw who it was.

Frank shook out his feet. He was dressed in a thick coat, and carrying a large bag with him. There was a thick envelope tucked under his other arm. He shook himself free from the lingering snowflakes, sighing in relief.

“Hello, Dr. Sphyrae.” Grillby greeted, waving the salamander/fish monster over. Frank adjusted his glasses with a sigh.

“I told you, my boy, just call me Frank.” he said as he waddled over towards the group, smiling as he adjusted the packet under his arm.

“This is the Royal Guard. They are handling Sans and Papyrus’s case,” Grillby introduced. *“And this is Frank Sphyrae: he’s their doctor.”*

The dogs barked out a cheerful greeting.

“Oh well, it’s a good thing I brought this along then.” Frank chuckled, handing the thick envelope over to Dogaressa, who took it with a paw.

(“What’s this?”)

“My official medical report.” Frank ran a hand over his bald head. “Trust me, it wasn’t easy to write.”

Dogaressa opened the envelope and began to look over the papers within. There were photographs and detailed written reports. There were even pictures of the kids’ souls and their horrible condition. Dogaressa looked ill as she scanned through the whole thing, placing the documents back into the envelope.

Frank nodded when he saw the dog's face. "I trust it's good enough for court?"

("Yes,") she squeaked, then swallowed. ("Thank you.")

Frank gave her a sympathetic smile. "Thank me by putting whoever did this behind bars." He took the bag he was holding and held it out towards Grillby. "Here you go, my boy— the medicine I promised."

Grillby took it, and winced at the weight of it. "*All of this is medicine?*"

"Yep." Frank nodded. "More nutrient powder. There's also a soak in there for them, which should help fill in their marks and help the bones get stronger. There's also, well...ointment in case...you know." Frank made a scratching motion across his face. The dogs looked confused, but wisely didn't say anything.

Ointment in case Sans hurt himself again. Grillby swallowed. "*Thank you.*"

"Remember, you can call me anytime." Frank put on a smile. He reached over and patted Grillby's shoulder supportively. Grillby merely nodded.

With that, Frank turned to leave. "Well, I'm off! There's a little bunny in town with a cough I need to see to!"

Grillby and the dogs said their goodbyes to the retreating doctor. The medicine in the bag suddenly felt heavier. It was almost like it was solidifying the reality of the situation. The children were not well. Things were bad now, but he hoped in time they would get better for the two children. The medicine could help heal their bodies, but what about their minds?

Greater Dog barked and gave Grillby a wide doggy smile. It was infectious, causing a smile to tug across the fire monster's own features

"Don't worry Grillby, they'll get better." Dogamy smiled.

("We'll be here too in case you need us.") Dogaressa added.

The other three dogs barked. Grillby had never felt so supported in his life.

"Thank you."



The rest of the day passed quickly. The children kept to themselves, having managed to complete one puzzle which Papyrus promptly tore apart again. Grillby took the time to take his lunch break with them in the back room. Sans and Papyrus were all smiles, and it warmed the bartender down to the core.

He took the time to explain that the Royal Guards were going to meet them the next day. He didn't keep any information from them, telling them honestly that they would want to know about where they came from, and what happened to them.

They would need to be brave. The Guards wanted to put who hurt them in jail, so they could have peace of mind and receive the justice they so rightly deserved. They would just need help from the two, if they were willing to provide it. Of course, they wouldn't have to do anything that they didn't want to do.

Sans took a few deep breaths but then looked up. He said something that would stick with Grillby for the rest of his life.

"as long as you're there, things will be okay, right?"

Grillby couldn't help but smile at that innocent statement. *"Yes, of course. You can trust me, I won't allow anything to hurt you both."*

Sans gave a smile smile. "i'll try to be brave, but...it's scary..."

"I know. You are already brave, Sans. There's no shame in needing help or having someone there to support you."

Sans fiddled with his fingers, but smiled. "okay" was his simple answer, but there was a note of contentedness to it. Grillby almost wished he didn't have to go back to work, but soon he had to leave them again. He made sure to give each child a big hug before heading back to the bar.

Soon enough, it was time to close up for the night. Sans insisted on walking back home, wanting to test out his now stronger legs. He held Grillby's hand, just in case he stumbled, but it seemed that food, rest, and medicine had gotten Sans to the point where he could walk comfortably again. Papyrus, of course, wanted to be carried, taking a quick nap in the fire monster's arms.

The night passed by peacefully. The children had spent the time playing. Sans had discovered a Rubik's Cube and was trying to solve it. Papyrus sat and watched, occasionally babbling and pointing as he tried to help his brother solve it. Grillby fed them and put them to bed. It seemed that thankfully there were no nightmares that night, as they stayed asleep until the next day.

The medicine seemed to be working magic on the two boys. They had only had a few meals with the medicine, and suddenly they had plenty of energy and were actually moving around. Grillby hadn't noticed how weak and listless they were until today. Now, the change was absolutely staggering, especially in Sans: before, he would simply lay around and sleep. Since breakfast, the two children were actively playing with each other in a flurry of activity. It was good to see them tussle and chase each other; an obvious sign of improvement to their health. It was wonderful to see them having fun and enjoying life like any child should.

Sans was particularly happy, for Grillby had managed to wash and mend his hoodie. Even though it was quite big on the child and still slightly ragged-looking, Sans still had an obvious attachment to it. When it was given to him, Sans quickly put it on and sat, hugging it to himself. Grillby could practically see stars in his eye sockets; they were so bright. Who knew the simple act of repairing an article of clothing would instill such a reaction? Grillby, for one, was just glad that Sans was happy.

Currently, both children were play-fighting in quadruped form, other toys and coloring books forgotten for the moment. Sans might have been stronger, but Papyrus was much faster, avoiding his brother's paws and jaws with ease. Catching him was a challenge, especially with his restored energy levels. Sans had to resort to trickery, pretending to be asleep, and then snatching Papyrus up when he came to investigate. Papyrus squeaked and flailed as Sans trapped the toddler close to his chest and nuzzled him lovingly, refusing to release him. Papyrus could not be contained for long and eventually managed to slip away. Then, the process started up all over again.

All too soon, there was a knock at the door, and the children reflexively went to hide behind the arm of the couch, eyes wide.

"It's alright. It's just the dogs I told you about, remember?" Grillby bent down next to the kids, petting them gently. Sans nodded, but didn't move from behind the couch. Papyrus whimpered and went to hide under Sans.

"It'll be alright. I'm going to let them in, okay?"

Sans put on the bravest face he could and nodded. Grillby smiled encouragingly and went to open the door. Outside were Dogamy and Dogaressa, who both smiled.

“Hello Grillby! (It’s good to see you!)” they both said in unison, holding hands. Grillby was glad to see they left their axes somewhere else before coming, but there seemed to be one person missing...

“Hello Dogi, where is Greater Dog?” Grillby tried to look beyond them, but couldn’t see the armored dog.

He was answered by a little yip, coming directly behind the Dogi. They parted, to reveal an armor-less Greater Dog. Without his magical armor, Greater Dog was only the size of a small domestic Pomeranian. He wagged his curly tail and looked up at the fire monster, all smiles.

“Well then.” Grillby suppressed a chuckle. He figured Greater Dog would want to be less intimidating, but to see him this small was a little silly. He moved to the side. “Come on in, they are in the living room. I must warn you, they are a little frightened.”

“It’s okay, we promise we won’t push them.” The dogs walked inside, wiping off their paws. All four monsters looked into the living room.

Sans was watching from behind the arm of the couch. He was trembling slightly. He was joined by Papyrus who also watched silently. Dogaressa suppressed a squeal.

(“Oh gosh, they are so cute.”) she whispered. Sans and Papyrus ducked behind the couch again. (“Dear, when are we going to get to have puppies?”)

Dogamy instantly blushed red. “Um...d-dear. We can discuss this later.”

Grillby went to comment, but Greater Dog yipped and pushed past all three monsters. He made his way to the center of the room and sank into a play bow, wagging his curly tail. He made sure to be close enough where he could be seen, but not close enough to encroach on the children’s space.

<“Hello!”> he yipped. <“My name is Greater Dog!”>

Sans backed up fearfully. He let out a nervous loud whimper, trying to shield Papyrus away from sight.

<“DON’T HURT US.”>

Sans was speaking dog...somewhat. It sounded slightly off, as though it was being spoken with a thick accent. It was loud and rough compared to the more subtle dog language. Greater Dog could at least understand the words. He yipped again.

<“I’m not going to hurt anyone!”> Greater Dog wagged his tail. Sans watched, his eyes flickering blue as he tried to figure out if there was a threat in front of him. Grillby, Dogamy, and Dogaressa stayed perfectly still, watching the exchange. Grillby couldn’t understand a single word, but the dogs apparently could.

“How can they be scared of Greater Dog? I mean...look at him?” Dogamy whispered, gesturing to Greater Dog’s adorable fluffy body.

Grillby shook his head. “*I don’t know.*” he whispered back, defeated. They continued to watch quietly.

<“Hey, it must not be very fun, being back there all by yourselves.”> Greater Dog switched tactics, rolling over onto his back. He let his limbs sprawl out in the air. <“Don’tcha wanna play?”>

With tiny squeaky barks, Papyrus shoved his head out from under his brother, looking directly at the dog. <“**PWAY???**”>

<“Yes! Play!”>

Sans pinned his brother down on the floor to prevent him from rushing out into the living room, causing the smaller monster to protest with an angry squabbling noise. He ignored his brother’s struggle and nervously looked at the two other dogs in the room.

<“**WHO ARE THEY?**”> Sans growled.

<“Didn’t Mr. Grillby tell you? Those are Royal Guards.”> Greater Dog rolled about. <“They are here to talk to you, but first it’s time to play.”>

<“**PWAY!!!**”> Papyrus rumbled loudly as he struggled. <“**PWAYPWAYPWAYPWAY!**”> Sans wouldn’t be able to hold him down forever. He whimpered again.

<“I’ve known Mr.Grillby since a loooong time ago.”> Greater Dog rolled until he was sitting on his haunches, wagging his tail. <“He wouldn’t let anyone in here that would hurt ya!”>

Sans seemed to contemplate his words, but abruptly squeaked as Papyrus once again escaped his clutches, launching himself at the fluffy white dog. Sans reached out with his jaws in hopes of snagging Papyrus’s sweater, but missed by mere centimeters. He could only watch as Papyrus ran right up to Greater Dog, just stopping short of outright crashing into him. He sank into a play bow himself, wagging his tail so fast it blurred.

<“**PWAY!!!**”>

Greater Dog smiled and rose to all fours. <“Yes! What do you want to play first?”>

<“**CHASE ME!**”> Papyrus took off into a run, his claws making soft ripping noises as they caught on the carpet. Greater Dog yipped and took off after him, running as fast as his short little legs could. Sans watched the interaction carefully.

“Is...is it going well?” Grillby couldn’t understand a single ‘word’ being said, nor the subtle body language included in speaking Dog.

(“It looks like it. Greater Dog seemed to have calmed little Pap down, but Sans?”) She looked over at the older bone monster, who stuck close to the side of the couch, simply watching. (“It looks like he’ll need more time.”)

Grillby nodded. *“Yes, it seems Sans is the more wary of the two, but he’ll come around. He just needs time to adjust.”* He thought a moment. *“Let’s go sit down. He’ll probably feel braver if I’m around.”*

The other two dogs nodded in agreement, carefully making their way into the living room. There were small children and a small dog to watch out for, and it didn’t help that two out of the three were running around and becoming a bit of a tripping hazard.

Grillby sat down on the side of the couch nearest to Sans, and looked down over the side.

“Sans?”

Sans looked up with wide eyes and whimpered.

“It’s alright, Sans. They aren’t doing anything that could hurt you or Papyrus. I’m here for you, remember?”

Sans didn’t make any noise, but merely crawled out from behind the end of the couch to sit under Grillby’s legs. He pressed himself up against the fabric of the couch and just watched everything with wide eyes.

Dogaressa looked over. (“Hello Sans! My name is Dogaressa!”)

”And I’m Dogamy!”

Sans looked at her, rocking himself slightly from his position of safety.

<“**hi.**”> he replied with a soft, shy murmur. He turned and shoved his face against one of Grillby’s legs, clearly not liking the attention.

<("Aww...It's alright, sweetheart. Do you know why we're here?")>

Sans took a moment, letting his courage build up. He murmured again.

<'cause...cause you wanna ask things?'>

"That's right." Dogamy nodded and smiled. "We want to put the people who hurt you and your brother in jail. We just need a little help to do so."

Sans tilted his head. <"what's jail?">

("It's a place where people who purposely hurt others have to go. There, they can't hurt anyone else. We want to put the people that hurt you both there, so they can't hurt anyone ever again.") Dogaressa explained carefully. Sans whined sadly.

<"then I'd have to go there too, right? i hurt things."> he whined miserably and shoved his face into Grillby's legs again, shuddering.

"No no, whatever happened, it wasn't your fault, okay?" Dogamy leaned down, speaking with concern. "Jail is only for people that do it on purpose, okay? Like the one who hurt you and your brother."

("You didn't do anything wrong, okay sweetheart?")

Sans sniffed and looked up at Grillby. <"hug???"> he whimpered again.

Grillby didn't need to speak dog to understand what Sans wanted. He reached down and scooped him up, settling the pup down on his lap. Sans snuggled close into the fire monster's chest as Grillby wrapped his arms around the child. The Dogi watched with concern.

"It's alright, Sans." he soothed. "Remember what I told you the other day? You aren't bad. None of this is your fault."

Sans whined, but allowed himself to be soothed. He relaxed slightly, just enjoying being held for a moment. Grillby pet his smooth skull with a hand.

The moment was interrupted by Papyrus skidding out of control and colliding into the side of the couch. The Dogi and fire monster looked down with concern as Greater Dog abruptly flopped over next to the bone pup, out of breath.

<"Wow, that kid is fast!"> he panted.

"Papyrus, are you alright?"

Papyrus shook his head and squeaked, seemingly unhurt. He marched over, propping himself up against the couch with his paws, looking directly at Sans.

<“**SANS!**”> he barked. <“**SANS! SANS! SANS! SANS! SANS!**”>

Sans wiggled a bit in Grillby’s arms, so he can look down. <“**what pap?**”>

Papyrus threw back his head and let out a loudly drawn out howling noise.

<“**PWAYYYYYYYYYY WIFFFFFFFFF MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE**”>

Sans snorted and went to relax again. Clearly not pleased, Papyrus ran off, quickly returning with their toy rope. He threw it on the ground in front of the couch.

<“**TUG TUG!**”> He demanded. <“**TUGGG TUGGG!**”>

He was determined to keep screaming until his brother stopped being lazy and played with him. The Dogi stifled chuckles at that.

<“**okay gosh! stop yelling!**”> Sans wiggled, having enough of Papyrus’s shrill calls. <“**i’ll play tug tug!**”>

Grillby set him down on the floor again. Sans padded over to the Tug of War rope. Papyrus erupted into noise.

<“**YAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAY!**”>

Sans snorted and picked up the rope; before being promptly attacked by his little brother. The three bigger monsters sat back and watched. The two pups fought over the rope for a little while as Greater Dog caught his breath. Sans relaxed enough that when Greater Dog came over again, he gave in to his brother’s demands to allow him to play with them. Sans was still shy and distant, but he was allowing others to be in his space while remaining calm; which was the only thing they could ask of him for the moment.

They tussled and chased each other around for nearly half an hour, until all three were worn out and panting on the floor. Sans and Papyrus shifted back into their bipedal form and just laid on the floor a while, panting with wide smiles. Grillby also smiled. They were right about Greater Dog, as he seemed to have worked all the nervous tension out of both children, only leaving behind the sense of contentedness.

“Did you kids have fun with Greater Dog?” Dogamy asked, earning nods in return. Greater Dog was also flopped over. Sans pulled himself into a sitting position and stretched his arms.

“that was fun.” he admitted quietly.

(“Well, perhaps Greater Dog can visit you two again to play in the future.”)

<“I really don’t mind, these are great kids.”> Greater Dog barked a reply.

Sans thought and looked down at Papyrus, who was still all smiles. “maybe?” he admitted. Well, it was a start.

“Just let Grillby know and we’ll tell him, okay?” Dogamy smiled.

“Yes Sans, if you want anyone to visit, you just need to ask.” Grillby added. This way, it would be up to Sans to choose when he wanted to interact with people. He hoped Sans would take them up on such an offer, but in the end it was his choice.

Sans smiled softly. “okay.” he said. He crawled over to his brother and scooped the toddler up into a hug. Papyrus hugged back and babbled excitedly.

(“Okay Sans, do you think you’d be willing to answer some questions now?”)

Sans looked up. “what kinda questions?”

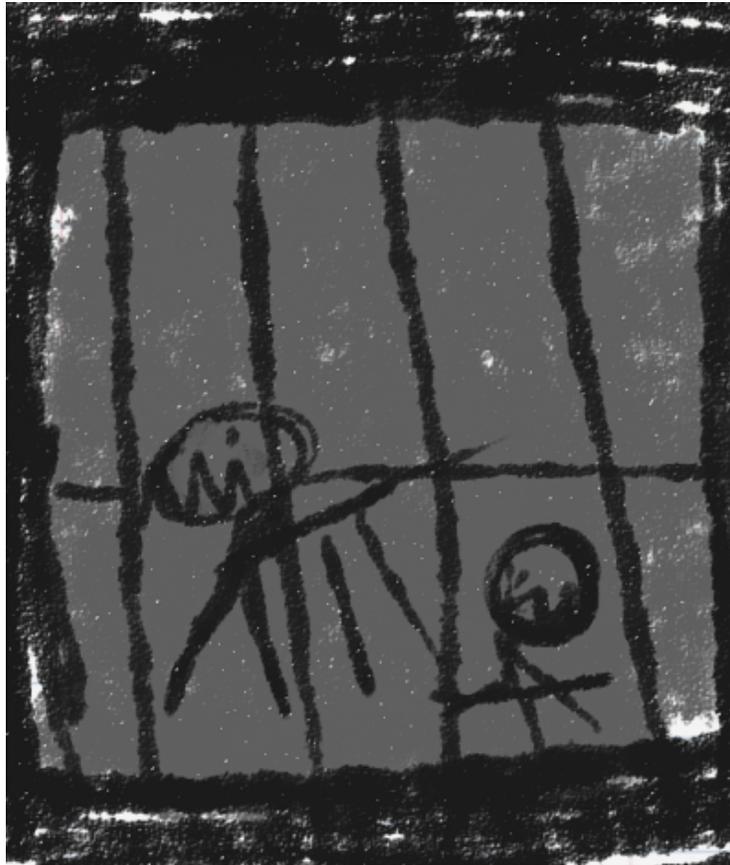
“Well, this is going to be a little different. We’re going to ask a question and you can draw out the answer.” Dogamy explained. “That should be a little easier, if that’s alright?”

Sans thought a moment with his arms full of toddler. “i think i can do that.”

He set Papyrus down and went to get his notebook and box of crayons. Grillby had discovered early on that the two loved colors, so they had quite the collection of crayons now. They just loved doodling, and the notebook was already halfway filled with rough drawings and colorful shapes. Sans brought them both over and sat down, turning to a clean page in the book. Papyrus crawled after him, sitting down to watch. Greater Dog came in to settle by Sans’s side to offer some support. Sans smiled, seemingly put at ease to have support from all sides.

(“Alright dear, can you show us where you lived before Mr. Grillby took you in?”)

Sans thought for a moment looking over his box of crayons. He selected the gray and black crayons and started to draw. It didn’t take him long, before he turned the book around to show all those present.



Grillby's flames unconsciously crackled. *Oh god*, Sans had drawn a picture of a cage, and a small, sparse one at that. He hadn't drawn a bed, or any type of toys or stimulation. It was just an expanse of gray with ominous black bars. What was worse was the way Sans' face looked as he drew it; like it was completely normal to him.

"Can you tell us a bit about it?" Dogamy kept his voice even and calm. Sans nodded.

"we didn't like it. it was small and cold." He tore out the page and set it aside. "there wasn't much to do there."

("Can you show us how you got out?") Dogaressa also was managing to keep calm by some miracle. Sans hesitated, looking around.

"It's alright Sans." Grillby swallowed. *"You aren't in any trouble."*

"yeah, but i... don't want them to get in trouble." Sans replied nervously. Greater Dog pressed into Sans's side, causing the child to reach down and pet the dog.

“Whoever got you out is a hero Sans, they are not going to be in trouble.” Grillby did his best to soothe Sans again. It seemed to work, as Sans took a breath and started choosing more crayons. He began to draw and once again showed off the finished creation



Sans had drawn a little yellow...dinosaur?...wearing what seemed to be glasses, holding a box in their hand. He had drawn them with a big kind smile.

“Who’s that?”

Sans hesitated. “her name is alphys.” he said fondly, looking down at the paper.

“What’s in her hand there?” Dogamy pointed out.

“that’s her ‘celly fone’. She got us out with it.” Sans frowned. “i... hope she’s okay...”

(“I’m sure she is. We can check in, and make sure she’s alright.”) Sans smiled at that. (“How did she get you out?”)

“she said... she said she was a 'hakkar', and she used her 'celly fone' to make the locks go away.” he explained. “she said it wasn't right that the white coats were being mean to us.”

Dogamy nodded. “That's right, she sounds very smart. Do you know how she found you in the first place?”

Sans tapped his chin in thought. “she said...she said her 'daddy' worked upstairs. there was a door nobody could get into, but she could 'cause of her 'celly fone'. she wanted to see what was 'down there'”

“So where you were kept is below ground?”

Sans thought back, remembering. “we had to go up a bunch to get out.”

(“Can you tell us a little about who Alphys's daddy is?”)

“alphys said he makes robots.” Sans pulled out the page and set it aside. “and that he was nice even though he wears a white coat too.”

“I see, they both sound very nice.” Dogamy, glanced over at Dogaressa with a nod.

“Can you tell us what happened when Alphys helped you both escape?”

“she came by when the lights were off, and helped us get out.” Sans started explaining, as he put back the crayons he used to draw his savior. “we got outside, and there were big people. she told us to run, so they wouldn't catch us. so we ran away, and she ran out to distract them.” He spoke the last part with a sense of guilt, fingering the page. “i hope she's okay...”

(“Sweetheart, I'm sure she is. She sounds very clever and smart.”) Dogaressa smiled, attempting to put the child at ease. (“Now...I'm sorry. This might be a little hard, but can you show us the one that hurt you both?”)

Sans took in a sharp breath. Greater Dog nuzzled up against the child's side. Papyrus patted Sans on the legs and gave encouraging babbles. Sans looked down at his crayon box and chose the black and white crayons.

He began to draw nervously, but quickly, as if he wanted to get it done and over with as soon as possible.



He revealed a stern looking person. Their hands were raised threateningly, with big holes in them. Their face was slightly angry, but impersonal. Sans had filled in the area around them with black. Sans shivered.

“his hands hurt.” was his only response, tearing off the paper. He put it under the other two pictures as though to hide it away. All three monsters were silent, trying their best to reign in their emotions. It would not do any good to upset the child any further than what he was now.

“Thank you Sans, I know that was very hard.” Dogamy gave the child an encouraging smile. “It was very brave of you to do.”

(“Yes, thank you Sans, you’ve helped us a lot.”) Dogaressa smiled. (“One last drawing, okay? Then we’ll leave you two alone.”)

Sans looked up and tilted his head.

("Can you draw how you feel, living with Mr. Grillby?") Sans actually smiled at that, and went to choose more colors.



What he revealed was an obvious picture of happiness. He had drawn himself, Grillby, and his brother with big smiling faces. It looked like they were getting hugged, as a happy pink color filled in the background.

They were both very happy here. All three monsters smiled as Sans tore out that picture and set it on top of the pile.

"Thank you very much Sans, you've helped us out immensely." Dogamy smiled.

<"Yes Sans, you did a good job today. You should feel proud!"> Greater Dog yipped and nuzzled Sans's side.

Sans just simply gathered up the paper and held them out for someone to take. Dogaressa took them carefully and slipped them into her cloak. Sans abruptly stood and picked up his brother. Wordlessly, he went to sit under Grillby's legs again.

Clearly, they'd had enough emotional tugging for one day.

"I'm proud of you both." Grillby said as he picked up both children and settled them into a hug. Both kids smiled slightly, but were obviously tired. *"I trust that should help you both with your case?"* he addressed the dogs next.

"Oh yes." Dogamy grinned. "This is all we needed."

("Yes, you wouldn't know it, but Sans gave us a LOT of vital information. We just want to try and contact their friend, before we take this to the captain.")

Sans stirred at the mention of his rescuer.

"Don't worry Sans, the guards will let us know if she's alright. I am sure she is." Grillby comforted the children.

"We'll let ourselves out." Dogamy went to stand. "You got your hands full at the moment."

("We'll keep you updated! You kids take care.")

<"See you kids later! Hope to play again real soon!"> Greater Dog wagged his tail and went to follow the other Canines.

Soon, it was just the three of them again.

"I am very proud of you two." Grillby repeated himself. The children deserved to hear some positive encouragement. *"I knew you both could do it."*

Sans leaned in and smiled, "i... guess I did?"

Papyrus yawned. Grillby looked at the clock, and was shocked at how late it has gotten.

"Are you both hungry?" he asked.

Both kids nodded enthusiastically. Grillby smiled.

"I think you both deserve a treat. How about lasagna for dinner?"

"what's that?" Sans tilted his head.

"Pasta with tomatoes and cheese." Both kids brightened. Sans had shown he had a rather big love for tomatoes in any form, while Papyrus was Papyrus. Both kids scooted off the fire monster to sit on the other side of the couch, looking up expectantly.

Grillby chuckled.



Dinner had went over as well as expected. Both children loved the food... probably a little too much. They were dirty again, especially Papyrus who had forgone a fork and used his hands to shovel the pasta in his mouth. Then of course, he wanted to hug his brother and got *him* dirty too. They needed another bath.

Grillby put the clean clothes and towels on the counter, turning again to examine the jar. Inside were marble-sized, sparkling white pellets, somewhat chalky in appearance. There were faint golden glints of sparkles in the pellets, catching in the artificial light of the washroom. The printed instructions on the jar told him to use one pellet each day and just let the kids soak. Apparently there was calcium and other minerals in it, to help make their bones stronger, something the boys needed desperately.

He turned on the faucet, adding one of the pellets to the warm water. The pellet immediately began to dissolve in the water, turning the bath a milky white. It began to froth, putting a layer of pleasant smelling bubbles on top of the water, almost like it was a bubble bath. A few gold bits of sparkles shined in through the water and bubbles. The whole thing smelled soothing, like freshly baked sugar cookies. A sweet and homely scent. Perhaps aromatherapy was involved here too?

Sans and Papyrus watched the tub fill up, curious.

"what's that?" Sans asked.

"It's more medicine." Grillby replied, shutting off the water once the tub was filled. There was quite a few more bubbles in the tub now, making a thick layer above the steaming water.

"oh. for what?" Sans tilted his head. He looked at the water, somewhat nervous but not overly fearful. The obvious trust he was putting in Grillby astounded him. Sans was now beginning to recognize that medicine being given to him was not going to hurt him or his brother—well, as long as the fire monster was the one giving the medicine. Sans reached in carefully, and poked a bubble with a finger, watching it pop. He looked completely fascinated. Grillby wondered if he'd ever seen bubbles before.

"It's to make your bones feel better. It will also fill in the... marks... you both have. It will take some time, but you should feel better soon." Grillby smiled. Sans hummed and subconsciously began to pick at the bar-code through his hoodie again, face skewed up in thought.

"Yes, it'll take care of that too."

Sans gave a small smile as though that statement was too good to be true, but wanted to humor the older monster. Papyrus started to angrily babble, clearly wanting to get in to play with the bubbles, but too short to climb inside.

Grillby chuckled. *"Come now, let's get you both in."* He helped both children undress, picking them up and placing them in the bubbly water to sit.

Both children looked stunned once inside the tub, touching the bubbles with a sense of awe and wonder. Soon they were picking up handfuls of bubbles and blowing them at each other, giggling and laughing. Sans picked up handfuls of bubbly foam and put it on Papyrus's head.

"you got a hat, pap." he giggled.

Papyrus seemed pleased about the situation, touching the bubbles on his head as he posed awkwardly. "NYEH HEH HEH!"

Grillby smiled, watching them giggle and play with the bubbles. It was good to see them having a good time. Fear didn't suit them at all. Sans and Papyrus continued to mess with the bubbles for a little while longer, eventually settling down to relax in the hot water, almost sleepily.

Suddenly Sans eyes widened in confusion. The small skeleton picked his hands up from the water and looked at them closely. He began to move a bit, looking about himself.

"Is something wrong, Sans?" Grillby asked, concerned.

"it's..." Sans tilted his head as he looked at his arms. "things don't hurt."

Grillby raised an eyebrow, "Hurt? What hurts?"

"everything, usually." Sans replied completely matter-of-factly, as it was completely normal. "but it doesn't now."

There was a soft amazed tone to his voice. He gently touched his arms and ran a few small fingers along the poorly-healed pockmarks and cracks in them.

His eyes were wide with disbelief. Papyrus seemed a bit confused himself, but simply leaned back against the tub and closed his eyes in a state of pure relaxation. The toddler was sinking deeper and deeper into the bubbles, and seemed completely fine with it.

“Sans, have both of you been in pain this whole time?” Grillby swallowed. Sans gave a simple nod back in return. There was a brief spark of disappointment in himself. He should have been able to catch that, right? Did he really allow a small child to spend days in pain, because he wasn’t observant enough? But Sans seemed to be a master of hiding things from him. It made sense that he would hide his hurt from him. After all, acknowledging pain took a backseat to pure survival. Was he so used to pain that it was second nature to him? What was Papyrus’s state? Grillby took a deep breath to calm himself.

As though sensing the bartender’s thoughts, Sans put on a worried expression, sinking a bit deeper into the bubbles. Grillby centered himself and took another breath.

“Sans, can you and your brother make a promise to me?”

Sans tilted his head.

“If you and your brother are in pain, will you please tell me? Neither of you deserve to hurt, and keep hurting. I want to make you both feel better, if I can.”

Sans looked away, suddenly self-conscious. “things usually just...hurt.” he tried to explain. “it’s always been like that. it just doesn’t now.”

“That is the medicine working. It should make the hurt go away altogether.” Grillby gave Sans a warm smile. *“You two don’t have to be in pain, or stay in pain, ever again.”*

Sans swirled a hand in the water, thinking. He finally looked up with a small smile.

“okay.” he announced, giving the fire monster a thumbs up. Grillby chuckled.

“Then together, we’ll both make sure to keep our promises. How’s that?”

Sans grinned. Things were going to be alright.



RING! RING!

A large orange dinosaur monster sighed. He slowly trudged across his living room floor, avoiding the landmines of Lego pieces, dolls, and various Tinkertoy parts. His daughter, a lighter colored version of himself, was sitting on the floor, building as usual.

RING! RING!

“Hold on, I’m coming.” he grumbled, finally picking his way across the room. “Alphys dear, can you clear a path for me?”

“Alright, Dad.” Alphys replied in a high, squeaky voice. “I’m building a robot for Miss Becky to drive!” she pointed at her doll as it sat beside a large Lego... thing. “She’s gonna save the galaxy!”

“That’s great, dear.” The father smiled and picked up the phone. “Hello?”

(“Hello, Mr. Bertram?”)

“Speaking,” Bertram replied, twirling the cord around one of his claws. “How can I help you?”

(“Do you have a daughter named Alphys?”)

Bertram started, looking over at his daughter, who was trying to shove the doll into the small Lego cockpit. “Yes? What is this about?”

(“Don’t worry, she isn’t in any trouble. We believe she has witnessed a crime. We’d like to talk to her, if it’s okay.”)

“Who is this?” he frowned.

(“Dogaressa, captain of the Canine Unit of the Royal Guard.”) the voice continued, (“I’m sorry, I don’t mean to cause any alarm, but her testimony could put a very bad person behind bars.”)

“Wait...” Bertram hushed his voice. “Is this about... she was talking about bone puppies not too long ago...”

Alphys heard him anyway. “Daddy, who’s that on the phone?”

(“Yes, do you mind if I speak with her for a few moments?”)

Bertram sighed, “Alright, come over here for a moment dear, someone wants to talk to you.”

Alphys powered through her avalanche of toys with surprising speed. She took the phone and put it to her ear.

“Hello? Is this about Sans and Papyrus?” She squeaked, her claws shaking. “Are they okay?”

(“Yes, they are safe now. They’ve been wondering if you are okay too. How are you?”) the kindly voice replied.

“I’m f-fine.” she stuttered back. “I w-was so w-worried...”

(“It’s okay, they are safe now. But I would like to talk to you about how you found them.”)

Alphys swallowed. “O-okay. Can I see them again?”

(“Of course. They have a little bit of healing to do, but they would love to see you again. Can you put your daddy back on the phone?”)

Alphys smiled and handed the phone back to her father. She stood there, watching.

“What do I need to do?” he grumbled into the phone, feeling immensely guilty. After all, she was telling him stories about two bone children being kept in the labs. Of course he didn’t believe her; how could he?

(“Just take her down to the Capital’s guard office tomorrow. We can talk there. And don’t worry, everything is going to be fine.”)

“We’ll be there.” he swallowed. “Thank you.”

(“No, thank **you!**”)

With that the phone went dead, and Bertram put it back in its cradle with a sigh.

What the hell did his kid get into?

Chapter Seven

Bertram and Alphys stood before the Capital guard office. It was nestled snugly into the street, flanked by all sides by even more buildings, crammed all together to maximize space. Bertram thought for a moment that perhaps it would be as intimidating and harsh as some of the guards themselves, but it turned out to be the complete opposite. To the contrary, the building was more welcoming and inviting. Sure, it was built for defense, with thick walls and small windows, but there was a sense of safety here that put his worries at ease.

He held his small daughter by the hand. She was more nervous than he was, but to his surprise there was only firm resolve on her features. She was a kid on a mission. He smiled down at her and earned a smile back. Together they entered the building, glad to be away from the crowded sidewalk.

The inside was much like a human police station. There were guards taking breaks and talking, as other guards sat at desks and filed away paperwork. Some were writing reports on some older models of computers, frowning at they typed. There was a closed office to the side, the windows covered in blinds. The smell of coffee was thick in the air.

They stood still for a minute, wondering what to do, before a familiar voice called out from the busy room.

“Ah! Dr. Bertram!”

A large female dog wearing a black cloak strode across the room, avoiding the clutter with practiced ease. She wagged her tail as she drew closer, holding out a paw.

“Thank you so much for coming! I’m Dogaressa! We talked on the phone last night.”

Bertram took the paw in his claws and shook it. “Nice to meet you.”

The dog looked down at Alphys with a warm smile. (“And you must be the little hero! Welcome!”)

Alphys blushed and hid a bit behind her father’s leg. Dogaressa merely smiled.

“Come now, let’s go to the Captain’s office. We can talk there.”

Both reptile monsters nodded and allowed themselves to be lead to the office with closed blinds. They had to navigate carefully through the many guards rushing to go about their duties, but Dogaressa turned out to be a fine guide. She knocked on the door.

("Captain! They're here.")

"Come on in then." replied a rough deep voice. Dogaressa nodded and opened the door, ushering the two reptile monsters inside.

Sitting behind the desk was a large and quite muscular fish monster. Most of his body was covered in thick black armor, exposing only his face. A deep red cape was draped over his shoulders and was thrown haphazardly over a chair he was sitting on. He looked rather fierce, with piercing yellow eyes and a mouth full of sharp fangs. His scales were deep green, almost black, and covered with various scars. A nameplate on the desk designated him as 'CAPTAIN GNASH'.

Completely subverting the rather fierce image was a coffee mug in his hand with '#1 Dad' enclosed in a heart, printed on its side. At the desk was a proudly displayed family photos, showing the captain with a salamander-type monster and what was obviously his young daughter. Bertram sighed internally. They were dealing with another father. Things would be okay.

"Welcome, have a seat." Gnash grinned, gesturing to three seats set in front of the desk. Bertram nodded and picked up his daughter, settling her on one of the seats, before taking one himself. Dogaressa took a seat at the end. Gnash smiled down at Alphys, who was still slightly nervous.

"You must be little Alphys! I've heard good things about you."

Alphys nodded and licked her lips. She fiddled with her phone on her lap, not turning it on but tapping on it to ground herself. "Yessir," she finally replied.

Gnash rooted around in his desk for a moment, before coming up with a can of soda. He placed it in front of the small child with a warm smile.

"Now doncha worry. Nobody here is in trouble. The only one in trouble is the ones who hurt the kids you helped." He watched as Alphys gratefully took the soda, popping open the tab and taking a sip. "We just need your story, to help fill in the blanks."

Alphys nodded. "I was... I was told they are okay though... right? Sans and Papyrus?"

Gnash nodded. “Yep, my husband is their doctor. They will be alright. He’s the best doctor around!” Gnash let out a loud affectionate chuckle at this. “After we’re done here, how about we see if we can call them up to put your fears at rest?”

Alphys sighed, somewhat soothed by that statement. “I-I’d like that.” she murmured, looking down at her can of soda. “Thank y-you.”

“It’s no problem.” Gnash gave her a wink and a thumbs up. He began fiddling with his computer on his desk, sitting a small recorder down in front of the child.

“Whenever you feel ready, go ahead and start.”

Alphys took a moment to finish her soda. It gave her time to think, time to even figure out where to begin with such a story. She put down the now empty can and glanced around the room. All three adults gave her encouraging smiles. She felt put at ease.

She opened her mouth and began to talk.



SIX MONTHS EARLIER

Alphys sighed as she sat in her chair, phone in hand. She scrutinized it with a critical eye that only a young child could. She used her thumbs to scroll through her various programs, editing the code to some with a few ticks of her digits.

Her concentration was interrupted once in a while by the sharp high-pitched whine of a drill, and the arid smell of a soldering iron. She glanced over at her father as he drilled a few holes into a shaped piece of metal. His work table was scattered with scraps of wires, metal, and various fine tools. He was currently absorbed in his work; the world dead to him as he pulled out a blueprint and compared his newly drilled part to it. He nodded, satisfied, and began to drill more holes into it.

Alphys sighed again. Well, it was either this or being put into the laboratory daycare. She was the oldest child among the scientists’, and the rest, well...

It wasn’t fun to sit around in a room all day with babies. They couldn’t really play with her, or even talk to her. All they did was just eat and lay around.

She was lucky her father decided to just take her to work with him, instead of just being trapped inside all day. It was pretty cool. Her father took the time to teach her things and show her some of the incredibly cool things they were cooking up in the robotics department. But times like these where he was completely enraptured with work....

It was fairly boring.

She decided to test something out.

“Daddy?”

Bertram hummed as he put down the drill and picked up a sheet of sandpaper. He began smoothing the edges of the piece of metal; the grating sound was not all that pleasant.

“I’m going to go drink some H₂SO₄.”

“Hrmm.” Bertram didn’t even look up. “That’s nice dear.”

Alphys groaned. She had just told her father she was going to drink some sulfuric acid, and he didn’t even flinch. She could tell when she wasn’t being paid attention to.

She got up from her chair, glancing back at her father, still lost in another world as he began to create. He was a very good daddy, but sometimes... once he was in ‘the zone’ it was hard to get him to pay attention to anything. Alphys figured she would have to just go and amuse herself for a while now. She took one last glance at her father and silently left the room. She checked her backpack to make sure her snacks and cellphone were safely secured inside. Feeling prepared enough for her journey, she crept further down the hallway.

Alphys knew these labs like the back of her claw. She was practically raised here. All the other scientists had interacted with her and helped to care for her since she was a baby. It was like a big family, and thus she had practically been in every room in the entire complex.

Except for one.

She took her time taking the elevator down to the basement floor. It was night, and nearly everyone else had gone home except for her workaholic father. She didn’t run into a single soul on her journey down; even the janitors had gone home for the night.

When she exited the empty elevator, she was greeted by the stark and sterile basement. It was mostly used for storage; large metal boxes were crammed into the available spaces. There were a few utility doors scattered about.

And one other door.

She padded over, her little claws clicking on the polished concrete floor. There was one door that nobody was allowed in. It was only for the Royal Scientist and his various assistants. They had been told it was for everyone's safety, as whatever they were working on was dangerous... volatile... and had the potential to help everyone in the underground. Thus, clearance to get down there was granted to only a handful of monsters. Nobody else was allowed down, not even janitors or utility workers.

People often speculated on what went down there, but nobody knew for sure. However, Alphys was a genius for her age, and she was bored. So very bored. When those things were mixed together, it ended up with a curiosity that could not be satisfied. Alphys was going to know what was going down there, and she was going to find out that night.

She glanced up at the door. The lock cast an ominous red light over the basement, washing out the shadows with its glow. She held up her cell phone and clicked a few buttons. There was a beep, and the cellphone wireless connection connected to the lock. Several numbers flashed across the screen as it began to run an algorithm to digitally pick the lock. She smirked as the light turned green. It was shockingly easy to break into places around here. Not that she did anything bad, but it was mostly to prove to herself that she could do it.

It was almost boring in of itself, that the big ominous door fell to her carefully written program. She thought it would be a little harder than this. Still, it was a victory, at least; anticlimactic or not.

She adjusted her shirt when the door unlocked and opened it up. What greeted her were stairs descending deep down into the darkness. There were only scant utility lights along the stairs, barely illuminating the metal steps. Alphys took one look behind her. Well, she came this far. She shrugged and began to tackle the stairs, one small step at a time.

She didn't know how many flights of stairs there were. She lost count as she thought more of what could be down there. She knew she wanted to be a scientist too one day, like her father. She wasn't going to do anything that could potentially destroy what might've been years of research.

But she had to know what was down there! It was driving her nuts!

Finally the stairs ended up at another locked metal door. The door's lock fell as easily as the first. It was almost pitiful. She pushed open the door, her heart beating with both fear and excitement. She didn't want to get in trouble, but a quick peek wouldn't hurt much.

Her claws clacked some more on the flooring as she walked down a long corridor. Many of the other doors were locked, but they didn't seem to interest her.

Most had **[UTILITY]** and **[SUPPLY]** stenciled over the doors in thick block letters. There were some other doors that were a little more interesting that she peeked into. Wide empty observation rooms with two-way mirrors. Rooms that looked like obstacle courses. A simple room with various puzzles left out. A very spacious plush office with a bookcase crammed full of binders. A room that resembled a doctor's office, but with a table fitted with leather straps.

This got Alphys's attention. These looked like they had to do with something biological. She had first thought there might be robots down here or perhaps electrical devices, but she saw no sign of either. No workshops. No electronics. Just large swathes of medical equipment. She was pretty sure she saw what she believed was a DNA analyzer in one room, which didn't quite make sense.

Another room answered her questions. Unlike the other locks, this one took longer to pick. Its digital code was hidden under several layers of encryption. It took a solid 10 minutes for her programs to sort through all the code before the door unlocked with a hiss. She made a quiet hiss of victory, pleased with herself and her abilities. They wouldn't be able to keep her out.

She stepped inside. It was cold, and dark, as though it were a walk-in freezer. The air hummed as cold frigid air was pumped into the enclosed space, making her bare toes ache from the chill. Her breath cast out mist into the air, as she fumbled with the light switch, closing her eyes so she wouldn't be blinded.

When she opened her eyes, she was greeted by one of the most horrifying things she had ever seen.

The room was crammed with large glass tubes, filled with transparent blue, viscous liquid. Floating in within... she couldn't even begin to fathom what they were. They looked like twisted skeletons, badly deformed and completely still. Were they fallen down? Dead? Some were about the size of her, some even smaller. Babies perhaps? There were even tanks with tiny fetal bones, floating gently in the liquid. Some of the skeletons resembled canines, some human, some a mixture of both. Some were simply large skulls, bigger than her, swaying softly in their glass prisons. Others were crippled with bone malformations. If they could get out of the tubes it was doubtful how long they would last.

Attached to each of the still creatures were various wires and tubes, running into a large database computer. She could see it was data, but she didn't understand what was being collected and compiled.

Printed in metal and screwed to each of the tubes was a serial number; the etchings glinting in the sterile, harsh light.

WD.G – E1 – 013 – F

WD.G – E1 – 006 – H

WD.G – E1 – 022 – L

WD.G – E1 – 018 – Q

WD.G – E1 – 004 – B

Alphys took a horrified step back, the chilly air catching in her throat and making it sting. She let out an involuntary sound of horror and shock. She was only five years old, going on six soon, and this was the first time she had ever seen something like this. It rocked her innocence down to the core, as now she understood *why* this lab was off limits. In her shock, she backed into a tray of tools, causing it to loudly clatter against the polished walls. A few tools scattered and fell to the floor, the sound stinging her inner ears with the harshness.

Suddenly, the dark empty eye sockets of some of the beings in the tubes ignited with small pinpricks of white light. They couldn't move their bodies or their heads, but the white-ringed pupils slid over to stare directly at Alphys, glowing brightly.

They were looking at her.

They were alive.

Alphys made a squeak of terror. They were alive. Oh god, they were *alive*!? They still didn't move, but continued to stare right at her, regarding her. She couldn't read their expressions. Were they sentient? Did they know they were trapped? Either option drenched her soul like a bucket of ice water. It was all horrible! Horrible! She could barely begin to understand what she was seeing.

They stared at each other for who knew how long, silent and still. Alphys shook from both cold and fear as the white lights stared at her unflinchingly.

Then suddenly, one by one, each of the eye lights faded back into darkness. Soon they all were dark again, silent and still.

Alphys backed out of the room, no, the tomb. She turned off the light and shut the door with a hiss. She rearmed the lock and sat roughly down, her back against the room of horrors. She felt herself cry but emotionally felt numb. What she had seen... It couldn't have been right? Why would they keep the creatures like that? What was their purpose?

For a little while she sat there and let the tears fall as she struggled to process all of what she seen. She decided that perhaps, it had been a very bad idea to disobey and come down here. There was a reason for all the rules and security.

She went to get up once she gathered her strength. She would have went right back up the way she came, wanting to forget about everything she'd seen...

But there was a soft, sobbing noise, coming out of the door down the hall.

It sounded like a child.

She looked up at the door. The sound was coming from a door marked [KENNEL] in big block letters, the lock on it glowing red in the darkness.

At first she was very afraid. Was someone down here? Why did they sound so young? She couldn't ignore the cries anymore, so she shakily rose to her feet and readied her phone.

Like the... tomb... room, this lock was also heavily encrypted; in fact, even more so. She was forced to listen to the sad sounds of sorrow and pain as she waited for her programs to pick through the lock. It was horrible to listen to, and she mentally cheered on her phone to work faster. Maybe another kid decided to explore, but was trapped down here?

She huffed as the lock turned green, and pushed open the door.

Inside was well, a kennel. Box-like cages were stacked on the floor, higher in size than they were wide. All the sides were made with solid metal, the front was barred like a normal cage. She estimated that they were only about three foot wide and deep, perhaps being four foot in height. She would have to actually measure it to be sure. Only one had a bottle of water clipped to the side. The rest seemed to be empty. The room was dimly lit with emergency lights, which barely provided enough illumination to see even that much. It was lucky her cellphone had a flashlight feature. She switched it on and scanned the room. She could hear the soft sobs come from the kennel with the water-bottle.

She padded over and knelt down in front of the cage, using her phone to help light the way. The light shone around the cage. There was a sticker plastered firmly to the side near the red lock.

WD.G – E2 – 001 – S

WD.G – E2 – 002 – P

The rest of the kennels had sticky residue on the sides, as though they had stickers at one point, but were scraped off. She took her cellphone and shined the light inside.

She gasped.

There were two children(?) inside. They were naked, save for very thin pale green medical gowns barely covering their pale and scratched up bones. They were... skeletons? Rare monsters from what Alphys understood. She was confused and shocked, glancing over the condition of the children.

The bigger one had his eye sockets bandaged over, with the thick gauze marked with dark bluish stains. Bled magic perhaps? He was effectively rendered blind as he laid on his side, crying miserably in pain. Curled up against him was a tiny... puppy? A skeleton as well, but in a different shape. The tiny one was being pressed as far into the stomach of the other child as he could, nuzzling against the rib-cage in an effort to provide some comfort. The pup's movements were restricted by a large cast on one of his forelimbs and on his spine, making it hard to crawl around on already weak and short limbs.

"Oh..." She couldn't stop the sound she made, sitting roughly down on her bottom. The older child stopped crying, tilting his head as he tried to pinpoint the sound.

"Oh... Oh, Hello?" Alphys squeaked out. The child flinched and curled around himself and the pup even more, shivering.

"Are you... are you alright?" It felt stupid as soon as she said it. They didn't *look* alright. They looked terrible! She was overcome with a need to make things better, the best she could.

They didn't respond. The tiny pup made a tiny growling noise at her, but it was weak and half-hearted.

"Um... you guys... I um..." She took off her backpack, setting it on the ground. The sound of the zipper opening caught the curiosity of the two monsters in the cage. The blinded one couldn't watch, but tilted his head to listen. The pup looked at her and her motions with wide eye sockets.

"I uh... got some f-f-ood..."

At the sound of food both beings jerked slightly, the older child weakly scooting closer to the bars and dragging the pup with him.

Alphys smiled. "Yeah um... not the most healthy of things, but it's um... good!" She fished around in her backpack, pulling out a granola bar and a bag of cookies. She carefully unwrapped the bar and held it through the bars of the cage.

The older skeleton smelled it suspiciously before suddenly snatching it away with a short growl, like a starving dog. He blindly ripped it in half and devoured one section, giving the other half to the pup who ate like he'd never seen food before.

Alphys squeaked when the bar was snatched away. She looked around the cage, there didn't seem to be any food in it, just water. Why didn't they have food?

Something was wrong here. She was going to have to tell her daddy about this, even if it meant she was going to get in trouble.

The bandaged child sniffed and looked over at Alphys, well as best he could while blinded.

"Ah, ah you guys were h-hungry!" She nervously began opening the packet of cookies. The little pup yipped excitedly, wagging his little tail as he watched her begin to poke the treats through the bars. "I got uh... I got a lot of snacks, you guys can have them."

They both turned on the cookies like they did the granola bar, snapping them up as quickly as they could. Alphys found herself reaching into her bag, pulling out anything that could be even remotely edible (including raisins, which she hated!) and feeding it to the skeletons one at a time.

Their hunger was eventually sated just as Alphys ran out of snacks to give them. They curled up with each other, sighing contently and no longer crying in pain. Snacks didn't have as much healing magic in them as actual monster meals, but it seemed to have brought them some relief. For a short while she watched them, feeling better that they seemed to be at ease.

"I'm Alphys!" she suddenly stated, causing the other two to look over at her again. "What are your names?"

For a while she was only met with silence. Finally the larger skeleton coughed, 'looking' around; as though expecting something to swoop down on them.

"It's okay. I'm the only one here." Alphys reassured him. "It's just us."

The skeleton sighed and made a few strangled noises, flinching. Eventually he began to speak.

"I'mmmm Eee too... zerro zerro one, esssss." his voice was rough and weak, stumbling over words as though they had barely been used.

He pointed at the pup at his side. "Eeeee toooo zerro zerro tooo peh. M-Myyy Brothaaa." The pup/little brother made a quiet bark at the mention of his name.

Alphys frowned. The bigger skeleton was the same size as her... shouldn't he be able to speak better? Maybe....

Maybe he wasn't allowed to talk?

She thought for a moment.

"Those are dumb names. You shouldn't be named after numbers and single letters." she finally spoke, nodding like a sage and speaking with childish honesty. The two skeletons tilted their heads at her, as though not quite understanding what she meant. "I'll give you new ones!"

She pulled out her cellphone, quickly making an Undernet search for some names. Turns out skeletons tended to be named after fonts, and lucky for her there was a nice list of them, sorted by letters. Well, if one was 'S' and the other 'P', it gave her a basis for her search.

"Ahah! I got it!" They two skeletons 'looked' at each other before glancing back to the reptile monster. She pointed at the larger skeleton before pointing at the puppy. "You um... 1-S? You can be Comic Sans, Sans for short! And 2-P... You can be Papyrus!"

The skeletons tilted their heads again. The older pointed at himself awkwardly and then at his brother. "Sannssss? Pahpierusss?"

"Yes! That's right! And I'm Alphys!"

"Alll-Alllfiesss?"

Alphys chuckled. "You'll get it, don't worry!" The skeletons seemed satisfied, curling up together again with a sigh.

"Look... I'm going to talk to my daddy. You shouldn't be in a cage down here all alone..." She spoke, but it seemed like the two skeletons weren't quite listening anymore. Perhaps they were too tired.

She stood up. "I'll be back soon! I'll bring more snacks!"

The older skeletons... Sans... just huffed quietly and held his brother closer.

"I promise."

.

.

“But... but dad!”

Alphys had manage to leave the basement lab, making it back to her father’s workroom. He didn’t even realize she was gone, still soldering pieces of metal together. She hadn’t been gone long... but still.

“No buts! I don’t have the time to listen to your made-up stories!” Her father huffed, giving his daughter a stern look as he began cleaning up his tools. “First, you were sure there was an alien in your closet.”

Alphys wilted. “B-b-bu...”

“After that, there was a man living in the television.”

“Daddy....”

“And now, you say there’s two kids in a laboratory! That’s impossible! No scientist would do something so unethical and wrong! It sounds like you’ve been reading too many of those... manga comics!”

Bertram turned around to give his daughter a stern talking-to, only to see her close to tears. He immediately felt guilty, sitting down and holding out his arms. Alphys ran into them and cried. It hurt. It hurt so much that her father didn’t believe her. Now, when she needed him the most.

“Oh Alphys... I’m sorry. I’ve been working too hard again... I need to give you more attention...” He held his daughter close. “Is this why you keep making things up?”

Alphys didn’t say anything.

It looked like she was going to have to do everything on her own.

Alphys was determined to keep her promise, even though nobody wanted to believe her. She tried talking to some of the other scientists that worked with her father. They just gave her sympathetic glances, and then went to tell her father.

Well... at least her father was spending a little more time with her, assuming her 'stories' were merely cries of attention from a lonely child. She wasn't going to complain about that, but she still wished that someone would believe her.

She stole her way down to the basement lab whenever she could, filling her entire backpack with snacks. Even though her father was paying more attention, he still got caught up enough in work to allow her to slip away.

The two kids in the cage seemed grateful for both the food and the company. It took a while for the bandage to come off Sans' eyes, so he could finally see Alphys for the first time; but he seemed to like what he saw.

"Colorrrr," He had said, pointing at her yellow scales and pink shirt. This caused her to glance around to the white and gray polished surfaces around her. Could she live in a world with only limited color? It seemed maddening to her.

When the casts were off she was greeted by the sight of the two skeletons changing their forms. It didn't look painful, but the sounds sure weren't pretty. She had told them both that they were 'Totally awesome'. They didn't quite understand what that meant until she explained, but they were all smiles later.

Papyrus seemed too young to really talk, so she worked with Sans to try to help him speak a little better. He tended to growl a bit when talking and tended to slur his speech. As long as she kept bringing cookies, Sans was willing to do just about anything. It seemed that he was just as intelligent as she was but just needed some extra attention. She couldn't fault him for that, speaking was hard, especially learning it later on in life. She brought her story books with her, slowly but surely teaching him the wonders of reading.

One thing Sans seemed to love was math, literally lighting up when she showed him math problems that she would bring from home. It shocked her how quickly he could solve them, but that was soon replaced by delight. They could be math buddies, perhaps?

She had explained to Sans what friends were and asked if he and his brother would like to be her friend. It was then the two skeletons learned how to laugh, and what laughter was.

She had begun unlocking the kennel, inviting the children to come out to play with her. At first they were terrified, hiding in the corners. Alphys didn't understand why, until Sans explained.

"We go out only when things gonna hurt."

“Oh... well I’m not going to hurt you.” She left the kennel door open and unpacked some sandwiches. As good as snacks were, she had begun packing actual food to take down. It didn’t take long for them to climb out and join her in a meal.

There were some good visits and bad ones.

Sometimes she would visit, and they would be active and alert. Papyrus was eager to engage in play, and Sans was willing to talk. They could share food, laugh, and for a little while, pretend they were normal kids.

Sometimes she would visit and see them in bad shape. Sometimes their bones would be broken, just to measure how long it would take for them to heal. Sans often had more surgeries done on his head and eye sockets. He’d just lay there, delirious and weak. Papyrus wasn’t exempt, sometimes just laying there as his delicate toe and finger-bones were broken, locked away in thick casts, whimpering in pain.

Sometimes it didn’t even seem like anything physically was wrong with them. They would just huddle together and shake, refusing to speak or look at Alphys at all.

There were more bad visits than good ones, but sometimes Alphys could coax them to eat or at least tell her what was going on. She knew what was being done to them was wrong and evil... but nobody believed her. Nobody would help her. She was here by herself, doing her best to keep two children barely older than herself together. It was a terrible burden for a young child, but Alphys was determined. She could at least read them a story and provide companionship; anything to help them.

She had been planning to help them escape. She knew it was wrong for them to be down here. Wrong for them to always be in pain and hungry. She had just turned six. Even though she was a genius, this whole situation was way over her head. She tried to plan as carefully as she could.

Eventually something happened that caused her to have to rush those plans.

She had yet again brought nearly a whole picnic with her to share with the other kids. Sans, however, barely ate anything. Sans seemed depressed and lethargic, giving Papyrus his share of the food and barely getting up from his side. Sans had been given ‘red needles’ he said, and he was tired and in pain.

“What’s wrong, Sans?” She had asked, trying to encourage him to eat a little more. He outright refused, turning away from the sandwiches.

Sans sighed.

“The White Coat said I was uh... useless. Not good. He said I would be... diss-ect-ed. Make better ones?” Sans sighed. His speaking had dramatically improved, though he still stumbled over larger words. “What does that mean? Is it bad?”

Alphys squeaked, her eyes wide. Dissected? Sans was going to be *dissected? Killed?*

“Sans wh-when did the White Coat s-say he was going to d-do that?” She had tried to keep the terror from her voice, but failed. Sans picked up on it and began stumbling with his words again.

“Uhhh uhhhh when the l-lights come on?”

Tomorrow.

Sans was going to be killed tomorrow.

“I’m going to get you both out. Right now. You can’t stay here.” She abruptly stood, causing the other two to look up at her with worry.

“Leave?” Sans asked. His teeth chattered, clearly nervous.

“Yes. Leave here. They... they...” She swallowed, her eyes wide. “They are going to kill you Sans.”

Sans’ eye sockets darkened. He understood what ‘kill’ meant.

“Come on,” she began picking up crumbs and leftover food, as to leave no trace. “We have to leave tonight.”

“...Where do we go?”

“I... to my house. Yes.” She picked up Papyrus. “You’ll be safe there.”

“...Okay.” Sans had managed to crawl out of the kennel, wincing in pain. She had hoped he would be able to walk, especially with all the stairs.

“Come, we’ll do this a little at a time.” She held out her hand and Sans took it.

The escape took a while. Clearly Sans was not used to a lot of movement, beginning to pant after only the first flight of stairs. It didn’t help he was weak and in pain, but he bravely did his best. They group had to stop on some of the steps every so often to let him catch his breath. He eventually changed shape, hoping four legs would be more helpful than two. It was still slow, careful work. Sans had nearly fallen down the stairs at one point when his legs nearly shook out from under him. Alphys had thankfully caught him in time.

Alphys in the meanwhile was careful, locking all the doors behind them, leaving no trace. For all she knew, the bad scientists would think they had disappeared into thin air. It would be for the best.

They had eventually reached the top of the stairs to the basement. She unlocked it and led them to the first floor. They moved cautiously, even though the building was mostly empty. Alphys didn't want to take any risks. When the coast was clear, she led them outside.

This was perhaps the first time either of the skeletons have been outside. They were frozen, noses sniffing and wincing. Even though it was 'night', there was an eerie red glow as the magma below bubbled and hissed in the air. Sans looked ready to bolt in fear, whimpering and backing up.

"No no no, Sans... It's going to be okay." She reached down, settling Papyrus on his back. Papyrus clutched at his older brother's neck with a soft giggle. Sans calmed down slightly, making a soft whistling noise at his brother.

"Okay... come this way we-"

Alphys's breath suddenly caught in her throat as she spotted movement beyond her. She could see a shadow come around the building, a *large* shadow.

"...run." She whispered.

Sans tilted his head at her.

"RUN!" She pushed his bony pelvis. "Someone is coming!"

Sans balked. He bumped her hand with his muzzle as a goodbye and took off; his paws kicking up red dust into the air. She knew he wouldn't be able to run away in time, not with how weak he was. She had to do something. She watched as the shadow rounded the corner, a large muscular bunny monster clad in thick armor. A royal guard?

She knew what to do.

She threw back her muzzle and wailed. With practice come from her toddler days, she began to sob, large fat tears rolling down her cheek. She wailed and sobbed, making sure her cries were as heart-wrenching as possible.

Her acting caught the guard's attention, as he focused directly on her. He bounded over, his large suit of armor clinking together. Despite his appearance, he knelt down and spoke with kindness.

“Awww, what’s wrong little one? Why are you out here all by yourself?” He put a hand on her shoulder and smiled at her.

“I’M... I’M LOSTTTTTTTTTTTTTT.” she wailed. “I WANT MY DADDYYYYYYYYYY.”

“Shh shhhh, It’s okay little one. I’ll get you home. I’m a Royal Guard. You’re safe now.” The guard reached down and picked her up, cradling her gently. “Everything will be alright.”

She wailed some more, glancing over the guard’s shoulder. Sans and Papyrus had run all the way down the path, looking little more than small white specks. Sans had turned to look behind him, glancing up Alphys’ way. She gave them a nod. With that, both skeletons vanished into the darkness.

Good, they would be safe.

She was interrupted by the guard shushing her gently. “Do you know where your daddy is?”

She pointed back to the building. The guard smiled. “Alright, let’s go find your daddy together, alright?”

Alphys stopped wailing and sniffled. She figured if she couldn’t make robots when she grew up, she could be a great actress. She watched the point of darkness over the guard’s shoulder as he began to carry her inside.

She wished she could have given them more supplies, more of everything to be honest.

She hoped they would be okay.



Alphys fiddled with her empty soda can, having picked it up and messed with it. She sighed.

“Then I got grounded for two months. And uhhhhh... that’s it.”

All three adults present just stared with quiet silence. Bertram was crippled with guilt, while Dogaressa was concerned for Alphys’s mental state. Gnash, however, was thoroughly impressed.

“Alphys...” Bertram started up. “I’m... I’m so sorry.”

Alphys looked over with a sad, but understanding smile. “It’s okay, daddy. Nobody else believed me.”

It didn’t make Bertram feel any better.

“Alphys,” Gnash interrupted. “I want to thank you for your bravery and ingenuity. You saved those kids’ lives. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you were royal guard material. In fact...”

He opened a drawer and pulled out a little silver badge. “I am going to make you an official, honorary royal guard!”

Alphys took the badge in awe, looking over the metallic object with scrutiny.

“Thank you, but I wanna make robots like my daddy.”

Gnash laughed and slapped his knee, snorting in amusement. “Well kid! You do whatever you want! Huh hahaha!”

Dogaressa cleared her throat. (“Now... you wanted to see how Sans and Papyrus were doing, right?”)

Alphys jerked in her chair. “Yeah! Please...where are they?”

The dog chuckled. (“They are in a new home, recovering. I’m going to give their guardian a call and see if they are around.”)

Alphys sat in her chair, waiting patiently. Well, not so patiently. She began drumming on the empty can as fast as she could, the sound grounding her as she waited. Nobody moved to make her stop. It seemed like an agonizingly long time to watch Dogaressa dial the number and lift up one of her floppy ears to put the phone under it...

(“Hello? Grillby? Are the boys around?”)

She paused, listening.

(“Oh, it’s their friend, remember? We found her. Yes. She’s okay. She’d like to talk to Sans and Papyrus if that’s okay.”)

Dogaressa waited a bit before smiling and saying: (“Thank you!”)

She removed the phone under her ear and handed it to Alphys with a smile. Forgetting her manners, Alphys snatched the phone away and put it to her ear, listening.

There was a bit of quiet before a familiar voice rang out.

“hello?”

It was no mistaking who it was. His speech was clearer, but there was the sense of tiredness that never seemed to go away.

“Sans!” She half-shouted in the phone. There was a pause before a single word was spoken with love and reverence.

“Alphys...?”

“Yes! Yes it’s me! Oh goodness I was... I was so....” Alphys felt herself choke up; a warm tear rolled down one her cheeks.

“Are you okay? Did they h-hurt you?”

“No no Sans. I’m okay. Nobody hurt me... are you okay? Where are you?”

“I’m... I’m...” There was a sniff. Sans must’ve been crying too. “I’m home. We don’t get hurt here. It’s great. We’re okay.”

“I’m so g-g-glad.” Alphys half-laughed and half-sobbed: the sheer relief was overwhelming. “What about Papyrus?”

“He’s right here!” There was a sound of the phone being moved. “Hey Pap, guess who’s on the celly phone!” There was a babble, and then Sans laughed. “No, it’s Alphys!”

“ALFFFFFF!” The scream nearly blew out her eardrums. “ALLLFIEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!!”

“Hello Papyrus!” She winced.

“YEAH? YEAH? ALFIEEEEE? HI HI HI HI HI HI HI HI !” The toddler clearly didn’t know what an inside voice was. “PWAH? YEAH?”

“I’d love too, but I’m over here.”

“NO. HERE. PWAY.” There was a sound of the phone being moved away as Papyrus happily screamed louder and louder. Sans spoke again over the noise.

“Can you come here? P-Please?”

“I really want to!” Alphys wiped away some tears, but they kept continuing to fall.

“Hold on.”

Sans held the phone away from himself. She could hear him talking to someone else. There was a brief pause before another voice answered.

“Hello Alphys.” The voice was warm and crackling, like a fireplace during a cold night. *“I am the boy’s caretaker. Sans said he would like for you to visit, correct?”*

“Oh h-h-hi um...Yes. I would.” She sniffed, struggling to get her emotions under control. “I really...I really missed him and Papyrus.”

“I know... they have missed you too. Sans has been quite worried for you.”

Alphys swallowed. “So, um c-can I come visit?”

There was a brief pause.

“Yes, if it is alright with your father. Would this Sunday work for you?”

Alphys felt more tears fall. This was it. She was going to get to see the first friends she’d ever made. Months of anxiety and fear burst like a bubble, leaving her feeling relieved and warm.

“I’d like that!”



Ever since he phone call with his savior, Sans had remained quiet and pensive. He at least seemed happy and relaxed, but he barely spoke at all up until the bar closed up. Sans has always been very quiet, but even this was a little unusual for him. Grillby didn’t push him. He knew that the boys talking to their first friend ever would cause some sort of extreme emotional response. At least Sans didn’t seem distressed... just thoughtful. Perhaps he was thinking about the upcoming visit?

Papyrus was the opposite, making so much noise that some of the bar patrons started asking about it. Well, once Papyrus decided to make noise, there was little to stop him.

He seemed to not be able to contain his joy, running around and knocking things over in his glee.

He had closed the bar a little earlier than usual that night. He planned to take the children home so they could relax a little more, perhaps stabilize and run around a bit. They must’ve been a little wound up (judging by Papyrus), from staying in the back room all day.

He hoped eventually they'd feel safe enough to come out during the day, but ultimately it was up to them to decide when they were ready to do so.

As soon as they got home, Sans went and wedged himself behind the couch. Papyrus dragged his toys with him beside it, not willing to leave Sans alone. Grillby was puzzled. Sans didn't seem particularly distressed or afraid, still just... pensive.

Grillby knelt down besides the couch. *"Sans?"*

Sans look up at the fire monster.

"Sans, are you alright?"

Sans nodded and pulled his knees up to his chest, resting his jaw on them.

"I'm thinking..." he replied quietly, closing his eye sockets.

"Do you want to tell me what you are thinking about?" Grillby asked as Papyrus simply busied himself with his toys.

Sans opened his eyes and remained silent for a minute. He eventually looked over.

"it's..." He looked around again. "too open, to talk."

"Too open?" The fire monster was confused at the wording.

"too open." Sans repeated. He gestured at the open space that made up the room.

"there..." He frowned. "there might be people... watching."

Oh. Grillby internally cringed. Oh. That... explained quite a bit. They *had* grown up in a cage. It would make sense if they were a little agoraphobic. He had never seen them stray too far from cover, usually hiding behind the couch or under a table. He decided to confirm his theory.

"Is that why I sometimes find you and your brother sleeping under your bed and not on it? Is it too... open?"

Sans nodded again and frowned. "i'm... i'm sorry i uh... i..."

"No no... It's alright." Grillby gave the child a warm reassuring smile. *"How about tomorrow, we make it feel safer for you and your brother?"*

Sans grinned, the luminous pupils in his eye sockets glowing brightly. "yeah."

“Do you still want to talk?” Sans nodded, but didn’t move to get out from behind the couch.

“Well, if I made some cover for you, would you feel better?” Grillby asked, earning another nod in return. The fire monster then stood up.

“I’ll be right back.”

Grillby first walked to the kitchen and began carrying the four wooden chairs from the table to the living room, setting them up as the base for a classic blanket fort. Papyrus had stopped playing to watch, tilting his head with curiosity as the fire monster carefully arranged the chairs. Sans also watched with equal interest, especially when his caretaker vanished upstairs, only to return with an armload of blankets and pillows.

It was quick work to put the pillows down between the chairs and to throw the blankets over them. In no time at all, Grillby had made a simple cozy fort. Sans moved away from the couch, picking up Papyrus along the way.

“what... is this?” he asked as he examined the fort.

“It is a blanket fort. I used to make them when I was a kid.” Grillby peeled open one of the blankets that was serving as the 'door'.

Sans smiled at Grillby before crawling inside, sitting himself and Papyrus down on the pillows. The kids sighed, seemingly placated by a warm, dark, enclosed area. Well, if it made them feel safe and happy, it was good enough for Grillby. Eventually Sans snapped out of his reverie to look back at the fire monster, patting one of the pillows beside him.

“aren’t you gonna come in too?”

Grillby could scarcely believe it. Sans had proven to be a very nervous and wary individual, but was trusting him enough to invite him inside a safe space. Grillby nodded and climbed inside as well, having to duck down. He managed to settle inside and sit, his ambient flame illuminating the dark area in a warm light.

“Do you still want to talk?”

Sans nodded. He hummed for several seconds, tapping his chin in thought.

“...what’s a daddy?” he finally said, sounding confused. He tilted his head and looked up at Grillby, as Papyrus flopped himself down on Sans’ lap. Grillby’s flames sparked for a brief second. Oh...of course. From what little bits and pieces he had learned about the two children, it made sense...in a horrible way...that they wouldn’t know what a parent was or what it meant. Inside, the old fire monster’s heart broke a little.

Sans continued.

“cause...cause Alphys keeps talking about her daddy, and I dunno what that is, but it sounds nice...” He stared down at his hand bones, fiddling with a joint.

“Well...” Grillby took a minute to figure out how to explain this. *“A daddy, or ‘dad’, is a different name for a father. A father is someone who loves their children and cares for them. This person is also called a parent, and can be either a father or a mother.”*

Sans tilted his head, prompting Grillby to explain further. *“A mother is like a father, but they identify as a woman instead of a man.”*

“oh.”

They all sat in silence for a short while while Sans processed the information he heard. Grillby remained patient. The only sounds were the gentle crackling of Grillby’s flames and Papyrus’s soft giggles as he played with his older brother’s finger bones. Suddenly Sans broke the silence.

“are you our daddy?” He looked directly into Grillby’s eyes hopefully.

A breath hitched in the fire monster’s throat. In such a short time he had found himself loving and caring for both children dearly. He couldn’t imagine his house being empty again, and he had wondered how the children would feel about it. But now...

“Would you like me to be your father?” Grillby asked carefully.

Sans nodded. “yeah!”

Grillby’s soul fluttered. It was... such an honor. The two had gone from terrified skittish beings, never speaking and nearly starving to death as they raided rubbish bins for food, to sitting comfortably, happy, and asking him to be their father.

‘I will never let these kids down,’ he swore to himself, never.

“Well then...” Grillby smiled. *“Hello, son.”*

“hi dad.” Sans grinned so wide that it nearly stretched completely across his face. Grillby had never seen such a big and genuine smile. Sans reached down and grabbed his brother, holding him out dramatically. “LOOK PAP! WE GOT A DAD!” Sans shouted excitedly, a few tears pricking the edges of his eye sockets. Pap just wiggled happily.

“BLLLLPPPP DA?” Pap reached his arms out. “DA?!?”

Grillby's breath hitched again. If he was able to cry tears, he probably would have been doing so. He reached out a trembling hand and patted Papyrus on the head lovingly.

"Yes Papyrus. I'm your dad." A giggle escaped the elder monster when he said it. He was a father! A dad! He could scarcely believe it. All three monsters were beaming with joy. There was no sadness here tonight: the children could forget about their troubles for a brief moment.

In that moment, they became a family.



An old turtle moved about a stove, putting a kettle over the small flame to boil the water within. He could hear the gentle trickle of water outside, forming new stalactites as the mineral-rich liquid dripped from the ceilings. The being was old enough to remember a time when the stalagmites were shorter. They just seemed to get longer and longer with each passing year.

He adjusted his hat on his head, humming as he set a table with toast, jam, and tea cups. He had just pulled the now-whistling kettle from the burner when he heard a short knock at his door.

"Coming, ya young scamp!" The turtle chuckled to himself, rubbing his goatee. He hobbled over to the door, pulling it open.

"Heya Commander." There, just outside the door stood Gnash, still dressed in his armor. Under his arm was a thick folder.

"Hehehe, this old turtle is retired!" Gerson chuckled, eyeing the folder. "I take it ya didn't come over just for a social call now, eh?"

Gnash shook his head. "Sorry... it's rather... troubling."

Gerson nodded, holding open the door. "Well come on in! We'll talk about it over tea!"

Gnash nodded seriously, stepping inside. The home was cramped, but cozy, just the right size for an old turtle. However, it was very short, causing the taller monster to have to duck down just to get inside. Gerson chuckled and lead him to the table, pouring out cups of tea before taking a seat himself.

“So, what brings you round here Gnashy?” The turtle picked up his cup of tea, blowing on it to cool the hot liquid before taking a sip.

“I need... some advice. Something has happened that, well, none of us has ever dealt with. It's... just look at these.” Gnash pushed the folder across the table, ignoring the tea for the moment.

Gerson raised a bushy eyebrow, taking the folder in his hand. He opened it up and began to leaf through the papers within. His eyes widened, nearly dropping his cup of tea as he got further into the content. There were pictures, transcripts, medical analysis....

“Dear angel above...” Gerson breathed. He forced himself to look at every document within before setting the folder back down again. “Are they...”

“They are alright now. You’d never believe who took them in.” Gnash fiddled with his tea cup. “The Major General.”

“Major...” Gerson thought back for a second. “Major... wait... Grillby? The fire lad?”

Gnash nodded, “Yep. They seem to be doing quite well there. They’ve got a long way to go, but my husband thinks they can recover. They’re happy there.”

“Good...” Gerson abruptly got up, the tea cups on the table rattling.

“Commander?” Gnash looked up with concern. He knew his old mentor would get angry about this. “Where are you going?”

Gerson gripped his hands and looked back, a malicious glint in his eyes. A frightening determined smile cracked open on his face, exposing bared teeth. “Oh, I’m just going to go get my hammer.”

Gnash grinned.

Chapter Eight

Grillby awoke, back stiff and vision washed with oranges and yellows. Again he found himself wondering where the hell he was before he was alerted to the soft rumbling sounds of purrs. He looked down from his position on a stack of pillows to see both Sans and Papyrus in their alternate forms, laying on his stomach. They were clearly happy, purring softly as they slept and not stirring at all from the slight movement.

Oh...yes. It was coming back to Grillby. After their rather emotional talk in the blanket fort, Sans still had questions. Papyrus had some too, which Sans helpfully translated. They didn't quite know what they were expected to do now and Grillby had to reassure them that they just needed to be children and let him worry about things for them. He would be there to watch out for them; they didn't have to worry about making huge adult-level decisions anymore.

It seemed to remove a large weight from them, Sans especially. Sans had been both Papyrus' brother and guardian, being forced to grow up faster than what should be fair to such a small child. No child should have ever had to make the decisions he had to while they were homeless. Now, Grillby would be the guardian, and Sans would be free to just be a kid.

Of course Grillby suspected that such a change would take a long time, and even then he doubted that Sans or Papyrus would lose their protective natures for each other. Sans understandably was still a bundle of anxiety stuffed into a small form; that would take time to ease. Still, perhaps now the burden would be lighter.

It seemed now the last step would be to make the adoption official. He doubted he'd be able to do that until the investigation was over, but it wouldn't hurt to ask, would it? His own paranoia deep down warned that since they were not officially his children, anything could happen. What if they were taken away and placed somewhere else? He doubted the children would do well with that at all. They seemed for the moment to only trust him, and he worked so hard to earn that trust too. The last thing he wanted was for their recovery to relapse because of bureaucracy. He squashed those feelings down for now and started the long process of untangling himself from his two children.

Of course Papyrus was the first to make a fuss about it. He grumbled loudly as he was shifted slightly to the side, opening his little eye sockets to glare daggers over who dared move him from the most comfortably warm spot in the world. His demeanor changed when he realized it was Grillby, wagging his tail and wiggling to get back to his paws. His tail, unfortunately, was close enough to Sans that it began to smack him hard across the face.

Sans grumbled and rolled off the fire monster to escape the barrage of smacks to the face, burying his head in the nearest pillow with a sigh. Upon hearing his brother, Papyrus immediately pounced on him with tiny growls. Sans only made quiet noises of defeat as he tried to burrow farther away from his hyperactive brother.

Grillby laughed and went to rescue the older child from the younger. *"Who wants breakfast?"*

Papyrus chirped loudly while Sans groaned into the pillow. Grillby chuckled and promptly scooped both up. After carefully maneuvering under the blanket fort, they were carried to the kitchen. Papyrus clicked and boofed at his brother, who was trying everything in his power to stay asleep as long as he could. He was a stubborn one, that was for sure.

The fire monster managed to convince them to change shape to eat properly at the table and after bundling them up, carried them over to the bar to start another day. He settled them in the backroom, and of course Sans went right back to sleep again, crawling into a nest of blankets and pillows on the couch. Papyrus, not wanting to be away from his brother, sat on Sans' back and began cheerfully drumming on his brother's head with his tiny hands. Sans didn't seem to mind much at all and continued to sleep as Papyrus giggled. Clearly they were going to be alright while their father opened up the bar for the day.

Grillby couldn't help but be confused when he unlocked the front door and didn't see the Guard waiting to be let in. He stuck his head out into the cold and looked in all directions, but didn't find them at all. Well...this was unusual. He closed the door again and went in the back to begin to prep the kitchen. They must be busy, he reckoned. He hoped wherever they were they would be alright.



Captain Gnash stood outside the lab, glaring up at the tall, imposing building. Surrounding him were many Royal Guards, all dressed to the nines in armor and brandishing weapons. Such a raid required all hands on deck, so guards between Snowdin and Hotland were called in to assist the raid. There were close to twenty people now, all staring at the building before them, awaiting orders.

Gnash studied the structure. There were only two exits in the building, the front grand doors and a back employee entrance. With a nod he sent Guards back to watch the exits and the sides of the building, in case there was an escape attempt. If there was, they weren't going to get very far.

It was early morning. He timed this so that all the workers would be at work and there would be fewer civilians on the streets. He sighed and gripped his sword.

Gerson gave the fish monster a calming pat to the back, his hand thudding against the thick imposing armor. No words were exchanged, just a mutual feeling. Gnash was grateful for the older monster's help; no doubt his experience would help keep everyone on track. Gerson himself had dug out his old armor. It still fit him like his own shell, even after so many years. The old turtle nodded and adjusted his grip on the large golden hammer resting on his shoulder.

It was time.

Gnash raised a hand and without a word, signaled all the Guards into position. The Snowdin Canine Unit flanked him, hackles raised and eager for a fight. The rest of the Guard stood behind them, their mission to contain the employees while the main task force hunted down the one responsible for this whole mess.

Gnash waited a second, steeling himself before thrusting his hand forward. Immediately everyone moved forward and, with surprising calm, burst through the front doors.

There was a chicken monster working the front desk, chewing gum and reading a gossip magazine. She did a double take as the sight of several Guardsmen in full armor stormed inside the pristine building. She opened her beak to protest, but Gnash just gestured to his royal armor. Wisely, she stopped her complaints before they were even voiced.

"Nobody leaves here today." He said firmly. She nodded in reply, shocked.

"Where is W.D Gaster's lab?" Gnash commanded. She raised a wing and simply pointed to a lone door. Gnash nodded and strode over with his unit, all of them itching for a confrontation. He ignored the sounds of protests as the rest of the Guard contained the building. The door lead to the basement, revealing the ominous locked door that little Alphys had described. The LED in the lock panel glowed red, washing out the rest of the colors in the room. It was locked.

However, there wasn't a lock in existence that could hold up to the Hammer of Justice. Gerson raised his hammer and brought it down on the door, crumpling up the steel like it was cardboard. It broke completely off the frame with three rapid blows, and laid crumpled up in front of stairs.

The resulting hole led downwards into the darkness, the metal stairs illuminated with pale white lights. Gnash walked in first followed by Gerson and then the dogs, stepping over the bent pieces of metal. A pair of Guards were left behind to guard to shattered remains of the door. Nobody in, nobody out.

They descended carefully, alert for any danger. Whoever was down in the lab was bound to hear the door being smashed open. If they were going to fight back or not was completely unknown. Still, everyone hoped for the best but prepared for the worst as each step brought them closer and closer to their target.

The bottom door fell as quickly as the first to Gerson's hammer, and like an organized swarm of bees, the Guards poured into the underground lab. A reptile scientist froze in shock at the sudden burst of guards and was quickly taken down, screaming about his 'rights'. Said scientist was quickly cuffed and tossed into a spare room. Lesser Dog stood in front of said room, growling at the scientist as he firmly held his spear in his paws. Wisely, the scientist stayed put as the rest of the Guard fanned out.

Gerson began smashing doors open to allow access to the locked rooms, until...

"Angel above..." Gnash's breath fogged the air as access to the refrigerated room was opened; it was just as Alphys described. Rows and rows of tubes containing living twisted creatures turned their eye lights to look at the intruders. On a table in the middle of the room was none other than Gaster himself, flanked by two other scientists.

They were in the middle of removing what appeared to be a tiny skeletal puppy out of one of the tubes, several wires and needles jammed everywhere into the small form. There was obviously something seriously wrong with it, as it had yet to move or make any sort of indication that it was alive. The sound of the door crashing alerted the scientists and Gaster looked up in alarm as the Guard swarmed in.

{ **"What is the meaning of this?"** } He hissed, a deep frown on his skeletal face. The skeletal puppy merely laid on the table, unmoving as the tube fluid began to drip off the table. The other two scientists took defensive positions.

{ **"Delicate work is being done here! Why I-"** }

"Wing Ding Gaster." Gnash cut him off. "You and your workers are under arrest."

{ **"Under what charges?"** } The scientist narrowed his eye sockets at the Captain, testing him. It was clear that the scientist thought the Captain was beneath him.

“Child abuse, neglect, unethical experimentation on monsters, medical abuse, torture...need I go on?” Gnash's grip tightened on the hilt of his sword. He hated people like this, and wanted nothing more than to just cut the sicko's head from his shoulders. But he restrained himself for the moment.

To his surprise, Gaster laughed, a hollow evil sound. { **“I'm sorry my dear boy, but none of those apply here. These...”** } He used a gloved hand to pick up the unmoving bone creature. { **“...Are NOT monsters, nor children. These are experiments. Nothing more, nothing less. Artificial tools.”** }

Dogaressa's hackles raised as she bared her fangs. (“They ARE children, you sick bastard!”)

Dogamy held his wife back with a paw. “Gaster, you don't have any idea how much trouble you are in. The king knows now.”

That seemed to strike a nerve, as one of Gaster's eyes twitched in response, a scowl creeping across his features. The other two scientists eyed each other nervously. Dogamy continued. “He is NOT happy with what has been going on. You WILL surrender or you will face the consequences.”

For a while the only sound in the room was the hiss of the AC and the beeping of machines. The other two scientists looked at Gaster for guidance, but he was stone-faced. Finally, he laughed, causing the assembled guard to look at each other with concern.

{ **“Such a shame...the King is a weak-hearted fool.”** } Gaster spat out the words viciously. { **“Do you not know how close I am to breaking the barrier? But of course not. Our King's inability to do what must be done is what's dooming us all down here. Nothing is achieved without sacrifice.”** }

He looked up, his eyes flashing blue. { **“I will not allow such weakness to destroy our chances of leaving this wretched place. So...I shall continue my work...elsewhere.”** }

With a nary a whisper, Gaster suddenly vanished in a flash of blue.

The room erupted into panic. Not only was the Guard shocked, but so were the two scientists left behind.

“Gaster, you son of a bitch!” One of the scientists screamed before he was quickly tackled to the floor. The other scientist gave up immediately as he was put in chains.

“Where...what?” Dogamy was flabbergasted with the disappearing act, and so were the other dogs. They put their noses to the air, sniffing to try to catch where the scent may have gone, but to no avail.

“Never mind that, we'll find him.” Gnash grit his fangs. “Dogamy, alert the Guard upstairs to start the search for him.”

Dogamy saluted and was out of the room in no time.

“Spread out, look for evidence. I want this place locked down and combed over! Nothing goes missed! Understand?” Gnash glared at all those present, getting nods in return.

As the Guard broke off to investigate. Gnash found himself transfixed by the beings in the room, still silently watching from behind their glass prisons. His feet moved on their own accord and walked him to the table. He looked down at the unmoving being before him and he reached out...to give it comfort? Assurance? But before he could make contact, it rapidly crumbled to dust. The poor thing didn't even get a chance to open its eyes. A deep hollow feeling of loss and anger hit him in the heart, and for the first time, he wondered if he could do this job anymore.

Without a sound, Gerson had laid a hand on the Captain's shoulder, distracting him momentarily from the tragedy before them. “We'll get him lad...” The old turtle spoke. “They'll get their justice.”

The eyes from around the room continued to watch with their unending vigil, unmoved from the events that had just taken place.

“...What the hell are we going to do...” Gnash looked at the silent beings.

“The best we can do.” Was the turtle's reply.

Gnash just hoped that the best would be enough.



The day went on as expected at the bar. People came and went and Grillby took time to periodically check on the children and feed them. For the most part they were quiet, choosing to sleep for most of the day. At first he was a little concerned, but then figured that since they were still recovering, they would need all the sleep they could get. Already they were beginning to look stronger, but they still had a while to go yet. Still the progress was good.

He closed up the bar for the night and took his children home. That night was spent just sitting around, watching television. Both children were surprised and a little frightened by the device, but soon warmed up to it when they realized it wouldn't hurt them. They just laid close to Grillby on the couch and watched the flashing images and music with wide, but interested eyes. There was a cooking show, which seemed to delight Papyrus most of all. Maybe he'd make a chef out of him? Grillby couldn't help but think fondly over the idea; most parents, he figured, would be ecstatic to have their children follow in their footsteps. If Pap showed interest in cooking then he'd do his best to nurture that interest.

Sans however mostly drifted in and out of sleep. Clearly he just wasn't as into it as his brother. That was fine, perhaps in time they'll find something that would keep his interest.

Eventually it was time for bed, and both children were tucked in under the covers. Tomorrow was Saturday, and Grillby planned to take the day off so he could make the bed feel safer for them. But for now they would have to sleep in it as it was, and he had reminded them that they were always free to come into his room if they felt scared. In order to soothe them he had dug out one of the picture books the Dogs had left for him. 'Fluffy Bunny and his Family' was a classic, and would serve to help the children understand a little more about what families were. Plus, what kid doesn't like bedtime stories?

He pulled up a chair next to the bed, Sans and Papyrus watching with excitement. They were both curled up under their covers, snug and smiling. Grillby held up the picture book in a way where both children could see the pictures as he began to read.

"Fluffy Bunny lived with his mommy and daddy and sister in the magical land of Bunnytown."

Both children watched as he turned the page, showing the next part of the story.

"Fluffy Bunny was named Fluffy Bunny, because he was the fluffiest bunny."

Papyrus studied the pictures carefully, his brow furrowed in thought. He suddenly reached out with a little hand towards the picture. Grillby obliged, moving the book closer so his youngest could touch it.

Sans watched, amused as Papyrus ran his hand over the picture of Fluffy Bunny. Papyrus' eyes narrowed more and more, a frown gracing his features as he moved from gentle touches to hard smacks to the book. Suddenly he exploded.

"NO!"

Grillby moved the book away, from the toddler. *"Papyrus, what's wrong?"*

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!" Papyrus frowned harder, tears starting to collect at his eye sockets. "AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

Grillby was worried at first. He didn't know that a story book could set off this kind of reaction. However when he looked at Sans, he realized there was nothing actually wrong. Sans was struggling to hold back laughter, grinning widely at his little brother.

"Sans?" Grillby raised an eyebrow. *"Why is Papyrus screaming?"*

"oh." Sans stated through chuckles. "he's just mad because the pictures aren't actually fluffy."

Papyrus continued to scream as Grillby put his face in his spare hand. Well, so much for a relaxing story before bed.

In time, he managed to get the screaming child to calm down. Well, if he was more touch-oriented, he would have to find books that actually had things to touch in them. He was sure there were books like that if he searched hard enough. Well, it was something for another time. He managed to placate the child by offering a stuffed rabbit the dogs had left. Papyrus accepted the bribery, hugging the plush toy to himself as he snuggled up with his brother. For the moment, things were peaceful. Grillby patted both children on the head affectionately and tucked them in as they drifted off to sleep.

He turned off the lights and left the door open a crack, crossing over to his own bedroom. He also left his door open and soon the long day took its toll. Grillby was scarcely under the covers before he was asleep himself.

It seemed that he was barely sleeping long, before he felt something hard patting his head. At first he was confused, but the patting increased in severity and speed until his opened his eyes blearily. Without his glasses the world was a blur of shapes and colors, but he could make out a white and orange blur perched on his pillow.

He fumbled for his glasses on his nightstand and slipped it on to reveal the his assailant was none other than Papyrus. His little hand was raised up, ready to give another hard pat, his eye sockets ringed with tears.

"DA!" He moved his hands to shake Grillby's shoulders urgently.

"Papyrus I'm awake, what's going on?" The sense of alarm was certainly a wake-up call. A quick glance to his nightstand showed that it was three in the morning.

"BRUDDER!" The skeleton slurred out, sniffing.

Oh. Grillby felt himself go cold. *"Where is he?"*

Papyrus slid off the bed and with surprising speed ran across the room and stopped at the door. He pointed at the bedroom door he shared with his brother. Grillby was up and out of bed, listening carefully. There was no screaming or anything that had plagued the children before. What was going on?

When Papyrus saw that he was being followed he slipped across the hall and into his bedroom, Grillby close behind him. The fire monster prepared himself and pushed the door open fully, using his ambient flame to illuminate the room instead of turning on the lights.

What he saw was Sans in canine form, his pajamas fitting awkwardly over his new bone structure. His eye sockets were completely blank and he was on the floor pacing endlessly. He would take exactly six steps to the left and then turn and take six steps to the right. Over and over. He kept his head down with the tip of his snout nearly touching the carpet as he paced, seeming to ignore everything.

Six steps repeating. Six to the left and six to the right. Over and over.

Grillby thought of the drawing Sans had drawn back when the Dogi asked where he lived before being taken in. He had drawn a cage. Sans might not have a concept yet of sizes, but the cage he drew looked small and cramped and perhaps only big enough for them to take...

Six steps...

Oh....

Papyrus was sitting in front of his pacing brother and babbled away, trying his best to try to snap his brother out of it, but nothing seemed to be working.

Sans continued on with his endless movement stiffly, occasionally stopping to whine and scratch at his head with his clawed paws. Already Grillby could see deep scratches in his skull again. This would have to stop immediately before he inflicted even greater harm on himself.

He knelt down and inched closer to his pacing son. *"Sans...can you hear me?"*

Sans couldn't hear him over the buzzing in his head. He couldn't see or hear much of anything, he just had a need to move and not stop. He managed to stop for just a moment to claw at his head again, huffing in pain. He wasn't sure if this was reality or a dream. He was confused...but it seemed as if his legs were going to keep moving no matter what he did.

Six steps to the left.

Six steps to the right.

“Sans...” Grillby tried again. This whole thing was very disturbing, reminding him of humans putting animals in cages and how they would go mad and pace endlessly for hours. There was a cold dagger of fear in his core. Was he too late?

He reached out and laid a warm hand on Sans' spine, hoping to interrupt the pacing. At first Sans just went rigid and still, his eyes still blank and staring at the floor. Papyrus watched, his fists shoved in his mouth as he nervously chewed them.

When Sans tried to start pacing again, Grillby tried to hold on a little more forcibly to stop him. “SANS!”

Sans reacted to the new stimuli violently as he began to whip his body around, emitting a thin, weak scream as he flailed. Grillby moved quick to try to restrain him— though the carpet was soft, he did not want the child to hit his already injured head on the floor. Sans fought the whole way, screaming and kicking his legs as warm arms encircled him. He didn't know what was going on, all he knew was that he was being trapped and touched and he wanted out! So he did the only thing he could do.

He managed to angle his jaws around and clamped down on the warm thing holding him, biting down hard.

Grillby grimaced as Sans bit down hard on his left arm. There was no skin or bones to break thankfully. He figured if he were a human, Sans would be doing some serious damage even with how weak he was. The small blunted fangs dug in hard as Sans started to jerk his head around instinctively, growling sharply.

“Ngg!” It hurt, but Grillby was more concerned with hurting Sans more than the other way around. He lowered his body temperature around the bite and stayed as still as he could. He would not burn his son. Not if he could help it. It was an exercise in ultimate self control as he waited for Sans to come back to him, using his right hand to pet the child's skull. “Sans...it's alright...it's alright...”

Sans flinched hard at the touch, but didn't let go of his grip. He growled again, his small voice muffled.

Grillby ignored the growls and continued with his soft touches. He'd gladly take a hundred more bites if it meant would get better. Papyrus in the chaos had transformed himself, and was softly clicking and trilling at his brother, a hopeful look in his little eye-sockets. They could work together to bring him back.

It seemed to be working. After a while the growls died down and the smallest ghost of a light was beginning to appear in Sans' eye sockets. His grip was slowly loosening as he was becoming more and more aware of his surroundings. Vision and sound was returning as the ever constant buzzing in his head began to fade away. He was aware of being held, and him holding on to something.

His eye lights solidified as he glanced down to see his own jaws wrapped around his father's arm. He gasped in shock and let go, another scream ripping out of his throat as he began to flail again.

Oh no oh no oh no he was bad he was bad a weapon he's a weapon he hurt someone dangerous dangerous dangerous! He kept screaming vocally as he struggled to escape. *Stupid. He had just ruined everything! Now they were going to be punished. Thrown out! Papyrus will turn to dust because of him.* The thoughts in his head jumbled up together. His instincts screamed at him to get out of there before someone retaliated against him.

Grillby just held on, trying to convince the struggling child that everything was going to be alright, petting him softly and speaking gentle words. Papyrus whined and paced around the two, not quite knowing what he should be doing.

"Shhh Sans...it's alright." Grillby soothed the child. *"I'm fine. You didn't hurt me. You're fine. It's okay."*

It took five minutes of convincing before Sans simply ran out of the energy to struggle and just laid panting in Grillby's arms. He glanced around the room fearfully, wincing at the fresh scratches in on his head. He finally managed to look upwards at Grillby, his eyes twitching in pain and fear.

"Hello Sans..." Grillby spoke once he was sure Sans was conscious again. *"Everything is fine. Everyone is safe, including you."*

Sans whined and began sobbing, it was all too much for him to handle. Papyrus pawed at Grillby's arm, whining. He raised up his arm and allowed the smaller to enter the embrace where he began to nuzzle his brother. Grillby held them all close, trying to comfort the both of them, rocking them slightly.

Something told him it was going to be a very long night.

Chapter Nine

Indeed it was a long night.

Sans would calm down every once in a while but it wouldn't take much to spark another fit of whimpering. Something as simple as the wood in the house creaking would set the child off into another panicked mess. Grillby could only hold on as gently as he could, riding out the fits with the child. At least he would know that someone was there with him and not be alone in his terror. Sans drifted in and out of reality through the night. Some moments he would be lucid and with others there would be a far away look in his eyes as he saw things nobody else could.

Papyrus snuggled close to his brother. He had shifted into his child form so he could wrap his arms around his brother and hug him tight. For a while, they just laid together, Sans' cries dying down over time. Grillby took them both downstairs to the easy chair where he rocked them for an hour or so. He doubted that either of them would be willing to sleep for quite a while. Not that he blamed them, but they still were recovering and needed rest.

It seemed like both children would take a step forward, only for something to happen and set them back two steps. It just...wasn't fair. But still, the bartender would rather them be here now, instead of a month back. At least here they can get help, instead of starving and freezing all alone.

When they had calmed down somewhat, Grillby took a closer look at Sans' skull. Sans had managed to do quite a number on himself. His claws might not be as sharp as his brother's, on account of Sans' claw-chewing habit. He managed to cut himself so that thin beads of raw magic oozed from the wounds. Grillby was more than grateful for the medicine that Frank had left for just such a thing. But he needed to figure out a way to prevent such acts of self-harm in the future. When the two children had relaxed enough, Grillby got up and left them on the chair to fetch the medicine.

The medicine itself was a jar full of thick green ointment, smelling of vanilla and aloe vera.

Sans was too weak and spent to fight off the treatment, growling lowly as the medicine spread over his cuts. Sans felt surprised that it didn't hurt, it felt warm and tingled as the pain faded away to numbness. A thick bandage applied to his head held the medicine in place as Grillby checked him over for more injuries. He found another right where Sans' barcode was. Until now the etched markings were beginning to fade as more healthy bone was growing in to fill in the marks. Sans had managed to chew them open again and damage the bone around them. The area received treatment as well. Sans made it a point to stare off into space instead of acknowledging his injuries. This only worried the bartender further.

He didn't know if the chewing was the result of mental trauma or that the regrowing bone was painful. He wouldn't be able to know the answer until Sans decided to shift back to his child form. It seemed like it would be a while before he did so, judging by his current state. Grillby decided to comfort them as best as he could as he glanced at the clock on the wall. The clock chimed as it ticked down the hours until morning. It wouldn't be long until it would have been his normal time to get up.

Thank goodness he had decided to close the bar for a few days. Tomorrow was the day when the skeletons' friend, Alphys, would arrive to spend some time with them. He didn't want to cancel the visit unless he absolutely had to. The children had been so excited to talk with her on the phone. It proved that they needed the interaction for both closure and companionship.

All he could do was try to get them ready for it.

The hours crept by and Sans refused to sleep. His pupils faded as he kept nodding off, only to jerk awake again in a new numb panic. Papyrus wedged in as close as he could, trying to offer some comfort.

'Morning' soon arrived. The outside grew brighter as the crystals in the cavern ceiling strengthened their light. Not a true sunrise—Grillby still remembered what those looked like—but it was still a way to mark a new day.

He had left them both on the chair to curl up as he went to make breakfast. It was clear to him that they would need to go shopping that day, as they were running out of food. With both children taking up his time, he didn't have much of a chance. He didn't quite want to, but with nobody to look after the children, he would need to take them with him.

He had made oatmeal again as it would be a while before they both could graduate to a full breakfast. He added their powdered medicine and brought it to the living room to feed them both. Papyrus, always happy to see food, sat up so he could accept the bowl on his lap. He was still unskilled with a spoon, so like most toddlers he switched to his hands to shovel oatmeal into his mouth. At least he could always be counted on to have a good appetite.

Sans outright refused to eat. He just stared at his bowl, looking ill at the thought of food. Grillby had tried spoon-feeding him, thinking that perhaps he was just too tired to eat. But he only turned his head away and whined, refusing it altogether. Grillby was of course, concerned. Frank had made it quite clear that neither children should skip a meal. He was about to gather up the bowl and try to fix something else when Papyrus took the initiative.

He babbled at his older brother, but Sans ignored it, turning his face away. Papyrus grumbled, and took his palm and smacked his brother hard across the nose. *WHACK!* Sans opened up his muzzle to yell, but when he did Papyrus shoved a fistful of oatmeal inside. Sans and Grillby were too surprised to react to the situation as the food dissolved in the child's maw. A short cough rattled out of his muzzle. Sans' eye-lights brightened from the small amount of nourishment, much to the fire elemental's relief. Papyrus withdrew his hand and scooped up some more oatmeal. Sans tried to turn his head to the side to avoid his little brother but found himself smacked again.

"EAT FOO!" Papyrus demanded. This time when the handful of oatmeal came around, Sans opened his mouth, lest he get another smack. "NYEH!"

"...*Papyrus...please don't hit your brother...*" Grillby winced. Bone hitting bone sounded and looked quite painful. But it seemed to be effective, and the end result was Sans slowly, but surely, eating. The look on Pap's face betrayed that he must have had to force his brother to eat more than once. The little toddler seemed to be almost used to such situations.

It seemed to jump-start Sans in a way, and after eating the small amounts oatmeal, he seemed to look a little less ill. He moved on to eating from his own bowl while Papyrus finished up his, looking pleased about the outcome.

Papyrus seemed to be a lot smarter and more aware of things than what a child of his age should be. Sans has proved to be protective over his younger brother...but it looked like Papyrus was just as protective over Sans. Grillby felt cold on the inside as he wondered just how often Papyrus had to watch over his brother. Papyrus wasn't even old enough to string together full sentences, and yet still had to help his brother eat. No child should have to go through that.

Eventually both children finished eating. Sans of course didn't finish his bowl and nudged it over for Papyrus. Grillby had gotten up to give Papyrus a second bowl to foster the idea that BOTH children had plenty to eat now. Sans didn't have to share his food anymore, though Papyrus was more than happy to eat all that was given to him. Getting them both cleaned up and dressed was another challenge. With only a few days on the medicine, Papyrus' hyperactive nature had come out. It took quite a while to wipe him clean and dress him, as he just didn't want to stop wiggling. Sans in contrast, was dead weight and barely reacted as he was dressed. It was only when he was wrapped up in his hoodie that he reacted, sighing softly.

"Today...we are going to be doing something different." The fire elemental spoke to both children. *"We will be going to the store."*

"STOOOOOREEEEE!" Papyrus parroted the word, screaming it at his brother. The toddler seemed excited, at least. Sans tilted his head to the side in confusion. At least he was now reacting to things.

Oh right...they might not even know what a store is.

"A store...is a place where you can buy food...and other things." He explained. *"We will have to go outside to go there..."*

Sans didn't seem to like that idea at all, giving a soft growl while Papyrus seemed to be wary, but excited.

"You will not have to worry, you will be with me..." The bartender was doing his best to be reassuring as he got the coats and slipped one on. Sans whined and curled up into a ball, sounding sad. It was enough that Grillby found himself sitting down again and scooping up the child to comfort him.

Sans snuggled up close to Grillby's torso, trying to steal the heat as he shivered. Grillby...had an idea. The coat he was wearing wasn't zipped, so...he zipped it up over the child. To his surprise Sans immediately calmed down in the warm and dark space. He shuffled about until he was comfortable and went still, breathing quiet.

...Well...that was a thing. That was one problem solved. He stood up and the tight bottom of the jacket prevented the pup from falling out of the bottom. Perfect! Sans was just so small he barely made an indication if he was there in the thick and puffy jacket. He was hidden and warm. Sans liked both of those things.

He was able to bundle up Papyrus with no trouble, and set him up so he could ride on his shoulders. Papyrus giggled and patted the top of Grillby's head. He was playing with the wisps of flames that crackled about. Grillby found himself grinning as he exited the house and locked the door behind him.

With both children snug and secure, he set off across the fallen snow.



Gnash groaned and slammed his head down on the metal table in front of him. A stack of papers upset and scattered about.

He had been in this angel-forsaken place for twelve hours now. He was running low on energy and there was only so much a body could take before coffee didn't help anymore. But yet he didn't want to leave, not until every little scrap of evidence was recorded and collected. Hell, the first few hours were just having the Guard photograph everything. That burned a large amount of time.

But now they were free to descend upon the laboratory. No stone would be unturned. The arrested scientists were placed under guard in the Capital cellblock. Soon they will be interrogated, but by whom was still up in the air. The king was already briefed on the situation, and to say he wasn't happy would be a vast understatement. Angel help the prisoners if the King himself wanted to question them.

Gerson had been the one to deliver the news. He had reported back that he hasn't seen the king this devastated since the deaths of his own children. Gnash had a suspicion that the King might want to become more involved with this case. So for now the Captain was supervising the evidence collection. And there was still a LOT to collect.

He pinched the spot between his eyes and sighed. He needed to catch some rest, but definitely not here. The whole underground lab was eerie and...wrong...like it was full of nightmares. And no doubt it was. The tiny little creature that died right after Gaster disappeared must have been one of many.

Despite being clean, the halls here were full of dust.

He wished that Gerson was here, but the old turtle had left not too long ago for some sleep. He had advised Gnash to do the same, but the Captain didn't feel right sleeping. Not yet at least.

Gnash needed to get up and move...do something other than sit and become caught up in thoughts. So he did, standing up and stretching until his back popped a few times. Feeling much better, he exited the small office room that became a temporary HQ.

From what he could see, all his Guardsmen were working hard as they documented and processed one room at a time. He found himself once again in the cold room with the creatures in glass. The shock of the frigid air and the room's contents banished all fatigue that he might have still had.

Nothing could be currently done about the beings floating in the glass tubes until the red tape was gone. It was clear that they were alive...if you could call the state they were in 'life'. It wasn't known if they were sentient or capable of awareness. Sure, they would watch people as they entered the room with eerie lights for 'eyes'. Attempting to communicate through both writing and Hands (monster sign language) yielded no results. They could all be suffering and there would be no way to tell.

Gnash just wanted their misery to end but it wasn't up to him at the moment. Most likely, such a decision would be up to the King. It was quite a confusing and taxing situation. So perhaps he would keep them a little company for now.

He was about to patrol the wide expanse of glass tubes when Lesser Dog bounded inside. The dog winced at how his armor chilled in the cold air, before barking at his Captain.

“<Captain! We found tapes!>” The dog barked and wagged his tail. “<It was behind a locked door, Greater Dog broke it open!>”

Gnash was quite glad he had learned to speak dog. He turned, expression serious. “Show me.”

Lesser Dog barked and turned, Gnash following him. The dog led him to what must have been Gaster’s study. The Captain had only briefly looked in there before to clear it but he was still surprised to see it. Compared to the dark and cold laboratory...it was surprisingly warm and bright in there. Decorated with bookshelves, plush chairs and what had to be an expensive wooden desk, it was a stark difference to the lab around it.

The bookshelves were empty. It earlier had been full of books and books of notes, but they were already taken for processing. Between them was the twisted remains of a doorway which Greater Dog must have torn right from the hinges. He was still there, holding the remains of the door, and almost dropped it in his haste to salute the Captain.

“At ease.” Gnash looked from the dog to the doorway, drawing closer to find a simple bare room. There were shelves, lined with tapes, and a single old VCR/TV combo on one lone table. A chair sat in front of the TV, with a nearby stack of papers and notebooks for note taking. He touched nothing as another Guard was at work, photographing the room. He scanned the labeled sides of the tapes with interest. Some of the labeled were quite cryptic and others were more straightforward. They were arranged in sections, with one section for 'Series E1' and the other for 'Series E2'.

The amount of tapes was staggering.

He groaned and rubbed his temples. They were going to have to watch every single one of those damn tapes. No doubt, they documented everything. The shit his Guardsmen would see...he would need to be sure to give extra vacation bonuses this year.

“Sir. Everything is photographed.” Squeaked a Guardsman. “What are your orders?”

“Well...I’m going to need another pot of coffee, for one.” Gnash pulled up the lone chair and sat down. That bastard must have been here, in this same spot....ugh. He shook his head. They were going to need to do this carefully. “We’re going to have to watch all of them. I need a roster, we’re going to be doing this in shifts. When a Guard has too much, let them tag out and get some rest.” He frowned at the television in front of him. “Everything needs to be documented. Nobody watches these alone, got it?”

The Guard nodded and scampered off.

Gnash selected one tape at random off the shelves, rubbing a finger over the printed text.

[E2 Series: Introduction of 002-P to 001-S.]

He sighed.

He wasn’t looking forward to this, but justice must be served. Greater Dog panted and sat his great bulk down besides his Captain. Gnash sighed and patted the dogs head, before taking the tape and slipping it into the VCR.

He didn’t know what he would be seeing, but he hoped he and his men would be prepared for it.



Ding!

The store bell cheerfully rang as Grillby and his charges stepped into the Snowdin Store. Sans for the most part didn’t react as he remained curled up inside the jacket. Papyrus couldn’t keep still, wiggling in his father’s arms. There was so much to look at. Colorful things lined the shelves and there were new smells and things to touch.

Grillby put him in the baby seat of a cart, making sure that the little belt was fastened. He didn't doubt for one second that Papyrus would escape if given the chance. Having a hyperactive child loose in the store wouldn't do favors for anyone.

Luckily the store was fairly empty of people. At this time of morning, most people were either already at work or asleep. It was perfect. A nice opportunity to introduce the children to 'outside' without it being too overwhelming. It was quiet enough that Sans grew curious and stuck his snout out of the top of the jacket's opening for a few quick sniffs. Soon he settled down, and the small but gentle expansions of his ribcage indicated that he fell asleep again.

Well, whichever was more comfortable for him, Grillby would support it.

And so Grillby found himself pushing the cart about through the aisles. He selected packages of food and showed them to Papyrus first for 'approval'. Papyrus was quite forward about things he did and didn't like, giving the boxes and packages a sniff before he either smacked it (no) or trilled at it (yes). Sans didn't give much of an input at all for the most part, sleeping away in the jacket.

("Grillby!"), a familiar voice called out. The fire elemental turned his head and smiled to see the Dogi walking towards him.

"Dogamy! Dogaressa! Hello!" Truth be told, Grillby was happy to see them. He had been wondering where they were. *"Any news yet?"*

The dogs looked at each other and then at Papyrus in the baby seat.

'Later' they mouthed at the same time.

Oh...that didn't...bode well.

Papyrus shrieked with joy at seeing the dogs and extended his arms outwards.

"DAGGY!"

"Hello little pup!" Dogamy looked to Grillby for permission first. Grillby nodded and Dogamy smiled and picked Papyrus up from the seat. He cuddled the child close. "Look at you! So excited!"

“He’s always excited.” Grillby nodded with a small smile. Papyrus was already grabbing one of the dog’s ears and tugging at it.

(“Where is Sans?”) Dogaressa sniffed at Papyrus, earning her a touch to the nose from the small child. She beamed at the little child as he continued to bop her nose with a tiny hand.

Grillby just gestured to the lump in his jacket. The lump twitched as the pup inside woke up. Soon enough his snout appeared above the zipper again, sniffing.

(“Awww hello pup! Are you hiding?”) Sans nodded before retreating into the warmth again.

“He had a ...rough night....” Grillby frowned. *“He seems happy in there....for now...”*

Dogaressa smiled. (“I’m sure he’ll feel better soon. What are you up to today?”)

“Oh, just...shopping. They also want a uh....” He thought about how to put it, getting distracted once in a while as he kept an eye on Papyrus. *“Enclosed bed...to feel safer?”*

(“Oh, they want a den.”) She took the time to give Papyrus some pats, making him giggle with delight. (“That’s normal for pups. They like warm dark areas.”)

“Oh...” Grillby had no idea on how to build a ‘den’, or what exactly he would need to do so.

As if sensing that the bartender was a little lost, Dogamy spoke up. “No worries, we can help you out! Why we’ve made some before for our siblings. It doesn’t take that much to make.”

(“Yes dear, we can even help you make them! If that’s okay with you.”) She couldn’t help but let slip a tiny indication of urgency in her voice.

The way the dogs spoke to him...Grillby felt a little worried. But they were part of the Guard, he could always trust them.

Even when they were pups with big dreams, he always knew that they were looking out for everyone. Fine then...he'd see what's going on later. Whatever it was, it must be sensitive enough that they didn't wish to discuss it in front of the children. Especially since Sans was now wide awake and watching the goings-on from that gap inside the jacket.

"I would be grateful for the help..." Grillby finally spoke. *"I must admit I am....quite new to this...especially with the 'dog' part...of it...."*

The dogs smiled. "Don't worry, we'll help you out." ("Yes dear, you won't be so 'new' for long!") They both chuckled at the same time.

Grillby then found himself quite suddenly being led around by the dogs. First thing they did was go and put quite a few cardboard boxes in his cart along with some old t-shirts. Odd...but he assumed they had a point. Then on the the bedroom section, picking out blankets and fastenings for curtains. At one point they had found glow in the dark stick-on stars, that Sans seemed to like quite a bit. A touch lamp. A few more toys for good measure. Extra pillows. Grillby could only watch as the cart got fuller and fuller. At one point Dogamy just held Papyrus so the extra space in the cart could make way for yet another pillow.

In the checkout they refused to let Grillby pay for the extra items, citing a 'clause' in the Guard rules. Grillby knew better to argue with the dogs and allowed them. Still...he still felt somewhat uncomfortable with the generosity. He supposed he would need to get used to it...but it was still strange to him.

The dogs carried everything, leaving Grillby to carry the children. Sans has snuggled back down into his jacket again when faced with the cold where he wasn't much trouble. But Papyrus was a wiggling nightmare that made Grillby feel like he was trying to keep an eel still. Somehow they managed to reach the bartender's cozy home without any incidents at all. The Dogs chatted away to cover their sense of alarm with soft words to keep the children at ease.

As soon as they got inside, Grillby locked the door behind him and unzipped his jacket to remove Sans.

Sans was reluctant and tried his best to stay in as long as he could, before he was placated by a warm blanket in exchange. He snuggled down on the couch to relax as Papyrus zoomed about the house to get rid of his energy.

Sans seemed like he would be okay for now. Lethargic and tired, he fell asleep again.

Grillby gave him a few affectionate pats on the head before he left him there.

The dogs carried everything upstairs with the fire elemental close behind them. As soon as they reached the children's bedroom, they took Grillby inside and shut the door behind him.

"So..." Grillby was rightfully worried, crossing his arms as he watched the dogs put down the packages. "*What is the matter?*"

Both dogs perked their ears and listened. With Papyrus yelling downstairs, they were sure the children wouldn't be able to hear what they were going to say.

("We tracked down the scientist responsible for all of this...") Dogaressa began. ("We arrested the scientists involved...but...")

"The lead scientist, W.D. Gaster, escaped." Dogamy finished, tilting his ears back in shame.

"....." Grillby, at first, was pleased to hear about the arrests but....the main leader was...

"He's gone...? How?"

"Teleportation. He could be anywhere."

("We have been assigned to watch the house. He could come back for the children if he learns where they are.")

Wow they sure didn't sugarcoat things. Grillby's flames flashed blue in both anger and surprise.

“He would be quite idiotic to come here.” He finally spoke in a whisper, his flames crackling.

“We know...but he seemed....unhinged.” Dogamy gestured. “I mean, you would have to be to do....what he did to the kids...wouldn’t you?”

Grillby nodded, his thoughts at a whirlwind. So the one responsible for...everything the children endured...was loose. At large. And he could be coming here, if he knows where they are. Well....if he did show up...angel help him...he wasn’t a Major General eons ago...for being a pushover, after all.

(“So...we and most of the canine unit are going to be watching. You won’t have to be alone in this.”) She was doing her best to be reassuring. (“The Guard will handle it...you have a more important job to do...helping these kids.”)

“The captain is going to want to speak to you later. But for now, let’s make these kids feel like the luckiest kids in the whole underground!” Both the dogs smiled.

Grillby nodded. He could do that. He made it a goal to show them what it was like to be spoiled. But he was sure the dogs would be more than happy to do so.

Instead of needlessly worrying, he set to work with the dogs. It seemed indeed that they had experience with this, and the end result impressed Grillby quite a bit. With all three working together, they had made a 'den' fit for the King himself, at least in his opinion. It was a simple thing to build, oddly enough. They took the top frame for the bunk bed and installed it. Then it was a simple matter of screwing in curtain rods and hooks, attaching the blanket to it so it hung down over the bed. Now even a weak child like Sans could open and close it easily enough. The bottom rung was also given a curtain to hang over the edge to offer a similar blanket shield to the space under the bed. It might be a while before they outgrew the space, so it was an extra layer of security for them should they wish to use it.

A touch light was installed on the wall next to the bed so either child would have access to light at all times. The glow in the dark stars were added to the walls and under the top bunk, adding another layer of light and comfort. Grillby was sure that they were going to love it.

As for the cardboard boxes, Dogamy showed Grillby that if one assembled them and slipped a T-shirt over the open end, it would make a cozy little bolt hole for the children to rest in. The head hole of the shirt would allow just enough room for them to get in and out and darkened the space considerably. Adding a pillow to the inside made it a cheap and effective tool to make the children feel more secure with the extra hiding spaces. One should be placed in every room of the house. Grillby had never thought of that before and resolved to confide in the dogs more for little tricks like these.

But now it was the time to get approval from the kids themselves. The dogs went to distribute the boxes around the house while Grillby went to fetch the children. Grillby was quite happy, when he went downstairs again, to find Sans in his child shape. It seemed the rest did him wonders, and he was happily watching his little brother scribble with some crayons. When both children heard him descend, they looked up with calm, but curious expressions.

“hi.” Sans greeted softly. He just continued to lay where he was, watching as the fire elemental approached. Papyrus took the opportunity to stuff a crayon in his mouth, but Grillby managed to remove it with minimal fuss.

“*We have a surprise for you.*” Grillby bent down to pick up both children. They both allowed it and Sans tilted his head with confusion as he was held.

“what is it?” He asked, his voice a little rough still.

“*Well...I can't tell you. It would not be a surprise then, wouldn't it?*” Grillby winked. Sans thought for a moment, somewhat stiff as he internally debated something. He then relaxed and nodded. Taking this as permission, Grillby carried them up the stairs and to their bedroom. Both kids' eyes widened when they saw the finished den for them.

The dogs had spent time charging the glow-in-the-dark stars before considering the project 'finished'. They didn't quite mean to, but the whole thing ended up being space-themed. Star-patterned blankets and pillows accented the stars and the children couldn't be happier. They almost wiggled out of their caretaker's grasp in their excitement.

Giggling with pure unbridled joy, they went to explore their upgraded space. Papyrus turned the touch light on and off while Sans seemed pleased to pull the curtain open and closed. Wide grins were on both their skeletal faces as they laughed. Grillby felt his SOUL soar a little. They deserved this, this simple little moment of happiness. He vowed to give them more than what they could have ever imagined.

“Looks like they approve!” Dogamy and Dogaressa poked their heads in the doorway, smiling at the scene.

Grillby nodded. The kids were just being kids at this point and just flat out ignored the adults in the room. Papyrus had gotten down on the floor and was moving toys and books up to Sans. The older sibling took them and stashed them in the corner of the bed with quiet giggles.

“Thank you both...again...” He was grateful to them for the help.

(“It’s our pleasure.”) Dogaressa nodded. (“If you need anything, we’ll be stationed outside.”)

“We’ll be hidden, so if you need us just text us.” Her husband added with a nod. “We’ll let ourselves out.”

Grillby nodded again as the dogs left, thoughts running. He had no doubt that he would be able to defend these kids along with help from the Guard...but he was concerned about how this would affect the children. Would they regress again? Would he have to start from the beginning to win their trust again?

“DA!” Such thoughts was interrupted as Papyrus yelled, holding up a book in his hands. “BOOEK!”

“it’s ‘book’ bro. booooook.” Sans just chuckled to himself as he curled up on the bed.

“NYEH. BOOEK!” The smallest shouted again and waved the book again, clear in what he wanted.

Well, it was a little early for a story...but why not? He settled down on the bed, the curtain left open for now as the kids gathered around for a story.

He had many thoughts, but now there was a more important task at hand.



Waterfall was peaceful. Water dripped in a cacophony of sounds, adding a musical layer to this already mysterious and quite magical area. It was still; the echo flowers stood tall and firm in the rocky soil, casting blue glows all around with their luminescent petals. The stillness would not last.

The air crackled as a point in space ripped through the air. The air vibrated and whined with the wrongness of it all. The echo flowers shivered in their attempts to replicate the horrible sound. A flash of blue washed over the area as the tall thin skeletal scientist stepped out of space and into the now.

He didn't look pleased.

{ **"Damn interference!"** } he hissed. He glared down at a small device in his hands, roughly resembling a hand-held radar. There was barely a blip on the screen, the lines shuddering. Of course it would be smart enough to pass through here. Waterfall was a literal well of magic, few sensitive devices reacted well to the area. 001-S was smarter than what it let on.

He used a hand to tap it firmly a few times. The device sluggishly resumed a harsh beeping as a dot reappeared on the screen.

More than ever he was glad he had prepared for this. After all, nobody could get rid of a tracking device implanted inside their skull. He had once tried plates and other easier-to-install devices. But shortly after, they all ended in failure. He would not put it past 1-S to chew off its own legs for a chance to escape.

He knew, it had tried before. That was quite a mess to clean up, and the recovery time set back valuable experiments. Hence, the new harder to reach device.

Sure, there were side effects for the subject. The scientist, however, felt comforted in the fact that his experiment would be retrievable. No doubt where 1-S was, so would be 2-P.

He hit the device again, jostling the beeps so they became stronger as it pointed down a narrow corridor. Ah. So that's where they went.

He grumbled and began to follow the signal. He would find them. They weren't quite ready yet, but plans would have to be hastened. The idiots in charge here were willing to doom their entire species over some mere tools, Gaster thought. It was madness! Gaster vanished into the darkness, the beeps from the tracking device echoing through the cavern.

He would find them.

And soon Monsterkind would all be free.

Chapter Ten

Bertram shivered, drawing the collar of his coat closer around his scaly neck. Of course, they would have to go to Snowdin, the bane of his existence. Scales weren't particularly warm in the snow and ice after all. He was still cold even when wrapped in several layers of heat enchanted clothing. Bah...to be a dinosaur...

There was a reason why scaly monsters tended to live in Hotland. Still...Bertram was a little worried. He could almost swear that they were being watched from the shadows of the evergreen trees. He squinted into the darkness, but he could not see anything that proved they were being observed. Only flashes of white that could have easily been simple snowflakes in the wind.

"Are we there yet?" Alphys bounced about in the snow, barely able to stay calm as they walked. Alphys didn't seem to mind the cold so much in her excitement.

Since leaving their home she hadn't stopped talking about her friends. How nice they were. How cool they were. She was trying to talk them up, but every time she mentioned the little bone children, Bertram felt a shiver of guilt creep across his soul. After all, his dear intelligent daughter had come to him for help and he had dismissed her.

Everyone in the Guard had tried to comfort him about it, but in the end he still ignored a cry for help and he felt awful. His fault or not, it was his inability to trust his daughter that continued their torture. The conversation over the phone with their guardian hammered in just how fragile they were. It was stressed that they would all need to be VERY careful while visiting. So much guilt...it refused to leave him.

Under his arm he carried a present. Hopefully, it would be a good start to make amends with the skeletons. Inside were some cookies, simple butter and sugar ones. Bribery to the highest degree, but he hoped it would be good enough to at least make them a little more comfortable.

"Almost there." He finally spoke. He reached out a clawed hand to hold his daughter close, a little paranoid with all this ice around. What if she slipped and hurt herself? That wouldn't do at all. He only wished that the 'being watched' feeling would go away. It had started ever since he set foot in the frozen town.

His old instincts flared nervously as his daughter held his hand and led him on, her ramblings a low buzz in his mind.

They were shortly directed to a pleasant little two-story house. It seemed that Grillby, the boys' guardian, was very well-known and beloved in town. Just about everyone knew where he lived. The front of the house was fairly plain and simple, making it stand out from the other houses permanently decorated with Gyftmas decorations.

He hummed nervously, adjusting his coat and hesitantly knocking on the door. There was a sharp bark from inside the house before it went silent again. He had to wait a few seconds before the door opened and a warm draft of heated air spilled onto the front step. Bertram's sigh of relief caught up in his throat when he realized who had opened the door. Despite knowing who he was, it was still a bit of a shock for monsters old enough to remember the war.

Grillby, former Major General of the Royal Monster Military...Bane of Humans...The Flames of Vengeance...was standing there, wearing a bright pink t-shirt with '**HOT DAD**' written on it in a flaming font. Hot dad indeed.

"Hello..." The fire monster adjusted his glasses as he peered at the two dinosaurs before him. His gaze then turned to the smallest dino. *".....Alphys....I take it? Welcome to our home..."*

"YEAH!" She squeaked and flailed her arms as much as they could under several layers of cloth. She vibrated slightly. "Are Sans and Papyrus in there? Are they okay? ARE THEY ALRIGHT? CAN I SEE THEM N-"

"Ah...yes....yes....they are fine..." The flame held up his hands to calm the overly excited child. *"They are inside...but please....be careful as they are still regaining their strength..."*

"Don't be rough with them, sweet pea." Bertram smiled and patted his daughter's head.

"Please be aware..." The flame addressed Bertram next. *"They do not trust strangers....it takes a long time for them...to warm up to people. And...no sudden movements...and no loud sudden noises. Don't try to touch them unless they...initiate contact first. And don't...stare at them."*

Seems there were quite a few rules, but understandable ones. "I understand, I'll do my best to not intimidate them." The dino nodded his head. He'd do his best, even though his species were not known for being intimidating. Pastel friendly dinosaurs were the entire family line.

Grillby nodded and stood aside to allow the two to come in out of the cold. Both dinosaurs wiped their feet before entering the house. What greeted them was not children, but an empty living room. It was warm and pleasant enough and quite roomy.

Scattered among the furniture were large cardboard boxes with holes cut into them. Holes big enough for a child to climb inside, he figured.

And then, one of the boxes wiggled and two pinpricks of white watched from the darkness of the hole.

Ah, there they were.

“Sannnnnsssssss Papyrussssssss!” Alphys ran inside, beaming behind her glasses. “Guys! I’m here!”

The box wiggled before two bone puppies burst forth from the cardboard. Yapping, they tackled the little dinosaur to the ground. Thankfully, her several coats cushioned the collision as she fell with a squeal. She laughed and giggled, trying to fend off the attack of happy licks and nuzzles. The two whined and snuggled up against Alphys, not letting her get up off the floor. She found herself trapped under the puppies.

In the end she gathered them both up in her small arms and hugged them. “Heehee I missed you guys.” She smooched them both on top of their bony crests, avoiding the bandage still on Sans’ head. They whined in response and began to purr. Sans’ tail was wagging so fast it could take out a small child walking behind him. And of course, Papyrus started screaming in delight. She hugged them closer, eyes closed to fend off emotions that threatened to spill over. Her very first friends were safe now...it was almost too good to be true. But here they were.

Both Grillby and Bertram watched the interaction, both ready to jump in in case there was a problem. But...they doubted they would need too. All three kids seemed to be fine at the moment.

Then, all three children jumped up and started chasing each other other through the house. Soon the house echoed with shouts and barks as the children were well... children. They ran about until they had worn away that brief burst of energy to sit with each other once again. The brief episode only lasted a few minutes, but felt like hours to the excited kids.

The children of course, completely ignored the adults in the room. Grillby took it to be a good sign.

“You guys look so much better.” Alphys smiled, panting to catch her breath as she sat on the carpet. “You guys have your own clothes and everything now! A WHOLE house! It’s so big!”

“yeah.” Sans had changed into his humanoid form (much to Bertram’s shock). “it’s great here!” He sat shoulder to shoulder with Alphys, wanting to be in contact with her at all times. “and...you’re okay too, right? you’re fine?”

“Of course I am! See?” She shed off the layers of coats to reveal a pink simple dress. She held out her arms to show that there were no bandages or marks of any kind. She was whole and safe.

Sans gave her a look over, before nodding with a satisfied smile. “that’s good...”

“And now that I know where you live, we can visit a whoooole bunch now!” She picked up Papyrus and cuddled him, who was still in his bone puppy form. Papyrus purred as he got held, closing his eyes and sticking out a manifested tongue. Alphys smiled and rocked the tiny pup. “We can have more than just slumber parties then!”

“what else is there besides that?” Sans tilted his head as he scratched at his bandage.

“Well, there’s dancing parties and cake parties...oh! Maybe we can go out somewhere, like to the toy store! But I’d have to ask Dad and Mister Grillby first.” Alphys stole a quick glance over at her father and Grillby, before turning back to Sans. “Are you happy here with Mister Grillby?” She dropped her voice to a whisper “Cause if not...I can bust you out again.”

“oh! no we’re happy. see, grillby is our dad now!” Sans smiled. “this is the best place!”

“Heehee you have a dad now too? My dad is over there!” She pointed. Sans turned to look. Wow, the adult did look a lot like his friend, but more orange and...round?

Bertram turned away from a quiet conversation with Grillby, looking to the children. He startled. The eldest of the skeleton children was staring right at him. Sans stared with his wide white pupils...before suddenly his eye sockets went pitch dark.

The older dinosaur flinched at the look. The action seemed to please the skeleton enough where he turned away and back to Alphys. There, they resumed their quiet conversation.

“Don’t worry about that...it is...a defense mechanism.” Grillby explained. *“He is...a nervous child. He relies on...intimidation to protect himself...”*

“Ah well...yes of course. That makes sense...” Bertram swallowed. He did his best to tear his gaze away from the children, remembering the ‘no staring’ rule.

“If anything...he is accepting you rather well...” Grillby nodded. *“He hasn’t entered any...outright threat displays...let’s keep it that way.”* There was a soft warning undertone to the sentence, that one dad to another could understand. Bertram nodded with a swallow, watching the kids from the corner of his eye.

Alphys had taken out a bag she brought along. She proceeded to dump a large pile of building blocks and Legos on the floor. Picking one up, she began to show the both of the skeletons how to snap them together. Papyrus was still too young to understand the concept of Legos yet, but he seemed happy enough to turn some of the more brighter colored ones in his paws and sort them into piles. Sans picked up on it rather fast and he and Alphys laid on their stomachs and began to build a city together.

“Come, you can help me with lunch...and let them have some...quiet fun alone.” Grillby nodded to the kitchen.

“Ah yes...sure.” Bertram nodded and followed the fire elemental to the kitchen. He went slow so as not to bother the children. To his relief, he was pretty much ignored as the children were far too busy with building to pay him any attention. It allowed him to catch a few snippets of their conversation as he passed.

“We need TWO candy shops, Sans.”

“why two?”

“Cause two is better than one, silly!”

Smiling, he left the children to their playing. Time to help fix lunch.



It had not been a good time for Dr. Felix.

Confined to a jail cell ever since the laboratory raid, his only companions were his thoughts. Stripped of his clothing of status, he instead wore a simple orange jumpsuit, a mark of shame. Those he could deal with, but the harassment was a different story, from Guard and prisoner alike.

Once it had slipped WHY he was in jail, the harassment had reached ungodly levels. Even murderers and thieves had no pleasant words to say to him once they found out. Even worse, he couldn't even rely on the companionship of his fellow scientists. They were all separated. Where the others were he couldn't begin to fathom.

Perhaps he was being given time to reflect on his deeds and repent...but that wasn't going to work. What was there to repent for? So, he festered in silence in the cold, dark cell, waiting for something to happen.

That was, until the Captain of the Guard came to 'escort' him to an interrogation room.

And that was where he found himself. His hands shook as metal cuffs dug into his arms. Cuffed to the arms of the chair, there wasn't any hope of escape. To prevent any further struggle, the metal of the cuffs hummed with magic. Magical runes woven in the metal were there to block all attempts of magic from a prisoner. Even his legs met the same fate, cuffed to the legs of the chair. And the chair itself remained firm, bolted to the floor. He was utterly trapped. They were not going to take chances with him.

He stared across the bare metal table at the fish monster sitting across from him. The room was dark. The only light came from a few bare light-bulbs scattered about. Their scant bulbs cast the sterile and gray room in a harsh light. It was quite...uncomfortable. Felix kept blinking. After being in the dark for so long, the light was almost unbearable as he tried to adjust.

Gnash picked at his teeth with a claw, glancing at the imprisoned scientist. He was in his full armor, his polished sword sitting in hands' reach. Clearly, if Felix did manage to try something, he would regret it.

"We've watched all the tapes." Gnash finally spoke, breaking the silence. "We read all the notes. You and the others are looking at either life sentences, or if the king decrees, the death penalty. It depends on how good of a mood he's in...and I'll tell you now. Ever since he found about about this? His mood has been pretty damn poor."

"It doesn't matter." Felix's voice cracked, rough from not speaking for so long. Ever since his capture, Felix had resigned to his fate. There was nothing he could do to change any of it, so why bother? In the end he was a dead man no matter what he did. All it would chance was how quick and less painful that end would be.

"It does matter. Our King has sworn to protect ALL monsterkind. And that includes the children you and your bastard of a leader made and tortured. He is not happy."

"So? Let him not be happy. It doesn't matter anymore."

“IT MATTERS TO ME.” Gnash slammed his fists so hard on the metal table, it left dents in its wake. The sudden display of violence shook Felix out of his cool demeanor, causing him to gape in shock.

“IT MATTERS TO YOUR VICTIMS. Two of which are still alive and WILL get their justice.” Gnash sucked a breath in through his sharp gritted teeth in anger. “You’re lucky you are here right now and that I follow the law. Most of my men want you tossed to the Major General. Remember him? Flames of Vengeance? He’d annihilate you to the point where they won’t even be able to find your dust. If he knew where you were, there would be nothing that would be able to stop him.”

Felix took a deep breath; despite himself he was shivering.

“Despite that, there is a chance for redemption.” Gnash casually withdrew his fists and checked over the armor, making sure they weren’t dented. “We need to catch your bastard of a boss, and you can help. If you do, you’ll avoid the death penalty for sure. That is the most we can do.”

“No...I can’t.” Felix finally spoke up, swallowing thickly. When did his throat get so dry? “I can’t help you.”

“We need to know where Gaster is.” The Captain looked right through the cat, his yellow eyes narrowing. “And you need to tell us NOW.”

“I DON’T KNOW where he is!” Felix backed his ears and hissed. “He never told us about any other labs or houses he has. He could be anywhere!”

“Are you sure about that?” Gnash peeled back his lips in a silent snarl. “I’ve looked over your files. You’ve been working with Dr. Gaster for years. You were even in his same graduating class. You two were close. You must know something.”

“Even if I did, I wouldn’t tell you.” Felix snarled back. He jerked forward in anger, stopped by the cold metal chaining him to the chair. The fur along his neck bristled from the interrogation. It seemed he had found a sudden surge of bravery.

Gnash merely regarded the feline coldly.

“Oh? And why not. He abandoned you and the rest of the team to face justice while he ran like a coward.” Gnash tapped his fingertips together as he started down the feline. “Odd, such loyalty for a...creature like that.” Gnash didn’t want to quite call Gaster a man or a monster, he didn’t deserve such terms anymore.

“Not so much loyalty.” Felix frowned, his ears pressed firmly against his skull.

“Ah, fear then?” Gnash leaned forward. “You know, we can protect you.”

“No...no you can't.” Felix chuckled, a bitter and deep laugh. “You can't. He can go anywhere he wants. He's a powerful mage. And, he has no conscience and only cares about the greater good...the BIG picture. What do you think he'd do to me if I spilled my guts about him? I'm surprised he hasn't killed me already. I am only a liability now.”

“But you're fine with him running loose.” Gnash quirked an eyebrow. “He's after the children, I'm sure of it, and you're saying you're okay with that?”

“I'm fine with him doing what he needs to do.” The cat looked away.

“And that is?”

“Freeing us all.”

“Yes, free us all on the backs of tortured children. I'm sure our King would be delighted.” Gnash's voice dripped with sarcasm and withered patience.

“The King would rather us all waste away by waiting for humans to drop into our laps. At least Gaster has a proactive approach.”

“Hah! Proactive indeed! Tell me, what did he do to convince you that maiming babies was the right path to take?”

Felix grit his teeth and looked away, refusing to look the Captain in the face. He had no answer to that.

Gnash tsked. “Such a shame. A brilliant mind, wasted by following a psychopath. Keep lying to yourself enough and eventually you'll believe it. How long did it take for him to begin his experiments? You must have had an inkling of how wrong they were. We have the tapes you know...so we know about how much they screamed for help even as they turned to dust in their cages.”

Felix closed his eyes, wishing he could cover his ears and shut it all out.

“You must have felt something when you assisted Gaster in breaking their little bones. Or forcing them to train until some died of exhaustion. Or perhaps, you felt a little twinge of guilt when Gaster gave them injections. Injections that would make them scream for hours. Hours and hours of screaming. SURELY, that must have caused you some inconvenience, eh?”

“Stop.” Felix growled.

“Or how about when they started falling down or were born crippled? Gaster shoved them into tubes to prolong their suffering. Or how about cracking their heads open and messing around inside of it like you would a toy. How about the times you wouldn’t feed them to measure how long they could last? Measuring how long it took for them to start dusting must have been a tough task.”

“STOP.”

“How about when one of earlier children learned enough common to call Gaster ‘Dadda’? And how he immediately killed them. You were there in the tape, you saw it all. That look on that poor kid’s face when he pulled out the hammer-“

“**STOP. STOP!**” Felix roared suddenly. “**SHUT UP! FOR ANGEL’S SAKE SHUT UP!**”

Gnash scoffed. “Oh, really now? Did I touch a nerve there, sunshine?”

“I’m done talking.” Felix leaned back, his face hard. “Take me back to my cell. I’m done.”

For a while they only stared at each other in complete silence. Gnash sighed and shrugged.

“That’s fine. You don’t have to talk to me. Instead, you can talk to him.” Gnash inclined his head towards the door. “*A special guest indeed.* Why, he even insisted he come talk to you and your buddies. But, we kinda wanted to keep you all alive for proper interrogation first.”

“Talk to wh-“

And then the door opened, the light washing out the figure, until they stepped forward. They had to duck, their great bulk and armor was not one made for smaller door frames. And then, stepping inside carefully to not catch his horns on the doorframe, was the King of monsters.

Dressed in his armor and cape, his trident clenched in his paw, the King surveyed the room. His eyes flashed blue and orange as he frowned. His aura of strong magic was enough to even make the Captain of the Royal Guard flinch under its power. King Asgore stood, regarding the disgraced scientist with both cold fury...and disappointment. It was almost like disappointing the best dad in the world, and Felix felt his innards twist in icy discomfort.

Felix’s breath caught in his throat. All bravado, all thoughts of the King being weak...a fool...died, paralyzed with fear.

Asgore walked forward, leaning down. His voice, deep and powerful, rocked with the undertones of sadness and restrained rage.

“Now....let’s talk.”



With two monsters helping in the kitchen, lunch was ready in record time. Grillby couldn't help but miss the children's presence as he cooked. Sometimes they liked to sit and watch, asking questions about cooking. For now though, it was important to let them catch up with their friend. Bertram proved to be a capable cook, explaining that it was just him and Alphys. *Somebody* needed to be able to make food.

In time a simple meal found itself put together. Mashed potatoes, meatloaf, and some mixed roasted vegetables. Grillby set out glasses of milk and plates for the children. Satisfied with the placement, he went out to fetch the skeletons and dino.

And what a sight greeted him.

Sans and Alphys had on rhinestone encrusted skirts, glittery tiaras, and bows. In both their hands they had little plastic wands. Clearly, Alphys had brought plenty of items with her, including dress-up props. They were trying to stop Papyrus, who was crawling around their Lego city. He stopped once in awhile to shove buildings into his mouth to chew on. He left a trail of colorful plastic collateral damage in his wake as he crawled. He babbled nonsense words as he picked up another building and started pulling it to pieces. Papyrus clearly was having the time of his life.

“Quick Sans! Use your Pup Power COSMOS ATTACK.” Alphys posed dramatically, spinning carefully to not step on a Lego with her bare feet. “Or the city will be LOST!”

“uhhhh.” Sans was clearly trying to learn this 'game' as he was going along. “Uh... uh....cosmos attack activate! *ka-powwwww!* *whooshhhh!*” He pointed his wand (both had hearts on the ends!) at his little brother.

Papyrus didn't seem to care. He spit out the building he was chewing on and reached over to grab another in his little hands. “ABABAH AH!”

“pap, you’re supposed to fall over!” Sans tried to whisper. “that’s cheating!”

Papyrus simply started chewing on the Legos again. “Bloo aaaaaahhh bab!”

“IT ISN’T WORKING! WE MUST COMBINE OUR POWERS!” Alphys went to strike another pose, before she paused. Sans looked up to see where she was looking, before breaking into a smile.

“hi dad!”

“Hello Sans...what are you three playing?” Grillby smirked as he looked over the wreckage. It seemed the building block city they were building had fallen to ruin. Papyrus, of course, was in the middle of it.

“we’re magical girls...i think! with....with...” Sans frowned in thought, trying to remember the rest of it.

“Magical girls with superpowers we use to save the day!” Alphys chimed in. “We spin around and get wands and crowns and dresses and MAGICAL POWERS!”

“yeah i’m a space magical girl, and alphys is a mecha one!” Sans beamed.

“Oh I see.” Oh no, this was too pure and innocent. Grillby’s flames turned a warm golden color to reflect his mood. *“And how did that go?”*

“we were protecting the city but...i don’t think papyrus knows how to play too good yet.” Sans looked over at his younger brother. Said brother started smashing buildings down and scattering pieces everywhere. “he’s a cheater.”

“I am sure he’ll be...a more involving playmate when he is a little older.” Grillby chuckled. *“Now, it is time for lunch. Little ones must eat....even magical ones.”*

It seemed Grillby had spoken the magic words. Sans picked up his brother and all three children made their way to the kitchen. Being magical girls was hungry work. The mess of Legos and building blocks lay scattered all over the living room floor. He would remind the children to pick them up and put them away after lunch.

A flash of movement at the window caught his eye and broke his current train of thoughts. When he went to look, there was nothing there.

There was a brief surge of paranoia...before he relaxed. The dogs were on the case. They were guarding the house. He had no choice but to trust them and he did. He has known the Canine Unit since they were all puppies. All good and dedicated dogs. And if someone did manage to get through them, then they would sorely regret coming here.

With that, he left for the kitchen, prepared for whatever might happen.

After all, prepare for the worst, but hope for the best.



The Dogi crouched, hidden in the snow. Trained in the art of stealth, they had traded in their usual black cloaks for white ones and had almost become one with the snow around them. They had stopped in their small patrol area to peek inside the house they were guarding. So far...so good. Grillby was burning brighter than he had for years. It was good to see him happy, him and the children too. They aimed to keep it that way.

They were sure that the adults knew that they were being watched.

Of course, they don't mean to cause discomfort, but they had a job to do. And that job was keeping an eye out over the family. They wouldn't put it past Gaster to attempt to retake his 'property', and if he tried, they would be able to catch him.

Dogamy glanced over at his wife. She was looking tired and he was feeling so too.

"Dear...we've been at this for a while now." He began softly.

("Yes. We have.") Dogaressa's reply was short, her dark eyes scanning the area around them.

They had taken refuge in the shadow of the wood. It offered superior natural camouflage. Its position also allowed them to set up ambushes and traps if need be. Luckily for Grillby, his house was close enough to the wood to offer such natural protection.

"When Lesser and Greater come to relieve us, you are getting some sleep." He looked over to his wife. "You haven't slept at all these past few days."

("How do you expect me to sleep, where there's....that thing...running around? He had no problem hurting these puppies, what makes you think he would have issues hurting the other pups in town?")

"I know...but we're only two dogs. We have the whole Canine Unit out now. We can't do anything if we're too tired to fight!" Dogamy placed a paw on his wife's shoulder. "You know it, it's one of the first things they drilled into us at the academy."

Dogaressa sighed. (“I know...I know...”)

Their conversation cut out when a low short howl echoed from town. The Dogi tilted back their heads and howled back. Two loud barks was the swift reply, drawing closer from the center of town.

Part of what made the Canine Unit so effective was their long-distance communication. In no time at all, Greater and Lesser Dog approached from the haze of snow. When they saw their two commanders, they snapped crisp salutes.

<“Lesser Reporting in!”> The shorter dog panted, his tail wagging in excitement.

<“Greater reporting in! News from the Big Captain!”> Greater loomed over the other three dogs. With his magical armor, he was the biggest and strongest out of all the canines in raw physical power.

(“Good news I hope?”) Dogaressa glanced at her husband. He looked back before squeezing her shoulder again.

<“Yes! Yes!”> Lesser vibrated, his neck extending a few inches. <“Bad scientists talked! Secret bad scientist holes are being found now!”>

“Excellent news!” Dogamy grinned. “See 'Ressa? Things are looking up.”

<“Won’t be long now!”> Greater opened his small jaws in a wide doggy grin.

Dogaressa allowed herself a smile, a rare thing since the case began. (“Then I suppose you’ll be taking our posts for the night?”)

Both Lesser and Greater saluted and nodded.

“Alright then, goodnight you two.” Dogamy took his wife’s hand and began to lead her back to the barracks for some shuteye.

<“We will!”>

<“We’ll keep our noses to the air!”>

Satisfied, the Dogi melted into the darkness and vanished from view. It was time for them to get some well deserved rest.

Lesser and Greater drew their weapons and assumed their posts. They weren’t made for stealth, but their white fur and light armor helped them blend into the snow. If anyone came around, it would be clear that the house was being guarded.

There they would remain steadfast and faithful, watching over the house before them.

They were good dogs. *Best dogs*. Maybe if they were good, they would have time to go and visit the bone puppies. They liked the puppies. They were good dogs too.

They wagged their tails and panted, keeping a watchful eye over the house.

Good dogs.

Best dogs.



Hours had passed since lunch and dinner, and the children had a blast. Of course they played some more, running around and yelling like kids tended to do. Bertram had given the boys his gift of cookies, but to his surprise they didn't eat a single bite. Sans briefly vanished upstairs with the box when he thought nobody was looking. When he came back down he was box-less.

Hrm.

The boys were then introduced to popcorn, anime, and dancing...in that order. Sans found that he liked the anime, but not so much the dancing. He wasn't quite used to all the noises and movement yet, and found himself getting a little anxious. Sans grew up in sterile gray walls and little to no stimulation...cartoons and music were still a little overwhelming for him.

Luckily Grillby seemed to have a sixth sense now to Sans' moods and casually suggested that they all sit down for a story. It was getting late after all, and the children were beginning to wind down. Sans and Papyrus had low energy to begin with, but even

Alphys was getting tired too. To Bertram, she had played harder than she had for a long time and, for once, was properly tired out.

So Grillby sat down, his flames crackling and popping gently like an old warm fireplace. He cracked open an old dog-eared copy of '*Winnie-the-Pooh*', a human book about little stuffed animals that lived in a wood. Like most books, it was recovered from the dump and restored at the local library.

Since taking in the kids, Grillby had found himself slipping there when he could. They had quite a few books that came from the surface about humans, but the children seemed to like them despite it.

Still a good story is a good story, no matter where it came from.

Eventually, the stories were over and it was time to get ready for the 'slumber' part of the party. Grillby made a bed up on the couch for Bertram as the kids ran to brush their teeth and get changed for bed. Papyrus was still too young to brush his own teeth. Last time he tried he ate half a tube of toothpaste before Grillby could stop him. In time, teeth were brushed and PJ's were put on and "good night"s were exchanged.

And Sans was oddly excited despite his fatigue.

"come on! it's time for bed!" He began tugging on Alphys's hand, trying to drag her to a room down the hallway.

"I know it is! Are we going to your room?" She was a little perplexed as she allowed herself to be dragged along. Papyrus had already ran ahead, seemingly eager for bed.

"yeah! wait till you see it!" The older skeleton could barely contain himself, his white pupils sparkling with joy. They didn't have long to go before all three were inside the room and Sans pulled back the curtains on his bed.

The lights were on and the stick-on stars glowed a soft green, making Alphys gasp a little.

"This whole room is yours!?! Wow!" She looked around the toy- and book-filled room. It seemed that the skeletons had begun to decorate themselves. Crayon doodles began to cover some lower parts of the walls along with the odd sticker or two. It felt homely. Much better than a cage, that was for sure.

"i know! it's all ours! and we didn't have to do anything for it!" Such a concept was still a little beyond Sans, but he knew he was happy. He picked up his little brother and tossed him on the bed. Papyrus squealed and bounced on his side of the bed as Sans climbed in after him.

"come on alphys!" Sans beamed and held open the curtain for his friend.

"Ah! Coming!" Alphys quickly climbed aboard and Sans closed the curtain behind her.

There in the darkness, the lights and the glow-in-the-dark stickers seemed to make the dark space into a whole other world. A warm and dark world nonetheless, but pleasant.

Sans turned on a moon shaped touch-light and for a moment, banished away the darkness. Sans grinned, happy to finally show off something that truly belonged to him and his brother.

“Guys...this is so cool!” Alphys had ideas already on what to do with her bed when she got home. Curtains and lights were awesome!

“heehee yeah...and if you get hungry...” Sans reached up into the wooden 'rafters' of the top bunk and pulled out the gift box of cookies. It seemed that the wooden beams offered plenty of places to hide food and trinkets. Alphys could catch a glimpse of other hoarded treats now that she knew where to look. Thankfully they all seemed to be sealed in packages. She didn't want to sleep in a crumb-filled bed.

“Nah, I'm good, your dad is a good cook. I ate too much.” She giggled in response. Shrugging, Sans stuck the box back in with his other stash.

“he's the best cook.” Sans could only agree. It had taken time, but now he was able to appreciate all the new food and flavors now that he wasn't so sick anymore. Grillby had explained to him that after a period of starvation, it took a while for someone to be able to eat well again. Luckily for Papyrus, Sans had always made sure he ate first, so his little brother wasn't burdened with such a problem.

He felt proud of himself for being able to ask for seconds today, much to his father's happiness.

“Yeah he is! I mean, my Dad is a good cook too.” She chuckled in response.

“i guess...dads are just good...right?” Sans blinked.

She nodded. “Yeah! They are pretty awesome...heehee.”

For a while they sat together for a while, Papyrus crawling on them to seek attention.

“I'm...” Alphys started. “I'm glad...”

“hrm?” Sans tilted his head, picking up his brother and cradling him on his lap.

“I'm just...so happy you guys are here now...” Alphys teared up despite herself. “I was just...so worried...”

“i know...but...it's good now right?” Sans, for once, looked hopeful. “dad said...he won't let anything happen to us...and i trust him.”

“True...Dad said that Mister Grillby is really strong.” Alphys wiped her face with a smile. “I mean, even if he doesn’t look it.”

“just what are you saying about my dad?” Sans quirked a brow ridge.

“That he’s a *nerd*.” The dino giggled.

“.....” Sans blinked. “what’s a nerd?”

Alphys laughed and proceeded to explain the whole concept of 'nerds' to Sans and Papyrus, only to witness them slow blinking and nodding off after the five minute mark.

Well, she DID tend to get a little long-winded when explaining something.

“GOSH! Fine, I’ll explain in the morning!” She giggled and grabbed the pillow she brought, laying down.

Only then to find herself pinned down by two purring bone puppies.

“NO! At least let us get under the covers first. *Goshhhh!*” She struggled and giggled, trying to pull up the covers but the pups didn’t want to move.

Outside of the door, Grillby listened with a smile until the laughter turned into soft snores. He wasn’t quite spying, more like being a little paranoid, and wanting to be sure everyone was safe and sound. When he was sure the children were both asleep, he made his way down the stairs where Bertram was making himself comfortable on the couch.

“*Thank you for staying.*” Grillby began. “*Are you comfortable?*”

“Oh, I am...thank you. And it’s no problem...I mean...two adults keeping an eye out is better than one.” The elder dinosaur nodded.

“*Mhmm...*” Grillby walked across the room to look out the window again.

“So...still no sign of the guy...right?” Bertram pulled up the covers to his chin, but was still very much alert.

“*No...but they will catch him...or I will.*” Grillby sighed and closed the blinds, checking to make sure everything was locked up.

Bertram simply turned over on the couch, keeping his ear pointed towards the door. “... good night Grillby.”

"...Goodnight Bertram." Grillby nodded, switching off the lights and making his way back to the stairs. *"If you need anything, I will be upstairs. Sleep well."*

"Thank you, I'll try to." Bertram sighed and settled down, watching as the fire elemental vanished upstairs. The absence of his fiery illumination plunged the house into darkness.

He knew that none of them would be getting much sleep that night.



Gaster stepped out of the rocky exit, frowning as his shoe crunched in the snow. So... they'd run all the way out here, to the very edge of the underground? Hrm...Snowdin was still quite 'wild' after all this time, with more wilderness than town. It would make sense for beasts to seek out where they belong.

He glanced at his device, the blips on the screen pointing up to the northwest of town near the tree cover. He was ready to step forward and continue his trek when a soft howl echoed through the cavern.

It was shortly answered by three short barks.

Ah yes, the Mutt Guard. Gaster wasn't a fellow who particularly liked dogs, but still admired their abilities. After all, he sought to emulate such traits in his creations, particularly the obedience and eagerness to please. But, unfortunately, they had proved too willful for that. Failures, all of them.

Oh well, the E3 group should see some improvements, once he gained his experiments back. They would be the new basis for a new line, and maybe this time he would have a properly functioning group, moving up from alpha phase testing to beta phase testing.

He shook his head, he was getting ahead of himself. If he wished to regain his creations, he would need to find a way around the Guard. No doubt they had a special interest with his creations, due to their current puppy-like stage. And he knew better to cross such a bond unprepared.

Tsk. How unfortunate. He was already falling behind his timetable with all these setbacks.

With no access to his main laboratory, he would have to start again, and he needed those two to do so. After all, does one not need a prototype before making a new version?

His musings were interrupted again by another howl and he frowned.

Well...it looked like he needed to make a tactical retreat for now and come up with a proper plan before executing the extraction of his subjects.

He would need to find an opportunity to strike.

And thankfully, he was a patient man.

Chapter Eleven

When Grillby checked on the kids the next morning, he found them curled up together and sound asleep. He almost didn't want to wake them up, he truly did, but schedules must be kept. It was nice to see them so peaceful and happy. It seemed as though all three of them managed to sleep through the night with no real issue. A first compared to when Sans and Papyrus first stayed with him.

He himself slept lightly, straining to hear every slight noise inside and outside. He would get up often to look outside the windows and check and recheck the locks. Bertram was equally anxious, but conked out halfway through the night. It was no matter to the fire monster; he was used to being awake for long hours. Grillby remembered vividly how, in the war, he would lie awake in his tent waiting for humans to attack in the night. He often preferred fire watch, keeping an eye out for his fellow soldiers through the night. It was a lot better than trying to sleep through all the anxiety. Standing guard made him feel like he was doing something at least. Even when promoted to Major General, he still found himself more awake than not. He had never been a deep sleeper at all, and even after a thousand years that habit had not changed.

Still he felt relieved that nothing happened in the night. No nightmares. No screaming. It was peaceful. It was still too early to tell, but perhaps this trend might continue? With how the boys were progressing, he didn't doubt it. It would still take time for sure. Once Gaster is caught, Grillby imagined that the kids' mental state will drastically improve. With effort and therapy, he is sure that Sans and Papyrus will be much happier. It will just take a little time. He smiled and entered the room, increasing his luminosity. The sudden brightness caused Papyrus to wake up first. He opened his tiny jaws in a colossal yawn and blinked away the remnants of sleep.

"Good morning, Papyrus." Grillby greeted his youngest with a soft smile.

Papyrus giggled and reached over to pat his brother in the face. “AAAPPT!!!” The tiny skeleton yelled and continued to pat Sans until he too stirred. The movement jostled Alphys awake as well as she blinked blearily. Once they were all somewhat awake, Grillby fully turned on the lights.

“Good morning, children. Get dressed, breakfast will be ready soon.” He watched as Papyrus easily slid out of the bed to zoom around. Sans was the slowest, practically oozing out of the bed and covers. It was true that Sans needed more sleep; he could always take a nap at the bar. Food and the medicine however, was just a bit more important than sleep. Alphys was helping to untangle him from the covers, yawning softly and rubbing her eyes.

“Mmmorning!” she squeaked and yawned. Sans just grumbled something inaudible. Papyrus was more than content to make up for the lack of noise all by himself, running around and yelling.

Confident he could leave them alone for now, he walked downstairs to wake up Bertram, and together they cooked breakfast. Grillby decided on pancakes with fruit along with hash browns. The smell alone must have hurried the children as they bounded down shortly later to devour all that laid before them on the table.

It was good to see such appetites, especially for Sans and Papyrus. The two (much to Grillby's relief) were beginning to eat a little more each day, especially since receiving their medicine. Alphys was clearly not a morning person, but she did her best to chat with Papyrus and Sans in between bites.

But all too soon, Bertram approached his daughter with their coats. Sans and Papyrus immediately tensed up.

“alphys...where are you going?” Sans blinked, suddenly more alert than five minutes ago. He reached out to take her hand as if afraid she would up and vanish on them.

“I’m going home!” She pulled Sans forward and planted a little smooch on the top of his skull. “Don’t worry! I’ll be back soon!”

“...but...but why?” Sans accepted the kiss yes, but his voice trembled and tears flecked the edges of his eye sockets. “you just got here!”

“*Sans.*” Grillby stepped in and spoke as gently as he could. *“I know you care about Alphys very much, but she has to go home with her father for now. I can promise that her and her father can visit again really soon.”*

“Yeah! And we have each other’s phone numbers! We can talk on the phone too!” Alphys smiled at Sans and pulled him into a hug. He sighed and sniffled, accepting it but clearly not happy with it. Papyrus joined in on the hug and made a tiny purring noise.

Bertram and Grillby could only watch and let the three settle themselves on their own. Of course the kids would be close and a little clingy to each other; they had been through so much together. But...things had to march on despite it. Grillby would make sure to set up the phone for both skeletons tonight so they could check in on their friend. In all, this was valuable experience for the boys. Over time they would get less and less anxious when people leave when they began to realize that people do come back. They wouldn’t have to worry about someone leaving and never returning.

Eventually they broke the hug and Sans wiped the tears from his eye sockets. “Goodbye, Sans and Papyrus.” She patted them both goodbye and then zipped up her coat. “I’ll call when we get back, okay?”

Sans nodded. “...okay...” He sniffled a little. He could let her go, but he didn’t have to be cheerful about it.

Papyrus waved. “Buh-bye...” The tiny skeleton was equally not pleased as he frowned.

With final goodbyes, Bertram opened the door for Alphys, and together disappeared into the white of Snowdin.

A few seconds managed to pass before both skeletons burst into tears. Grillby found himself on the floor as he tried to comfort them. *“Don’t worry,”* He said as he rubbed their backs. *“She isn’t gone forever. She may have left, but she will return eventually.”*

“Just because she isn't here, doesn't mean she is gone forever.” The kids responded with sniffles. It seem that such thoughts would take some time to take root.

What a way to start the day, and it wasn't even 8 *a.m* yet.



Eventually, Grillby calmed both children down enough that they allowed themselves to be dressed in coats and carried out into the cold. By now they had gotten enough strength back that they didn't rattle like they were going to fly to pieces in the chill. They still snuggled close to their adoptive father to steal all the heat they could from him. Luckily, the fire elemental had plenty of heat to spare. He simply cuddled them close through the short walk, unlocking the backdoor to the bar and heading into the warm building.

The children were set up in the backroom as usual, with snacks, blankets, and paper. Grillby could rely on Sans to keep Papyrus from eating crayons again. It wouldn't necessarily hurt him, but it was a habit that needed to be broken.

Once he was sure they would be alright and prepped, he opened the doors to start the day. To his surprise, three of the Canine Unit were waiting for the bar to open. Doggo, Lesser Dog, and Greater Dog stood out in the cold, mouths open in doggy grins.

“Heya Grillz!”

“Bork!”

“AUFFF.”

“*Hello.*” Grillby opened the door all the way and stepped back to allow the dogs in.

“*Where are The Dogi?*”

“Just relieved Lesser and Greater.” Doggo held onto Lesser Dog’s shoulder so he could be guided to a stool. “Dogamy suggested they come here to get a bite. I tagged along.”

“I see.” Grillby felt a little more comfortable to have three Guardsmen in his bar. Doggo might have vision problems and be quite young for a guard, but he made up for it with determination and drive.

The dogs sat together at the bar in a row. They were regulars and thus always ordered the same thing: a nice bowl of warm kibble and some water. Since they were Guards Grillby made sure to add bacon bits to the kibble as a little ‘thanks’ for their service. The three dogs barked their thanks and tucked in, leaving Grillby to feel a little better about the situation. He had people in his corner. He didn’t have to be alone in this mess. He hoped the Dogi would be alright out there, but they were a powerful pair. If Gaster ran into them, he would be in for a world of hurt.

The lunch crowd descended in an hour later like a tidal wave. Through the blur of cooking and serving, the dogs stuck around. It gave Grillby the chance to check on the children, and so far they seemed to be good at amusing themselves for the time being.

He fell into the usual routine. Serve. Cook. Check on the kids. Serve. Cook. Rinse and repeat for the next few hours before the bar was empty again. The sudden quiet was a little shocking.

“What a crowd!” Doggo leaned back on the counter, earning agreeing barks from his comrades.

“Indeed.” Grillby surveyed the damage in his kitchen. He was now out of lettuce and onions; he could blame that on the Rabbit Clan. He was also running low on bread buns for the burgers. He would have to go out and get some more while there was a lull.

But...would he take the kids with him...or leave them? He checked on the children one last time, to find them curled up together for a nap. He didn’t want to disturb them....

“Could I trouble you three, for a favor?” Grillby spoke to the three dogs as he removed his apron.

“Anything for you Grillz.” Doggo nodded along with Lesser and Greater.

“I must close down for a moment to pick up more groceries. Could you watch the boys please? They are taking a nap.”

Lesser and Greater barked, vibrating slightly.

“Of course! We’ll keep this place guarded as though it’s the King’s castle!” Doggo saluted.

Grillby smiled a warm smile, his flames softening to pastel yellow for the moment.

“Thank you. They are in the back, napping. I shall return shortly.” He gathered up his coat and his phone. *“There will be more kibble for you all, when I return.”*

“Then you better hurry back!” The husky laughed and gestured to the door. “No worries. We got this!”

Grillby inclined his head and stepped towards the door. The dogs barked among themselves for a moment, before Greater left to go into the back room. The children liked him a lot, and having such a big Guard in the back watching over them gave Grillby the last bit of reassurance he needed. He walked through the door and flipped his sign from ‘Open’ to ‘Be Back Soon’. It was a slow hour anyway, for most monsters would either be at work or school at the moment. It gave him time to pick up what he needed and go. The quicker he could get back to his kids, the better.

He couldn’t help but crack a small smile at that. *‘His’* kids. It had a nice ring to it. He took off at an even pace through the snow, blinking away at the small snowflakes that caught the light and glittered in the air. Lovely, like always. It would be even lovelier when that bastard of a scientist was caught. Then perhaps this tense miserable feeling in the air would be gone.

Just then, a bony hand grabbed his shoulder. { **Hello Grillby.** } A dark and smooth voice sent shivers down the bartender’s flames.

Before he had any chance at all to react, he was *yanked*...backwards? Upwards? He wasn't sure, but suddenly everything was black and cold. Cold enough that his flames burned brighter to counteract the sudden loss of ambient heat. He literally couldn't tell what was up or down, and a dark hissing echoed through the blackness.

And just as suddenly as it came, it went, and Grillby found himself far far away in the deep woods. The old locked door to the ruins still stood firm and ageless as it did hundreds of years ago. The lights of town were but tiny specks in the distance. Grillby stumbled, the shock of being pulled through *nothing* and suddenly ending up so far away was enough to give him a flash of intense vertigo.

{ Pull yourself together, that was just a short jump. Honestly...some war hero you are. } The dark voice dripped with ire. Grillby turned to look at the speaker.

It was him.

Of course, Sans' drawing of his torturer was rough...childish...but it fit the monster before him to a T. A flat, featureless white face with bare hints of skeletal features, smooth and unblemished. The black eye-sockets gave the bartender an amused and haughty look, like one would give to a troublesome insect. He was dressed in mostly black, and the white lab coat he wore gave him an otherworldly look. He spread his hands, both with holes drilled out of the palms. *His hands hurt*, Sans had told him. Gaster's hands. Grillby could feel the raw fear of Sans' short and simple statement.

Gaster's face split into a too-wide black grin. The white pupils in his eyes flashed with hidden aggression. Grillby's hands clenched into clawed talons, the edges of his flames turning blue in his building rage.

{ Come now, there is no need for that. } Gaster purred, bringing his hands together to rub them. **{ We are all reasonable men here, right? So I'll make my request perfectly clear. }**

He leaned forward, his expression darkening as his mouth twisted into a frown.

{ Return my experiments. And all of us will be free. }

“You mean children.” Grillby hissed back, flames licking from the collar and cuffs of his shirt. The snow began to sink and melt around his feet.

{ How many times do I have to tell people. They are not children. They are tools. Tools that will break the barrier and free us all. } Gaster scoffed, as if he was talking to an idiot. **{ Such...sentiments...are what’s keeping us trapped here in the first place. }**

Grillby did his best to compose himself. *“Then let ME be clear. Surrender yourself to the Guard and leave MY children alone. That is your only option.”*

Gaster merely laughed, a scratching eerie noise that would have set Grillby's hair on edge if he had any. The mad look in the semi-skeleton’s face was enough proof for sure, that Gaster was completely and utterly insane.

{ Your children? }

{ YOUR CHILDREN? }

His eyes flashed blue and with the sound of static, manifested blue hands wreathed the scientist’s head and body.

{ A pity, I thought you would be reasonable. }

The hands circled and then flashed outward, fingers outstretched. Grillby drew on his many years of combat experience and dodged, his flames a blur of speed. He drew back a clawed hand and with a roar slashed forward. Flames rocketed towards Gaster, burning huge scars of black into the soil.

There was a blink, and Gaster teleported out of the way of the flames, countering with magic hands heading right for the elemental’s SOUL.

That poor young fool. Grillby simply lashed out with blistering hot flames. The magical manifestations cracked and shattered under the onslaught. Gaster did his best to gain some distance between them, manifesting more hands. Along with hands, blue and white bones appeared and floated in place.

They tilted in place, and a hail of bones rained down on the bartender. Gaster's smug face could barely be seen through the dark rain of magic.

Grillby simply bolstered his flames, burning blue and white as he waited out the attack. Bones and hands hit his flames and simply burned up, causing no damage at all and sizzling away into the burnt acrid smell of spent magic.

Grillby simply stared out from a ring of charred and burnt bones circling him. Not a single point of HP was lost.

And it was then Gaster realized that he *royally* fucked up.

"MY TURN." Grillby's face broke open in a jagged grin with a hellish hiss.

White and teal flames flash-melted the snow in the immediate area as the elemental rocketed forward. Trees exploded into shards of charred splinters from the sheer violence of the sprint. Gaster was too shocked to teleport away and found himself in a burning choke-hold.

"YOU WILL NEVER COME NEAR MY CHILDREN AGAIN!!!" Grillby viciously slammed the scientist into the nearest living tree, shattering it into sap and splinters. His heat continued to build, scorching clothing and the wood around him. A soft creaking noise of bones being tested to their limits emanated from the scientist.

There was sudden sharp cracks and Gaster cried out as two thin cracks marred his eye sockets and face, reaching deep down to even the twisted frown and the crown of his head. Smaller, similar cracks spread down his body as bone lost against heat.

Grillby threw the scientist away and into the snow, where the sudden loss of heat cracked even more bones.

The gentle bartender looked more and more like some hellish fire beast, but remained in control. This creature before him was responsible for *everything*. Sans might never fully recover because of *him*. Papyrus, a happy but entirely too anxious baby, because of *him*. The screaming. The nightmares. The sheer amount of scars and trauma.

Because of him. Gaster struggled to move, no doubt trying to piece together enough magic for another teleport, but Grillby wasn't going to let him go.

“THEY ARE MY CHILDREN. NOT TOOLS.”

Grillby picked up the gasping scientist by the neck and threw him again, sending the skeleton tumbling away into the burned and smoking ground. Gaster gasped in pain and then cried out as Grillby slammed a foot down on his hand.

CRACK!

And then again on the other hand.

CRACK!

“YOU WILL NEVER HURT THEM AGAIN.”

Smoke and crackling embers poured out of the enraged bartender's mouth as he made sure that these hands of Gaster's would *never* be capable of harming another monster again. The cracking of bone only enraged Grillby further, imagining how it must have felt and sounded to Sans and Papyrus. How it felt when their tiny bones were broken and shattered. He wanted Gaster to feel as they did. He wanted Gaster to experience the same pain and fear that he inflicted on the children. In his enraged state he was more than happy to shatter every little bone in this disgusting monster's body.

He lifted a clawed burning hand, ready to slam it down on the prone scientist. Gaster hissed something and there was a sudden sound of fabric tearing and the sense of wrongness. Grillby didn't have a second before a hot beam of light flashed in front of his face and pushed him backwards to the edge of the snow again. It was enough to momentarily blind the bartender and he blinked and coughed at the heavy smell of ozone.

He opened his eyes.

Before him were...floating skulls. Two of them. For a second he was terrified; they looked exactly like Sans' and Papyrus' beastly forms, but with subtle differences. They were larger with better-developed teeth and crests, but they still had the soft rounded edges of childhood. Their white-ringed pupils in their too-large dark eye sockets watched Grillby blankly, swaying back and forth as if in a breeze.

They were children.

They were guarding Gaster as he struggled to stand up again. Grillby was stunned, his flames sputtering at the horror in front of him. Was this...what he planned for his two children? Mindless weapons?

His shock was all it took, and Gaster and the two heads vanished with a sound of static. *Too late.* Grillby roared with fury as he missed Gaster by a mere second.

“Up ahead!” (“What happened?!”)

Grillby whipped his head around as Dogamy and Dogaressa ran into the burnt and destroyed clearing, panting hard.

“Grillby!” Dogamy's eyes went wide as he surveyed the damage. Many trees were shattered and burnt, and in the middle of it all was a still-burning and enraged elemental.

“**GASTER.**” Grillby roared, his voice vibrating the needles in the surviving trees.

(“You...you had him! Wh-”) Dogaressa began, but Grillby cut her off with a snarl as he blazed forward and headed back into town. True, the snow might have slowed him down if he was calmer, but Grillby was consumed with rage and fear, causing him to burn so bright it was like the sun itself was in the Underground. He ran with all the speed he could muster, leaving a burned black trail in his wake.

The Dogi sensed the urgency and ran after him, tilting their heads back and howling. Howls echoed back as the entire Canine Unit was alerted.

They just hoped they would reach the kids in time.



Greater Dog opened the door to the backroom quietly, his tail wagging a mile a minute. He boofed softly as he spotted the puppy pile on the floor. It seemed that Sans had pulled one of the couch cushions down on the floor and threw all the pillows and blankets on it, making one cozy nest. Both him and Papyrus were curled up together. It was almost too *adorable*.

He shut the door behind him and boofed softly! <"Hello Puppies!">

Papyrus yawned and blinked his eyes open. His tail wagged when he spotted the older dog monster. <"HI! HI! HI! HI!"> He barked loudly and used a paw to tap Sans on the top of his skull.

The older pup opened his eyes blearily and sniffed. When he saw it was only Greater Dog, he yawned and closed his eyes again. It seemed the pup wasn't too interested in being awake at the moment. No big deal.

Greater wagged his tail harder and chose to get down on the floor with the pups, curling around them. With his massive armor and frame, he would be able to guard them properly. He was a *good dog* after all.

Papyrus yawned again and snuggled up close to his brother, falling asleep in no time at all.

This is nice. Greater thumped his tail and kept a close eye over both pups, his ears pricked for any and all sounds. Time wore on and he still remained vigilant. *Best dog. Good dog.* The pups were getting a good nap in, but he wondered... *What was taking Grillby so long?* He was about to check on Lesser and Doggo when Sans and Papyrus startled awake with sudden sharp whines.

<"What's wrong pups?"> Greater grew concerned when both pups began to breathe heavily, terrified of something. Both pups snuggled up to Greater's armor, shivering enough that their bones rattled.

<"he's coming."> Sans managed to choke out, his eye sockets completely blank.

Before Greater could ask who was coming, an alarm howl echoed through the cavern. Greater pulled himself up on his paws and hunched over the two children protectively as the air began to get thick and reek of ozone.

There was a vicious crack of splintering wood and a bright flash of light as the restaurant caved inward.

KRAK-KOOOOM!

Greater hunkered down over the pups, closing his eyes as burnt wood splinters bounced off his metal armor. There was the sound of furious dogs and the dull smacks of bodies being thrown around.

He blinked his eyes to rid them of the debris and wood dust, growling sharply. His ears were ringing from the volume of the blast, but as his hearing returned he could hear the other dogs furiously barking and growling. He looked up to see Doggo and Lesser Dog fighting...giant floating skulls? Blue and white bones rammed their way from under the floorboards in an attempt to skewer the canines, but they were too agile. Both dogs cut through the bone assault with ease as they struggled to keep their attacker back.

And, to his shock, it was Gaster. He looked barely alive, face cracked and shattered into a barely recognizable visage. The scientist supported himself with a few bones, reaching out with blue magic hands to rip up everything in his way. He seemed terribly injured, and the bits of dust falling off his bones was a sign of how bad it was.

{ E2-001-S! E2-002-P!!! }

The scientist's voice was broken and hysterical. Both pups whined fearfully and hid under the giant canine.

As much as Greater wanted to help Lesser and Doggo, he knew his place was protecting the pups. So he stood and withdrew his spear from his inventory. His massive frame blocked the way and he braced himself.

Gaster turned his head to stare at Greater, a mad glint in his remaining un-shattered eye socket. The floating skulls hovered around their master, expressions blank. The other two dogs continued their attacks, attempting to drive Gaster out of the ruined restaurant.

Sans covered behind Greater, shielding his brother the best he could behind their canine guardian. And then, like soft whispers in the dry air, he heard them.

Brother?

That brother?

Yes. Yes. That brother. That brother!

Sans managed to gather enough courage to poke his head around their guard to see what was happening. The huge skulls looked directly at him, their white ring-like eyes expanding.

It brother. Hello brother.

Sans felt his SOUL clench. He always knew he had other siblings besides Papyrus. But...these? Where these things really his...brothers? It was too horrible. Too much to think about. Was that their fate? To just...float and obey commands? Little more than weapons? He let out a thin reedy cry of fear and ducked back again to safety.

Papyrus began sobbing as Sans curled around his little brother. It was all too much.
They had to hide.

While Greater fended off the incoming rain of bones, Sans dragged his still sobbing brother as gently as he could and shoved him under the couch. Papyrus cried and screamed, but Sans silenced him by shoving the blankets under with him.

<"shh shh bro...be quiet. hide."> He murmured to his smaller sibling over the noise of the fight. Papyrus sobbed, but remained where he was.

Greater growled, swung his spear up, and brought it down on the ground with a crash. The ground shook and sent the mad scientist off balance. Gaster cried out and sent bones flying in Greater's direction. Greater knocked all the incoming bones out of the way, except for one, which he caught in his mouth. His dark eyes blazed with fury as he bit through the bone and sent it crumbling away into spent magic.

One of the living cannons opened its maw, a bright beam of light building up with a hum and aimed it at the dog.

KSSSSSSK!

Greater countered by swinging his spear, and knocked the skull out of the way with a single blow.

BOOOOOOOM!

The blast went off, cutting a hole in the roof and causing plaster and wood to rain down on all those fighting inside. Doggo and Lesser continued to pester Gaster with their swords and barking, forcing the scientist to split his focus between multiple attackers. At this rate, he would be captured for sure.

Ping!

Greater looked down at his chest, confused as a blue glow shined forth from his SOUL.

He scarcely had time to understand what that meant for him before he was picked up and violently thrown into the other two dogs. With a sharp yelp of pain, they collided and hit the far remaining wall with a crash.

{ ENOUGH! }

Gaster brought three cannons to his side and they began to charge up, aiming directly to the prone dogs. The beams built up with a humming whine that seemed to vibrate the bits of dust on the floors and walls. He grinned. These mutts wouldn't give him any more trouble.

And then, quite suddenly, he was knocked off his feet by a sudden thin beam of light. He slammed his head hard against the wall, worsening the cracks and sending small splinters of bone to the floor. All the weaponized skulls cut off their beams and floated listlessly, confused about how to proceed.

Gaster looked up to see E2-001-S standing in the ruined doorway, his jaws clicking shut after he finished blasting his creator. He was shaking, but there was a look of utter hate in his eyes that caused the edges of Gaster's mouth to pull up into an unsettling smile.

{ There you are. }

Ping!

Sans struggled to fight off the blue magic in his SOUL, screaming and digging his claws as hard as he could into the broken floor. He charged a beam again, but he was abruptly slammed against the wall. He gasped and the magic building up in his throat sizzled and dispersed. Stunned, the pup could only breathe as he was dragged forward and gripped tightly in blue hand constructs.

Sans managed to open an eye in his panic to see that his master's hands were broken, only held together by innate magic. He wheezed in alarm as the transparent hands squeezed him tight. The skulls, distracted away from the dogs, hovered over for a closer look. Sans's eyes flashed blue as he struggled, snarling and snapping with all the strength he could muster. His soul pounded in fear.

{ There's no escape for you this time. Now...for 002... }

Gaster had no time to complete the sentence as the skull hovering closest to him shattered in a ball of flame. It let out a reedy thin scream as its bones disintegrated and crumbled to dust.

!!!BROTHER!!!BROTHER!!!

Sans could hear the panicked whispers of his kin as they floated, unsure of what to do. More fireballs slammed close and Gaster was forced to duck away. Sans cried out as he was dragged along through the air, the hands only tightening their grip.

And suddenly, there was heat. Sans opened his terrified eyes to see his adopted father, standing in the ruins of his bar. His flames now burned a pure teal in rage and his mouth was open in a horrible sharp-fanged frown.

“LET GO OF MY SON.” The bartender shrieked and rushed forward.

But all too well, Sans could feel the cold building up and the unsettling feeling of WRONG deep in his bones. Gaster was smiling, seeming unfazed as a fire monster and five dogs rushed into his position at once.

at least papyrus is safe, Sans thought. Perhaps Gaster would just be content with just him, and would leave his baby brother alone.

And that was the last thought he had before he was yanked through the void.

Chapter Twelve

Machinery hummed and the sound of metal hitting metal rang out through the CORE. A recent invention for the past few decades, the CORE was an utterly immense machine located in Hotland. By drawing in the magically-saturated lava below, it could convert the energy into power. Before, monsterkind had to huddle in the dark and cold, with only a few candles to guide them. But now, there was light.

And it was all thanks to the Royal Scientist.

The workers inside toiled about, checking gauges and lights as they kept the machinery running smoothly. Once in a while, an ice block from Snowdin would fall into the lava below, hissing and causing the heat and humidity within to spike. The lava below the CORE glowed a fierce harsh light, casting dark shadows on the catwalks above. It was a little unnerving, but people got used to it quickly.

Somewhere, a bell rang, and the grateful workers laid down their tools and headed out. Time for lunch in air-conditioned rooms! Soon, the CORE was barren, with only the computer systems left behind to monitor everything.

In the quiet, a sudden rip tore its way open above one of the catwalks. The rift shifted and rippled, before a tiny bone beast fell out roughly to the floor. *SMACK*. 1-S shivered and twitched as it struggled to get feeling back to its limbs. It gasped for air as a slender figure stepped out of the rip. The horrible noise of the void folded in on itself over and over before the rip vanished completely.

Gaster winced, his eye lights glowing as he used his coat like a makeshift sling for his broken hands and arms. Magic hand constructs flashed blue as they meandered on to the computer and began typing. It was his plans and calculations that built this place, one of his crowning achievements. He had built several backdoor codes into this place, so in the end, it would obey its master. Always a multitasker, another hand streaked out to the first aide station. As he worked, the construct grabbed several vials of concentrated healing magic and brought it back to himself.

One set of hands continued typing while others spawned around the vials. One hand removed the vials' caps, another carried a vial to Gaster's mouth, and another pair began pouring the vials' liquid over his broken bones. He winced as the magic flowed down his throat and his broken bones began to pull back together. The pain faded, but the deep cracks in his face remained.

It would most likely take more magic than this to heal the terrible damage to himself, but for now he was grateful that he felt stronger. More aware. The pain had faded to a manageable dull ache that he could easily ignore. When he attempted to flex his bone hands he found that they could barely move at all. The bartender's vow of him never being able to use his hands again seemed to have become truth.

No matter. He wouldn't need his actual hands anymore, not when his constructs could perform a better job. He'd worry about his broken bones later: his priorities had to be in order. He wasn't a stupid person; he knew they would be looking for him soon. He just needed to finish one last thing....and then they could do whatever they wanted to him.

1-S shivered, but was finally becoming warmer, and tried to silently drag itself away. Pitiful. He brought down a construct-hand, pinning 1-S firmly to the metal catwalk. The creature still struggled, clawing the metal and hissing.

{ **“Stay.”** } Gaster didn't even look at his creation, his focus was on the main computer. 1-S snarled as it still insisted on struggling. Biting the constructs did nothing and it couldn't wiggle away from the ironclad grasp. Certainly, the creature was tenacious, but that was nothing out of the ordinary. Such tenacity had been hard-wired into it, for it was so essential when fighting humans.

Gaster typed one last string of code, and the doors leading to the core shut down with a sharp *CLANG* and bolted into place. A red light began to flash and emergency lights lit up along the catwalk. A metallic artificial voice began to rattle off from the computer.

[Emergency Containment Level 2 Procedure Initiated.]

[Admin Level 1 Code Accepted. Lockdown Successful.]

The lights above flickered before dimming.

[Emergency Auxiliary Power Engaged. CORE output 25%.]

Gaster hummed as he drew his constructs away from the terminal. There, now nobody would bother him. He'd have the time to set up his final experiment, for the good of all. Eventually, they might be able to break in past the blast doors, but by the time they did, he would be finished. Already he could hear muffled protests and banging on the other side of the blast doors. No doubt the workers were now aware that they were locked out of the CORE. He would need to work quickly and efficiently.

1-S continued to snarl and hiss. Gaster drew up the construct to eye level to face his creation. 1-S took a chance and began to build up a hum of energy in the back of its throat. Perhaps 1-S forgot its place while away from his care. That would be quite easy to fix. Suddenly, Gaster slammed the tiny bone beast against the flat panels of the CORE, knocking both the breath and magic out of it. Stunned, the creature could only lie there and pant.

{ “All this time. All this sacrifice. All this death...” } Gaster once again brought up his bruised and shaking creation to eye level. **{ “An artificial construct blended by human and monster traits, and this is the result?” }**

1-S gave him a defiant growl in return.

{ “For King and Monster Kind.” } Gaster hissed and squeezed 1-S a little too tightly. It was always amusing when using the trigger on his creation. How it struggled to remain in control, as that very control drained away.

1-S gave one quiet, strangled gasp...and then just hung limp in the blue hands, eye sockets completely black.

{ “You had better be worth it, 1-S.” } He carried the limp pup over to one side of the core, summoning new hands to pry off some paneling and exposing the wires and machinery within. **{ “This is my last chance to free everyone. ”Soon they will know that I was right!” }**

He set 1-S down next to the machinery, where it lay obediently. Good. He glanced down at the area around the paneling..

There was a handheld power drill and a few needle-nose pliers resting near the terminal. Good. That would make things much easier. He reached into his inventory to pull out a needle and a few vials of glowing red liquid.

Much easier indeed.

With that, Gaster got to work.



Grillby was no stranger to loss.

As far back as he could remember, there was nothing BUT loss. Summoned during the war against the humans, he had no choice but to accept it. Friends would be alive one minute, but gone the next. He had seen whole platoons wiped out in a blink of an eye. He had seen fellow monsters beg for their mothers as they lay dusting on the battlefield. He had seen it, and he had accepted it.

But this?

This he couldn't accept. He couldn't.

His flames whirled uncontrollably as he roared at the space where Gaster once stood. He had taken his son! His child! It was one thing to lose fellow soldiers...but children? His mind raced. *It was too much! Too horrible!*

("Grillby!") "Grillby!" The Dogi wanted to do something, perhaps restrain him, but he burned so hot they couldn't get close. The entire Canine Unit was a witness to the bartender's pain.

Grillby would have torn the whole bar apart if it wasn't for a small cry.

"Papyrus!" The bartender's rage snuffed out like water on a campfire and he was immediately searching. *"PAPYRUS!"*

"Lesser! Get a healer! Greater! Help search!" Dogamy barked out orders as his wife called the Captain. All the dogs were injured to some extent, and there was only so much healing one could get from food alone. Not only were they injured, but now a child could possibly be hurt as well. Lesser saluted and took off on all fours, heading towards Waterfall.

Greater barked and headed to the backroom. The couch where the children had often napped was buried under thick wooden beams from the partially collapsed room.

The crying was coming from underneath the ruined couch, muffled under the layers of fabric and wood. Grillby and Greater went right to work, heaving the beams and debris away until there was only the couch. Greater simply lifted the couch straight up in the air as Grillby pushed away the last of the crumbled, charred bits of wood.

Under the couch, wrapped up in blankets, was a tiny little skeleton. Papyrus. He looked up with his eye sockets full of tears and sniffled.

Grillby immediately reined in his flames back to their gentle, campfire-like features, and quickly picked up his little child. Papyrus bawled loudly and clutched the fabric of Grillby's shirt, refusing to let go. Grillby held him close and sank down to the floor to sit. He began to rock the little skeleton gently, shushing him in an attempt to comfort him.

"Shh shh...it's alright Papyrus...I'm here...I'm here..." Grillby was also crying, but he could barely feel it next to Papyrus's powerful wails. They were both hurting in such terrible ways.

Dogaressa put a paw on Grillby's shoulder. ("We'll find him. We'll get him back.")

True, he trusted the Guard to find his son again, but he was worried. What state would Sans be in when they recovered him? It took such a long time to work with Sans to get him in a somewhat comfortable state. It was all going to be undone: he was sure of it.

Sans would needlessly suffer again when he was just learning what a happy childhood was like. "Grillby seethed under his flames and clutched Papyrus tighter.

("The underground is small, turn over a few rocks and we'll find him. Then he will pay for his crimes.") Her hackles raised as she pinned her ears back.

"I'm coming with you." Grillby spoke softly over Papyrus's little cries.

("You can't! What about Papyrus? Who is g-")

She was interrupted by shouts of protest in the distance, growing closer. Both the Dogi and Grillby turned to gaze at the large hole in the side of the bar to see an approaching figure. As the figure drew closer, they could see it was Lesser Dog, carrying a surprised Frank bridal style. The salamander monster wiggled and struggled.

"Hey! I can walk!" The doctor protested, but Lesser is a Good Dog, and carried him right through the blown out hole in the side of the restaurant. Lesser barked and set the doctor down nicely once he was carried through.

Frank was rendered to speechlessness as he took in the ruined bar. All the dogs were covered in cuts and bruises, Doggo being hurt most of all. There was a skeleton child wailing in distress. The bartender was tired and burning lower than what he should be. *Everything was...ruined.*

"...What happened here?" Frank gasped as he set his bag down.

("Gaster happened,") Dogaressa growled. ("He attacked the bar and abducted one of the children.")

Frank frowned and began looking after the dogs, hiding pills in pieces of cheese and giving it to them to eat. His claws glowed green as he began magically stitching them up. "Judging by the crying, I can assume he took Sans."

The dogs sagged with relief as their wounds mended and their pain faded. Hiding the pills in cheese also lifted their spirits, as the magic within boosted their strength and health. Good dogs wouldn't stay down for long.

“That is right.” Grillby just held Papyrus close and took him over to Frank. He had to raise his voice over the skeleton's wailing.

Frank took a look at Papyrus, weaving a diagnostic spell over the child. “He's unhurt physically, but mentally I can't be sure.”

“Gaster took his brother. Those two are never separated.” Grillby couldn't imagine what this would do to this little child. Sans and Papyrus were never more than a few feet away from each other at any given time. Grillby figured that, for Sans and Papyrus, to be separated from the other would be akin to torture. Papyrus was more dependent on Sans, but both of them would be suffering.

“That's true.” Frank took to Grillby next, looking over him for injuries. Strangely enough, there were none. Grillby did his best to try to comfort Papyrus, but nothing seemed to soothe him. The dogs were however feeling much better, and were beginning to check over their armor and weapons. They were more than eager for round two.

“...Have faith, Grillby. Evil doesn't go unpunished for long.” The salamander packed up his supplies and looked one last time over the dogs.

Grillby said nothing but continued to rock the toddler in his arms, thinking. Gaster's labs had been searched already. The royal labs were still in lockdown. Gaster had nowhere to go, so why would he even take Sans if he had no refuge left? Gaster was clearly insane, but even so...it made no *sense*.

As if to answer his question, the remaining lights in the bar flickered, and then dimmed down. Grillby found himself to be the only light source in the bar as the dogs looked about in confusion. Dogamy peeked his head out of a hole in the wall.

“The whole street is dark!” He exclaimed. Already monsters were leaving their homes, standing and staring in shock at the dimmed lights...before everything went dark with an electric ZAP. A strange buzzing noise crackled in the electrical sockets. Something was *wrong*.

Dogaressa, who was still on the phone, listened closely to her Captain. She suddenly widened her eyes and gasped.

("...WHAT?") She barked in surprise, drawing the attention to everyone in the bar.

"Dogaressa, what is happening?" Grillby asked quietly, having now finally gotten Papyrus to calm down into soft burbles. Papyrus was still clearly not happy, but had tired himself out enough that he was more interested in being rocked than screaming.

("Captain Gnash said that the CORE workers have been locked out! Something strange is going on there!")

"Angel above, what if it explodes! We have to evacuate Hotland immediately!" Dogamy was already thinking ahead, gripping his ax tightly.

("Exactly, he wants us all there to help.") She closed her phone with a click. ("Come on, we gotta hurry.")

Suddenly, realization flashed across Grillby's mind.

"...He's there."

"Who?" Frank tilted his head, unsure if he should leave or go.

"Gaster. He BUILT the CORE...remember? It was...a major celebration...some years ago..."

The dogs looked at each other, dawning realizations on their faces.

"Of course! But what is he doing?! He could dust us all!" Dogamy was confused as well as furious.

"I am not sure, but I am coming with all of you." Grillby held onto Papyrus and went to step out of the hole in the bar...when a paw stopped him.

("Grillby, you can't. Papyrus would be a target if you took him with us.") Dogaressa was sympathetic, but firm. ("I know you can fight...but what will you do with him?")

"I'll take him." Frank stepped forward. "My home is shared with my husband, the Captain of the Guard. It's well-warded and protected. Plus....Gaster would have no idea who I am."

Grillby held onto Papyrus a little tighter. Both of them were right: he couldn't take a toddler into battle, and he trusted Frank with his life. But...he didn't want to hand over his son. Not after what just happened. A real fear blossomed from within that if he handed Papyrus over...there was a chance he would never see his child again. He took a deep, rattling sigh...and then carefully handed over the skeleton after giving him one last pat to the skull.

Frank took Papyrus in his arms and bounced him a little. The skeleton just blinked his little eye sockets and stared, confused about what was going on.

"...I will call you later...when this is over."

"Of course. I'm sure Undyne would like to meet Papyrus. They'll have a good time, I promise." The salamander nodded and adjusted his grip on the skeleton. "...Come back safe...alright?"

"I will. I have to. With Sans, too." Grillby made it a statement. He *would* come back with his son. There was no alternative.

"The fastest way to Hotland is via boat," Dogamy pointed out. "We'll have to hurry!" The other dogs gathered around, awaiting orders.

"Then by all means, let's not keep Gaster waiting." Grillby narrowed his eyes.

Usually people learned their lesson after the first time, but Grillby was more than happy to teach it again to a certain scientist.



Some time later, Frank grumbled to himself as he carried his precious cargo back to his house. Being the husband of the Captain of the Guard meant that his house was well-protected. Gnash always valued preventative measures, so he had taken to hiding runic wards all around the property. If someone had ill intention for the people inside the house, they would essentially run into an invisible wall. Only someone powerful, like the King of Monsters, could hope to tear down the wards.

It was a safety measure that helped him sleep at night. With this whole Gaster situation, he found himself worrying more about his husband and child. He knew all too well that sometimes trouble would follow one home.

Papyrus continued to snifle, exhausted and weary from the terrifying events of the day. Physically, he was alright, but mentally was a different story. Frank used a clawed hand to shield the child from the constant water drips and cold of Waterfall. Even though he was bundled up in a blanket, Waterfall was still rather chilly.

“It’ll be alright, your dad and brother will be back soon.” Frank ran a warm hand down the child’s skull, knowing that he liked to be petted. Papyrus gurgled softly and closed his eyes, simply too young and tired to truly understand what was happening. All he knew was that he felt safe, and that was good enough for him.

Wanting to be extra careful, Frank retraced his steps and backtracked a few times, just to confuse anyone that might be following them. Satisfied nobody was going to ambush him in the dark, he made it to a nice corner in the cavern. There, next to some ponds and the river was his home. A simple house for sure, with a garden of herbs and fungi and toys in the front yard. At some point they were going to put up a swing but needed to find space for it. If only they could get a tree to grow in Waterfall...

Stepping past the mailbox, he could feel the ambient magic race along both him and Papyrus. The wards checked the two over, and finding no issue, Frank was able to step within his property. He fumbled with his keys, but with practiced ease unlocked the front door while juggling a toddler.

“**Pops!**” A loud brash voice erupted from the stairway, and a ball of energy and fins came flying at the older monster.

“Undyne! Careful!” He braced himself as his daughter ran right into his belly. “Oof!”

Thank goodness he had extra padding there!

His daughter resembled Gnash to a T: she was a humanoid fish monster with lots of teeth, and even had Gnash's yellow eyes. However, she inherited his colors, a soft blue gray with some red here and there. He thought she was a wonderful mix of the two. She was still fairly small, being eight years old, but he could see her towering over both Gnash and himself one day.

Papyrus wiggled at the sudden movement and made a soft warble, which attracted Undyne's attention.

“Whatcha got there Pops?” She wiggled her fins and reached up.

“Careful.” Frank knelt down so Undyne could see the little skeleton. “This is Papyrus, he's going to be staying here for a little bit. Say hello!”

Undyne stared at the toddler, and the toddler stared right back. She sneered and wrinkled her brow as she examined him. “Wow, he's really shrimpy, isn't he?”

“Undyne, that's not very nice.” Frank scolded quietly. “He's a baby, he's supposed to be little.”

“Nuh-uh, I was a baby and I wasn't *that* small.” She frowned and reached out to poke the skeleton on the head, much to poor Papyrus's confusion.

“Yes, you were very small when you were a baby.” He started to move Papyrus away to rescue him from the pokes, but Undyne was quite persistent.

“He looks weird! Where's his skin!?” She continued to poke.

Seemingly having enough of it, Papyrus growled and bit the next finger that got too close to his mouth. “Nyeh!”

Frank was very worried that his daughter had gotten hurt, but to his surprise, she started laughing!

“Ow! Heeheehee wow he's got guts for a weird no-skin shrimpy baby!” She seemed almost pleased about it, her bright yellow eyes sparkling.

“Undyne, please stop bothering him. He had a rough time.” Frank tried his best to calm his daughter down enough to stop harassing the poor baby.

“Okay.” She tried to withdraw her hand, but Papyrus was still holding on to the finger and growling. “....I LIKE him!”

Frank sighed and gently extracted his daughter's finger from Papyrus' tiny little jaws. “It's good that you like him, but please dear...be gentle. He isn't a toy or a plaything, he's a little one who is still recovering from some...bad things.”

She blinked a few times. “Ohhhh....he's your patient?”

He nodded. “Yes, and he will be staying here for a little bit. Let's do our best to welcome him, eh?”

“Yeah! I'll go get my swords and action figures!” She raced back up the stairs, two steps at a time. Thankfully, the swords were made of soft foam. She wasn't quite ready for a wooden one yet, perhaps once she stopped breaking lamps with the foam one.

He carried the skeleton bundle to the kitchen, setting Papyrus in the crook of his arm. He started to mix up some milk along with his medicine; no doubt Papyrus would be hungry. He could hear his daughter in the floor above tossing toys and what might be boxes around, looking for the best thing to play with.

Well, it looked like they might have started a beautiful friendship. He'd see later if Papyrus would be willing to leave his blanket cocoon and play a little. After being sufficiently harassed by his daughter and the events of the day, he wouldn't be surprised if it took a little time.

He bottled up the milk and gave it to the hungry skeleton, anything to distract him from what was really going on. Papyrus perked up, held the bottle in his hands and drank his milk quickly. His hunger satisfied, he quickly returned to his usual liveliness.

“POPS! POPS! WHERE'S MY BATTLE ARMOR?!?” Frank sighed, his daughter was at it again. Sounds of yelling and crashing echoed down from the upstairs room. Thank goodness the floors were reinforced, or it might not contain his daughter's destructive tendencies. Frank sighed. At least there were plenty of distractions.



All the way to Hotland, the dogs and Grillby were lost in thought. The boat would rock in the water as the River Person pushed it past its usual speed. River was a strange person, but they could sense urgency. They only had one thing to say.

“Tra la la! Beware the man who speaks in hands! Tra la la!”

After that, they were quiet. The last dog was barely on the boat before it began to move, skipping over the water. They sat quietly as Waterfall whizzed by, steadily getting brighter and hotter as they entered the red landscape of Hotland. Constantly lit by pools of lava, it gave an unsettling glow to those who preferred cooler climates.

To their surprise, there was a group of residents waiting on the shore as they pulled up, all fire monsters. Obviously they would not survive the walk through Waterfall's rain unscathed. Waiting among them was Captain Gnash.

“Bout time you all got here!” He helped the dogs climb out of the boat, which was being replaced with residents. “The evacuation has started. We need some men out sniffing out any stragglers. Can I count on you all to be *Good Dogs!*?”

The Canine Unit saluted and barked, beginning to fall into place. The Dogi remained in command, and began distributing orders. Grillby at once felt out of place. It had been years since he had followed or gave orders. He wasn't quite too sure where to go besides straight to the CORE.

He was startled when Gnash laid a hand on his shoulder. "Major General." He said, giving the bartender a look. "Ya know, Gerson warned me you wouldn't be able to keep out of this for long."

"I cannot. Gaster took my son." Grillby narrowed his eyes. *"I mean to get him back."* He knew that if Gnash told him to remain there, that he wouldn't. Nobody would be able to stop him.

"I'm not going to stop you." Gnash put his fears at ease. "Hell, you're more experienced than all of us really. Gerson said you have a strong sense of justice so he said not to try and stop you. Instead, you'll be coming with us. The dogs and Gerson will handle the evac."

"Who is 'we'?" The elemental glanced around at the stream of people heading to the docks.

"It will be the three of us." A deep voice answered to the left. Grillby turned and was greeted by the sight of his sovereign ruler, King Asgore. Gone was his robes and his humorous T-shirts. Instead, the King was dressed for battle. His dark armor looked as strong as it was during the war, and the trident of red magic was gripped in his paw. The King did not look pleased at all.

Instinctively, Grillby went to kneel, but was stopped by a soft paw on his shoulder. "There is no need, nor time for such things." King Asgore looked Grillby in the eyes. "Today, we are equals looking to uphold justice. After all...this could not have happened if it wasn't for me. I aim to fix that, with your help."

There was rage behind those eyes. Ever since the King lost his two children, he had lived with a pain nobody else could really understand unless it happened to them. The King loved children. To see what Gaster had done undermined everything the King had sought to build. Even with the law on the fallen humans, it still destroyed the King each and every time a soul was taken.

To be a king was a terrible burden, and Grillby had no envy for the position.

“My King, you are not to blame for what Gaster has done.”

“Oh, but it is. I gave him permission to build weapons, to aid in the upcoming war with humanity. He requested privacy, and time. I have given him both. I should have checked on him, demanded updates...demanded demonstrations. But I had trusted him since he built the CORE. I saw no reason to bother him before...and now my ignorance has resulted in the deaths of countless children.”

Gnash and Grillby had nothing to say to that.

“He will be brought to justice, and I will make sure nothing like this shall ever happen again.”

“Then let's not waste any more time.” Gnash gripped his sword and then glanced at Grillby. “Do you have weapons? Armor? We might have time to stop by HQ to get some.”

“I need neither.” Grillby rolled up his sleeves. *“Let's be off.”*

The king and captain nodded their heads, and together they strode on past the fleeing population, towards the CORE.

By the time they reached the CORE, the area was deserted. No doubt, Gnash and Gerson had cleared everyone out. The only thing left was the unsettling emergency lights and the remains left behind by the fleeing monsters. They could see lunches left forgotten on tables. Hardhats and work boxes were left behind as if the owners suddenly vanished. Lit up ahead were the actual doors to the inner CORE. They were shut firmly and the key slot next to it was lit up with red warning lights.

Grillby was about to ask how they were going to get into the room when the King's eyes began to glow. The doors began to shimmer with a chilly blue and creaked with some invisible strain. With a thrust of his trident, the doors folded up on each other like wet cardboard and were ripped from the hinges. The room suddenly became brighter from the ambient lava below, and the door sailed backwards to crash into the break room wall.

Gnash and Grillby could scarcely believe it. Of course, their King was strong...but THIS strong???

Asgore strode forward and then stopped, shocked. A sudden feeling of dread overcame Grillby as he peeked around the corner.

His flames dimmed in horror.

Far ahead in the main console, he could see Sans. His shirt and pants had been discarded, most likely to the lava below them. His right eye socket was full of various wires, going down deep enough to perhaps reach the brain case. Metal rings bolted him to the console, erasing any chance of escape. The poor pup's head was propped up, jaws held open with metal as a tube was stuffed inside.

He hung still and lifeless, looking by all means ready to crumble to dust at any second. The most disturbing thing was how silent he was, simply staring out into the distance.

“SANS!” Grillby roared and flew forward to rescue him, LOVE burning deep in his soul, when a sudden wall of blue bones slammed down to block his path.

{ **“Idiots!”** } Gaster hissed as he emerged from behind the console. Grillby was pleased to note that both of his arms were in slings. It seemed like the beating from earlier had caused the scientist permanent damage. *Just what he deserves*, Grillby thought. Gaster now had to rely now on magic to pick up and manipulate objects. {**“Do you know what you are trying to interrupt!?”** }

“Gaster.” Asgore stepped in front of Grillby. “You have one last chance to stop this madness. Return the child to his father and surrender, or you will die where you stand.”

Gaster made a show of thinking about it, even manifesting a constructed hand to stroke his chin.

{ **“I will not. I WILL break the barrier and save us all. It is my duty. It is my legacy. If you don't desire freedom...then I suppose, you will have to take 1-S by force.”** }

Asgore shook his head sadly.

“You were once my friend, but today...you have become a greater threat than the humans. A rot from within us that must be cut away.” Asgore readied his trident. Gnash drew his sword and Grillby ignited into angry, teal flames.

“I am truly sorry that it has come to this.”

Gaster sneered, clearly taking great offense to being considered *worse* than humans.

{ “I as well. If only you weren’t so sentimental.” }

Bones suddenly appeared, angled down at the three. There were so many that they blocked the emergency lights from above. Then, with a great, terrible ripping noise, two objects appeared: the very same ones that showed up at the bar. The floating skulls, disturbingly similar to the children’s bestial forms, snapped their jaws and growled. The heads hissed as they floated over to flank their creator. They swayed from side to side and stared out at the King and his companions with white circular eyes. They seemed to almost make giggling noises as they gnashed their teeth, staring straight ahead.

Then, the bones rained down.

[FIGHT.]

Chapter Thirteen

The ambient sound of magic hummed in the air as blue and white bones flew forward with deadly precision.

The King waved his hand and a searing wall of flames erupted from the walkways to counteract the bones. The bones hit the wall and sizzled, exploding in motes of white and blue magic. Grillby and Gnash huddled behind the wall of flames until the King parted it with a wave of his paw.

“Give up Gaster! It's not too late!” Asgore tried one last plea.

Gaster only sneered and readied another volley of attacks. Rings of hands formed, each clutching a long bone club. He would NOT go down without a fight.

King Asgore brought his trident in front of him and turned to Grillby. “Go! Get your child!” Gnash readied his sword. “We'll cover you!”

Grillby nodded and picked his way through the catwalks. Gaster turned his head, intent on going after Grillby—only to meet a faceful of sword. He had to summon a vertical row of bones to block the sword, lest he literally lose his head. He scowled at the fish monster before him.

[Captain Gnash blocks the way!]

“You're going to have to get through me first, you bastard!” Gnash growled and began a relentless assault, slashing and parrying with his sword. Gaster was forced to be on the defensive, twisting and ducking out of the way. One of his blasters surged forward to flank the Captain, but was blocked by a trident.

[King Asgore blocks the way!]

Asgore felt sick fighting these....blasters? They were clearly young, and alive. He used his trident to throw the blaster away from the fight with a roar. The blaster cried out as it went flying end over end in the air, drawing its sibling's attention. Its sibling really didn't like that, and opening its maw and beginning to gather magic within it. The King pulled Gnash away just in time, as a white hot beam of light struck the catwalk and burned a hole through the metal where they once stood.

They had no time to rest as Gaster went on the attack again, summoning rings of bones to strike them. King and Captain fought side by side, doing their best to keep the scientist in one place. They had to keep his attention! Despite Gaster being surprisingly good at combat, it was still a two against one battle. The other blaster regained its composure and attempted to enter the fray again, but was smacked away once more.

Useless, Gaster thought to himself, as he watched one blaster comfort the other far away from the battle. It was a bothersome tendency: his blasters, like mere children, tended to stop fighting when struck. It only reminded him of his failure, his failure to completely remove their free will. Despite their master's call, the blasters were quite content to stay far away from the fight.

Meanwhile, Grillby ducked through the stray bones flying debris as he ran to the command console. He didn't have much time before Gaster would be upon him. The fact that he could teleport added to his sense of urgency. Grillby stole a look back to see his King and the Captain distracting Gaster. It seemed that Gaster had no choice but to focus on the fight: one false move and he would be dust. He turned away just as Asgore began flinging fire at the scientist, hell-bent on burning him to ashes.

That didn't matter now. What mattered now was his son. He ducked under a stray bone and slid down the catwalk, slamming into the large computer console in the middle of the CORE. He grunted, doing his best to catch his breath as he spotted Sans.

Sans remained unresponsive, just staring off into the distance with those horrible wires shoved deep into his right eye socket. He dared not burn away the metal strips bolting the tiny pup to the console: the super heated metal could hurt him. Grillby looked around frantically for tools. Bingo! Gaster, it seemed, was sloppy, or was interrupted too fast. The toolbox was still there. Grillby quickly grabbed a pair of pliers and cut the wires snaking their way into his son's skull. He would leave them in there for a doctor to remove, but cutting the wires would at least free him.

"Sans? Can you hear me?" Grillby took up a power drill next, adjusting it to unscrew the bolts.

Sans remained unresponsive and Grillby reined in his urge to cry at the sight. He doubled his effort in unbolting his restraints as fast as he could. He almost dropped the drill when the whole walkway system rattled and buckled from the force of an attack, forcing him to the ground. He moved his head just in time to see a wave of white bones slam into the metal walkways heading right towards him! He rolled out of the way as the bones slid by.

He heard Gaster's gasp and there was a smell of burning bones. It seemed like the King had more than punished the doctor for that move, allowing Grillby to continue freeing his son. The sound of rattling metal and shouts of battle was more than distracting, but he did his best to ignore it.

Finally, the last bolt became undone and Sans slumped to the floor, caught in one of Grillby's hands. "*Sans? Sans...I'm here. I'm here.*" He scooped up the tiny pup to his chest and hugged him close. He knew that Sans was alive, but he had yet to show any sign of consciousness. He was like it a computer unplugged from its outlet: completely shut down. He continued to whisper gently to Sans as he looked around for the fastest escape route.

{**"HnnnAUUAGH!"**} Gaster managed to knock back both Gnash and Asgore. With the precious few seconds of breathing room, he shouted towards his creation.

{**"001! ATTACK!"**}

Sans jerked in his father's arms stiffly, and then sank his teeth deep into Grillby's forearm. Grillby hissed in pain, trying again to rein in his heat so Sans wouldn't get burned. Sans fought like a wild animal, shrieking and kicking and biting until he managed to break free from his father's grasp. He hit the floor not too gently, but rose quickly, his eye sockets blank.

Tears were dripping down Sans's face as he growled and assumed an attack position. "**WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM!!**" Grillby roared. This was horrible....Sans was obviously in there somewhere, watching, but unable to do anything. It made his core feel like ice at the horror of it all.

{**"He is MY creation, he obeys ME!"**} Gaster's eye lights flashed blue as he reached a hand out.

Ping!

Asgore and Gnash groaned as suddenly an immense pressure was placed on them, only to be lifted up and slammed hard into the metal catwalk, buckling it. The blue magic was quite powerful, lifting the king and guardman with ease.

The metal in the facility began to creak from all the damage, and a few panels of the walls rattled off their hinges and fell to the lava below.

{**"001, KILL THE FIRE ELEMENTAL."**}

Sans jerked, and then his bottom jaw bisected as a thrum of magic began to build in his ribcage. The tears continued and his bones rattled from the force of the command. He couldn't break free. He could only watch from the inside as he turned his head to his adopted father.....and **FIRED**.

Grillby wasn't a Major General for no reason. He dodged out of the way, but already Sans was charging up another attack. He couldn't harm his child, but he also couldn't allow him to keep attacking like he was.

Soon, the whole walkway system would collapse into the lava below! For now he could only duck and weave from one attack after another.

Gaster opened his mouth to issue another command, only to be stopped by a fireball to the face. He shrieked as he was burned, losing his grip of blue magic on the two combatants' souls. He didn't have time to look before Gnash punched him so hard in the face it broke his jaw. { **“NNG!!”** }

The scientist fell back, clutching his broken face. Pieces of chipped bone and dust drifted to the catwalk. With the sharp sound of ripping fabric, he vanished to reappear behind Asgore and Gnash. Before they could turn around to attack him, Gaster viciously locked them in blue magic and attempted to throw them over the side of the railing. Asgore and Gnash got a grip on the railing just in time to prevent being thrown to their deaths, but Gaster kept pushing with his blue magic. Every second was an intense struggle as the pressure continued to build.

{ **“001. LOCK TARGET, AND FIRE.”** } Gaster shouted, his words slurred by his broken jaw. All his concentration went into pouring magic into his blue attack. Asgore being able to resist was no surprise, but Gnash hung on as well with fierce determination. Sans abruptly stopped his attack just as he was about to corner Grillby. He turned around until he faced the struggle on the nearby catwalk. He was ordered to lock target and fire, but Gaster neglected to mention *WHICH* target to fire upon. His jaws built up with bright blue and white energy, humming and crackling until it released with an ear-splitting *CRACK!*

A look of surprise flashed across Gaster's face when the beam of light hit him square on the chest, burning and shattering the bone beneath. The sheer momentum of the blast pushed him over the side of the railing. Stunned, he tried to reach out for anything that could save him, but there was none.

He was F A L L I N G.

D

O

W

N.

With a sickening flash of multi-colored fire, the scientist was consumed in the lava of his creation. Soon not even his dust was left, roasting in the intense heat.

Gaster was no more.

Sans slumped over, unconscious once more. Grillby quickly scooped him up as Asgore and Gnash pulled themselves back up to safety. The creaking and rattling of the warped and damaged metal turned to a shrill squeal as the catwalks began to rumble. The computer began to list a repeating string of error messages, sparking and sizzling out as circuits were fried, one by one. A heavy scent of ozone began to build up in the hot air, humming and shimmering.

The blasters, sensing danger, panicked and vanished in a sharp flash of white.

“QUICK! WE MUST GET OUT OF HERE!” Asgore pointed to the exit.

Grillby didn't need to be told twice, holding Sans close to his chest as he bolted just behind Gnash. All the while debris and metal began to fall from the rafters above as the facility began to shake. They all sprinted to the doorway, but suddenly there was a loud **BOOM**. Grillby felt something hit him from behind, and then everything went dark.

get | up

you | have | to | get | up

your| son | needs | you

Grillby groaned as an intense pain blossomed in his head, silencing his inner voice. He struggled to open his eyes. The room twisted and spun in his blurry vision, giving him an intense feeling of vertigo. When he realized he wasn't dead, he knew he had made it into the outer rooms of the CORE. Through the rubble behind him, the CORE crackled and burned. The sound of it stung his head and increased the pain he was feeling. What in the world hit him?

He blinked and struggled not to slip into the darkness again as he looked around. Gnash was slumped against one of the walls and The King was lying not too far away. All of them seemed to be unconscious from the force of the blast. Debris and pieces of concrete covered the ground like so much litter. His whole body stung from the backlash of magic, and his flames were nearly dark red. He was burning low, nearly snuffed out by the thick dust and smoke. Something was missing.

Sans!

He gasped and gripped the shattered flooring around him, struggling to rise. He couldn't call out, but he wearily began to crawl, searching for his child. It was slow, and laborious, but he finally found the pup. The right side of his skull was nearly smashed in and many of his bones were broken. He laid there, limply, taking ragged breaths.

Deep anger burned within him, but was quickly dulled by pain and exhaustion. He couldn't make it outside to get help, but he would do his best to comfort his child.

Grillby could see his vision going dark again as he used the last bit of strength to crawl to Sans. He curled around Sans as protectively as he could, holding one of his paws on his unbroken arm. It was all he could hope to provide Sans a little bit of comfort and warmth. He could swear he heard voices just as his vision went black, and he slipped away into unconsciousness once again.



The first sense to return to Grillby was his hearing. He heard voices, footsteps, and the crackling of his own flames, but he could not see. He tried moving around until he heard a familiar voice.

“Take it easy there, Grillby.”

His sluggish mind struggled to process the voice. It was...Frank's? What is FRANK doing here in the CORE? He forced his eyes open with a wince, and the room spun and blurred until it finally became still and focused again. He was...in a hospital? He looked down to see that he was in something almost akin to a bathtub, a shallow charmed 'bed'. The bottom was littered with burning wood and embers; no doubt the doctors wished to keep his flame fed.

“You were hit fairly hard with parts of the CORE.” Frank casually tossed another piece of wood into the bed. Grillby's flames devoured it immediately, slowly bringing his color back to a bright orange. “King Asgore and Captain Gnash only suffered minor scrapes and bruising.”

Grillby jerked to attention. “*What about Sans?*” He put his hand on the rim of the bed, attempting to rise. Frank frowned in response, but made no attempt to stop him.

“He's in the bed over here.” Frank gestured to a bed pushed close enough to the metal tub to be seen, but not catch on fire.

Grillby's flames seized up when he saw Sans. He was lying in bed, with one half of his head was bandaged up. One of his forelegs was sticking out of the covers, wrapped up tight in a cast. There was a thin IV line of healing magic feeling into the little pup. He was bundled in warm blankets, and a few wires ran to a machine that measured his HP and magic levels. All Sans seemed to do was breathe, but he was breathing easier at least, and didn't seem to be in any pain. Of course, Frank brought Papyrus along, who was sleeping next to his older brother.

Frank answered Grillby's unspoken question. “He will heal, no doubt about that. He may end up being blind on the right side, but they'll do everything they can to save his vision. He's going to need a while to heal.”

“*He cannot stay here.*” Grillby wheezed. His continued attempts to get up kept ending in failure. “*You know as well as I do that he was medically abused. If he wakes up here...*”

“It's why they placed him in a medical coma.” Frank held up his hands to reassure to distraught father. “He needs a few days here, as well as you, to heal. Then he will be sent home with you, with me checking up on his healing often.”

Grillby sighed in relief. That was one problem taken care of. “*How is Papyrus?*”

“He's fine, he got along well with my daughter. He's just been staying in bed with Sans. Bless him, he believes that hugs will heal him.”

"It's more true than you think." Grillby at least managed to pull himself up into a sitting position. "What happened at the CORE?"

"That, I can answer." Came a voice from the doorway.

King Asgore went to enter the room, ducking and moving sideways so he could get his horns in. He no longer wore his armor and cape, but was instead in just simple pants and a shirt. He looked to be fine, except for a few minor bandages on his arms and snout. Gnash followed, a bandage wrapped around the top of his head.

"I'll take my leave then. Rest up, Grillby." Frank smiled at Grillby, and with one quick smooch with his husband, he disappeared into the bustle of the Hospital.

For a while there was an awkward silence as the King and Guardsman looked over to the injured pup.

"Oh dear....will he..." Asgore was almost afraid to answer the question.

"He will heal." Grillby answered simply. *"He will be fine."*

"He's a tough one, that's for sure." Gnash added. "I saw what he did to Gaster. That took a lot of guts."

"Yes, but how will he feel about it when he wakes up. He killed Gaster. It was more than justifiable, but he's just a child...?" Grillby couldn't begin to imagine what mental state his son would be in when he woke up.

"I don't know," Asgore added in. "But he will be fine, with a father like you. In fact, I have something for you, if you feel well enough to take it."

"Of course, your majesty." Grillby sat up a little straighter as the King walked before him. Asgore handed him a piece of parchment, in gilded leaf and signed with the royal seal. Grillby's eyes widened when he realized what he was holding.

It was essentially a document granting Sans and Papyrus monsterhood and all the protections thereof. It also designated Grillby as their sole parental guardian. There would be no fears of them being taken away. No fears that they would be treated badly because of the tragic circumstances of their birth. They were, now, fully monsters.

"All the paperwork has already been completed." King Asgore spoke with a smile. "We have the finest therapists on standby, to help them once they decide to ask for it."

"...Thank you..." Grillby whispered, setting the precious document on a side table. *"This means a lot, to me and the boys..."*

But then Grillby remembered something. *“What about the ones without bodies? The ones that fought in the CORE?”*

“We don't know.” Gnash piped up. “They just...vanished. The guard hasn't seen them return to any of the tubes at the lab, so they can be anywhere. At least...they are away from Gaster.”

There was a solemn silence. “The only thing we can do, is wait for them to show themselves.” The King sighed and trudged over to Sans' bed. Papyrus opened his eye sockets when he heard footsteps approaching. He squinted upward as he puzzled over the fuzzy new person.

“Abah?” Papyrus gurgled a question that only he could understand.

“I must apologize, to the both of you.” The King spoke, regret on his face. “If I had kept a closer eye on my royal scientist, none of this would have happened to the both of you, and the countless victims of the labs. I swear to you, that it will not happen again and you both shall be cared for by Monsterkind.”

Papyrus tilted his head, puzzling over the words.

“YEE.” He chirped as quiet as he could and then went back to cuddling his injured brother.

“Papyrus forgives you.” Grillby couldn't help but smile. *“You should not blame yourself for the actions of others.”*

“Yes, but I feel responsible.” The King sighed.

“Not to interrupt, but we have work to do. Things to clean up and announcements to be made. No doubt everyone wants to know what the hell happened to the CORE.” Gnash pointed out. “They'll need the King to settle any fears the citizens may have.”

“Duty calls then, I suppose.” Asgore looked to Grillby one last time. “Heal up, you and the boys. I will always be available should you need me.”

“Thank you.” Grillby nodded.

Both the Captain and the King exited the room, shutting the door behind them. No doubt, they had a lot of fallout and problems to deal with. Grillby was just happy that he and his kids were alive. Gaster was gone, and he would never bother anyone again. No doubt, Sans would be set back in his recovery, but Grillby was a patient person.

Perhaps, everything will be okay.

Chapter Fourteen

Grillby and the boys ended up staying for a week in the hospital. Of course, he didn't blame the doctors for being very careful. Sans' injuries were severe enough that they were reluctant to release him for home care. Of course, Frank had to talk to them, and as soon as Sans was well enough to travel, they relented. Sans was bundled up and the small family carefully traveled back home, where Sans could wake up in familiar surroundings.

Grillby made sure to put him in his star-themed bed. Thankfully, he didn't have to worry about IV tubes getting ripped out in the case of a panic attack. He tucked him in alongside his brother, hoping at least that the familiar smells would provide some comfort. Now all that was left to do was to let the sedatives wear off. Once Sans was awake and conscious, Grillby could then access his mental state.

Judging by how Papyrus screamed at every little instance of separation from his brother, he was sure that both of them were in need of comfort. Papyrus had refused to be removed from Sans' bed while his bandages were changed, even going as far as attempting to bite people for it. He only calmed down when he was allowed to be next to his brother again, so the doctors and nurses just left him there. Perhaps Grillby would take Asgore up on his offer - if there was a therapist equipped to deal with children so young, he would like to know about it. Papyrus, it seemed, was just as in need of help as Sans was. Even now Papyrus was under the covers, holding onto his brother with his little arms, dozing in and out of sleep.

Now all he had to do was pull up a chair besides the bed and wait, looking over a newspaper to pass the time.

Of course, word of what happened spread across the underground, and there were whispers here and there. For most of the monster population, they had no idea that Sans and Papyrus were the victims talked about in the newspapers, and Grillby was happy to keep it that way. For now, only the Royal Guard and a few close friends knew the truth behind the matter, and he was confident that they wouldn't blab. Gaster's name had gone down in monster history as a cautionary tale of hubris and the act of pushing ethics aside. The ends justifying the means was no longer an excuse, and the scientific community found themselves being scrutinized harder than before.

It would all go down in the history books for sure. It'd be taught to future students and repeated in books and newspapers. Gaster, in the end, achieved immortality in a way, but perhaps it was not what he had in mind. At least the nightmare was over for two little children, and would never come back.

As for their less fortunate siblings, King Asgore ordered all the malformed children in the tubes to be allowed to pass peacefully. It was still unsure of how much they were aware of their surroundings, but they would no longer have to suffer. Once they had dusted, they were spread among the trees in the Capital park. Fitting, as they never had a chance to see the outside world, and now they could rest, no longer confined. It was a very bitter affair that affected everyone. Last time he checked with Frank, Gnash had ordered everyone involved in the case to take mandatory therapy. At least then, everyone could be able to move on.

From what Grillby had been told, everything in that lab was destroyed and sterilized. Now it was a robotics lab. Still, scientists were uncomfortable working there, as if there were whispers and feelings trapped in the very walls. Thankfully, most of the current scientists worked on bringing the CORE online. The fight had nearly destroyed the entire command hub, but in a couple weeks and round-the-clock shifts, everything should be up and running soon. Everyone was getting sick of the random blackouts.

Grillby was interrupted in his reading by a soft shuffling noise. Looking over to his left, he could see Sans moving his limbs slowly under the covers. It seemed like the sedative was finally wearing off, and he was free to sniff the surrounding smells. Papyrus held on to his brother and chirped encouragingly as Sans moved a little more. Sans took a deep, shuddering breath and opened his good eye socket slightly, the other bandaged over. He blinked a few times, his eye light hazy and unfocused as it drifted around the room.

Finally, he looked at Grillby with a blink... and then stiffened. For a moment, his eye light constricted in fright as he struggled to separate the past from the present. He stared for a few moments as his surroundings eventually began to soothe him. He relaxed back into the pillows and blankets, drawing enough breath to utter a soft 'boof'.

"Hello, Sans." Grillby bent down and offered his hand slowly to not startle him. *"You have been sleeping for a while."*

Sans blinked again and just laid still, looking quite sleepy. He was, however, awake enough to smell the hand offered to him. He sighed and released the tension in his body, fully intent on using the warm fiery hand as a pillow. Grillby used his other hand to gently pet the uninjured part of his head. Sans crooned softly and relaxed, closing his eye socket. Grillby was now trapped under the pups. It seemed he would be stuck there all night.

That was one worry off the bartender's mind. He had fully expected Sans to panic upon waking up. Perhaps the smells around him while he was unconscious helped him? The setting, perhaps? He couldn't know for sure until Sans was well enough to shift and speak again. With broken bones and a crushed skull, that might take a while.

Papyrus squealed happily nuzzled the uninjured portion of Sans' skull. By the way the covers began to move further down the bed, it was clear that a tail was being wagged, slowly at least. Sans could just bask in the love of his family without fear.

Sans wasn't stupid. He *knew* what he did. But he wasn't quite sure whether his tormentor was gone for good. Sans managed to cough a few confused noises as his little brother pestered him.

After spending time with them, of course Grillby could recognize the various noises they spoke while in their more feral form. It was a question being asked, and Sans was most likely very confused with what happened.

"You have been asleep for over a week," he explained. "You are very injured, but you will recover. Gaster is dead, he will trouble you and your brother no longer. You have nothing to fear anymore. It is safe now."

Grillby continued petting the little pup's skull as Sans sighed in relief. He yawned and quickly fell asleep again with his little brother nuzzling up close.

Things after that fell into a routine.

With Sans injured and Papyrus having severe separation anxiety, Grillby could no longer keep the bar running. He only left the house just long enough to put up a sign that the bar would be closed until further notice because of a family matter. Of course, by then the Snowdin regulars understood just why the establishment would remain closed for quite a while. No doubt the Canine Unit had told everyone to not worry, and to understand that his kids were recovering. Nobody complained, at least.

After that, Grillby began to receive so many casseroles and pies from concerned townsfolk that he scarcely had room to store them all. Still, it was quite helpful, and most of the food was given to Papyrus to devour. The batches of soup he received went right to Sans.

Sans was too weak and injured to eat on his own. His jaw had been fractured from the CORE, but was knitting together well. Grillby took the time to sit and spoon-feed his eldest child until he regained enough strength to eat on his own. Grillby's whole world revolved around the children, and he devoted himself fully to their recovery.

He was especially happy when Sans could eat by himself, so now the never-ending casseroles were eaten rather quickly. However, the townsfolk took it to be that the kids were just *very* hungry, so they sent twice the amount.

Grillby was sure at this point that he would never have to cook again, as he struggled to fit yet another pie into an overflowing fridge.

Of course, he had lots of help caring for the kids. Frank came by everyday the first week to check on both children. Soon, he was able to taper off visits as Sans healed. By that time, both Papyrus and Sans were eager to see the doctor. Who knew that a doctor could be so entertaining? Sans watched a hundred times, but still could not figure out where Dr. Frank was pulling lollipops from. Sans, at this point, was eager to take any entertainment he could get. He began to put up with the doctor visits, as long as he could get bad puns and magic tricks out of it.

The Canine Unit often stopped by as well, giving Grillby much-needed breaks once in a while to rest. Sometimes they stayed for a few days at a time, each member taking shifts to keep the pups company. Despite knowing that Gaster was dead and gone forever, the children still had night terrors. They especially loved Greater Dog, who would guard the door for them as they slept. They were also more than helpful with translating Sans' speech into something Grillby could understand.

It was a month later when their friends were allowed to visit.

Of course, Alphys visited first, worrying over her dear friends. She was quite disturbed about what happened, and perhaps she would need therapy as well. Still, she sat with the pups and read them manga. For a while, they could escape to a world of mecha and magical princesses, and not have to worry about their own problems.

Undyne, Frank and Gnash's daughter, also became a frequent visitor. She was rather loud and brash and opted to play with Papyrus. In the end, it helped Papyrus overcome a bit of his separation anxiety and become okay with being in a different room from his brother. While the two chased each other around and broke a lamp or two, Sans took the time to burrow under the pillows and take an extra long nap. It wasn't good for Papyrus to continue to lay around with his brother, as sweet as it was. No doubt, he was full of energy that wasn't being expressed. With Undyne's help, he would be thoroughly worn out so he could sleep through the night.

Months later of good food, care, and cheer, Sans finally had his casts and bandages taken off. With him getting treatment right away, he healed very well. Grillby had to squint and look hard to see the small, tiny lines that were once hideous fractures, but they thankfully didn't scar much. Before, little Sans' head had nearly caved in on the right side, but now it had healed with a fresh layer of new calcium.

Frank, however, confirmed the worst with a vision test. Sans was now blind in his right eye. His regular white pupil was there, but he could not see with it. When drawing in his magic, both eye sockets no longer glowed with yellow and blue light. One socket was permanently dark.

At first, Grillby worried how Sans would take this sudden handicap. No doubt, it would be extremely difficult to adjust to. But Sans proved to be resourceful enough. After bumping into chairs and doors a few times, he managed to figure out a way to move around without much trouble. Papyrus began to act like a guide, yelling at Sans to alert him if he was about to run into something. Putting some padding on the sharp edges of tables and corners no doubt prevented some injuries as well.

It took Sans a while to be able to move at all. Nearly three months of lying in bed had done a number on him, and he wobbled around like a newborn. Shape-shifting didn't help at all, and two legs were just as wobbly as four. Sans had become used to being lazy and being carried around, but now he would have to get around on his own. Papyrus would *never* leave him alone after that, begging for play or a tussle. Slowly, but surely, things became better, and it was like the CORE event never happened. Sans, however, continued to take advantage of being carried around. He learned quickly that if he just laid about, someone would pick him up and take him where he needed to go. Grillby knew that Sans was smart, but he could sometimes prove just how cunning he really was, tricking his caretaker into carrying him about if he was just too tired or lazy to walk.

Nightmares and panic attacks were something to deal with, but somehow they both knew that Gaster was gone and could not hurt them. It was still frightening to witness, and Grillby tentatively brought up the idea of therapy. Sans was reluctant about it, so Grillby resolved to wait a few months and see if he would be open to the idea then.

Not only did the family settle down, but so did the rest of the Underground. The CORE was repaired and there were no longer rolling blackouts. A new Royal Scientist was reported. Grillby didn't quite catch his name, but apparently he was interested in agriculture and increasing production of magic food. This gave great relief to everyone involved with the CORE incident. Unless the new scientist decided to grow monster-eating killer tomatoes or something else of the sort, they had nothing to worry about.

In time, the bar was reopened and things went back to normal. Customers came and went with their gossip. Sans and Papyrus stayed in the back room to play, unless the Guard dogs were in. Then, they managed enough courage to leave the room and sit with the dogs. Perhaps it might take a while for them to become completely comfortable with strangers, but the dogs provided a safe buffer. There, nobody could bother or hurt them, and Grillby was grateful that they had begun to trust other people to protect them.

One day, the King decided to visit.

Grillby knew something was up when the bar went silent. He was in the back at that moment, fetching some clean glasses, when the hustle and bustle of the bar cut out. Curious, he returned to the front counter of the bar to find the King himself seated on one of the stools.

"It's alright, it's a casual day for me." He smiled at the other patrons. Of course, he wasn't quite dressed to be 'Kingly' at that moment. Just some pants and a quite ugly knitted sweater was all he wore, save for the little crown nestled between his long horns. "No need to stop on my account!"

At their King's command, everyone began talking and eating again. Once in a while, the King would go among the monsters to random establishments. To the King, it was a way to remain in touch with his subjects, and present himself as a kind King that the people could go to with their problems. It wasn't often these days that people would go to the royal court, but sometimes people felt better bringing their concerns up to him in a casual and friendly setting.

Today, everyone just seemed happy to eat and have their drinks, leaving the King alone to perch on a bar stool that was, perhaps, a little too small. "Hello, Grillby."

"Hello, your Majesty." Grillby politely polished up a fresh glass. *"What can I get for you today?"*

"Oh, just a butterscotch soda. I dropped by to ask you how the children were doing."

Grillby began mixing the drink, handing the tall glass over to the King. *"They are fine. They are somewhere around here."*

"And the injured one? Is he better?" Asgore took the drink and took a sip.

"Yes, he has healed just fine. Let me see if I can find them, they may be with the dogs."

"No need. From what I remembered with my children, they often appear by themselves, at the most inconvenient of times. Why, we just need to engage in discussion and they should be along to interrupt us."

"Is that so?" Grillby chuckled, the sound like the pops of a fireplace.

"Yes. I'm sure you will discover such things on your own." The King sipped his soda with a large smile.

Grillby thought for a moment, before voicing a question. *"How do you know... if what you are doing is right in parenting?"*

Grillby was only a parent for a bare three months or so. Deep down, there was the ever-lurking fear that he wasn't equipped or able to help Sans and Papyrus completely. Everyone is afraid to fail, but it's even worse when there are two lives that depend on you completely. One wrong move could undo everything that took so long to build.

"Well..." Asgore set his drink down for a moment. "Are the children happy?"

“Yes. They smile more now.”

“Then you’re doing everything right.” Asgore winked. “I can’t tell you how to be a parent: it’s different for everyone. As long as your children feel safe and loved, you are doing everything right. Second-guessing yourself, old friend?”

“A little,” Grillby admitted. *“I just... want them to be happy.”*

“And you are doing a fine job of it! When... Asriel was born... I was terrified. I was so terrified of doing everything wrong, I forgot to just...savor the little moments.” The King smiled sadly. “Don’t let those little insecurities stop you from enjoying parenthood.”

For a moment, Grillby was quiet in thought. *“I am not looking forward to PTA meetings.”*

That earned a loud guffaw from the king. “Oh, I hated them too!”

At that moment, Asgore felt tiny fingers touch the fur on his arm. Puzzled, he looked down to see a little skeleton with a scarf longer than himself. Papyrus’ eye sockets were wide as he petted the white fluffy fur on the King’s arm. Sans was not too far away - close enough to watch his brother, but far away enough to not get grabbed. He watched the King with a calm and almost tired expression.

“Why, hello there! I was hoping I could see the both of you!” Asgore dropped his arm lower so that Papyrus could properly pet the fur there.

“Heeeeeheee..... **HI.**” This was... a *loud* skeleton.

“Hello!” Asgore echoed back.

“HI!”

“Hello!”

“HI!”

This could go on forever, so Asgore chuckled in defeat. “My goodness, look at him! What a cheerful little skeleton.”

“Yes... it’s almost unreal how much the both of them have changed. He must remember you from the hospital.”

“He probably does.” Asgore reached down a paw and gently patted the child on the head. He looked over to Sans, who was still watching them. “And what about you? Are you doing alright?”

Sans just nodded silently and yawned. He didn't get close, but he at least tolerated someone in his space.

"As you can see, they are doing quite well. In fact, I think it's time for them to nap for a bit. Would you like that, Sans?"

Sans nodded with a genuine smile on his skull. He took Papyrus by the hand and began to lead him behind the counter and off to the back room. Papyrus waved to the king as he was led along.

"BUH BYE!!!"

Asgore waved with a stifled giggle until both children vanished into the back room.

"Grillby, old friend, they are adorable."

Grillby smiled warmly, his flames picking up a soft yellow hue. *"Indeed, they are. I am very interested to see what kind of people they will grow up into."*

"Well, with you guiding them, I'm sure they will be good people."

Grillby 'blushed', pleased at the praise as he went back to polishing glasses.



It was only a few weeks later when a knock came at the front door. By then, Sans and Papyrus had calmed down enough that they didn't immediately hide after a door-knock. Instead, they simply stopped what they were doing to look to the door. Grillby was also quite curious. It was rather late at night and the children had just finished dinner; it wasn't a time that monsters usually came to visit.

He opened the door to reveal the entire Canine Unit, visibly wiggling with excitement.

"...Hello?" By now, it wasn't all that unusual for the dogs to drop by, as they had forged a very tight bond with the children and were helping them learn social skills. But still? This late at night? *"...Can I help you?"*

"Yes!" Dogamy held his wife's paw in his. "We want to borrow the puppies!"

Grillby quirked an eyebrow. “.....*Borrow them? For what?*”

(“Dog things!”) Dogaressa chimed in. (“We’re going on a howl!”)

They must have picked up on the elemental’s confused expression, so they chose to elaborate.

(“A howl is where dogs gather and yell at the sky!”) Of course, that would mean yelling at the cavern ceiling for now.

“... *But... why?*” *Yell at the sky? What?*

Dogamy barked a laugh. “It’s a social thing, for dogs! At least, all the good dogs.”

The mention of ‘*good dogs*’ had Greater, Lesser, and Doggo wiggling even *faster* with excitement.

Grillby turned and looked back to his two children. Sans and Papyrus were obviously listening and looked quite excited about it. Briefly, a flash of protectiveness and panic washed over him at the very thought of letting them out of his sight. But... he couldn’t stifle them. They had to have room to grow, after all. Hovering over them at all times would be detrimental to the development of their social skills. Sans and Papyrus looked at him with smiles and wide eyes, and he came to a decision.

“*They will need to be back here by 10 p.m. That is their bedtime.*” He couldn’t help but relent. Of course, this caused both kids to run around yelling, and it took the help of the dogs to catch them and get them into winter clothes. Thankfully, the local tailor could weave enchantments into clothing. For both boys, their clothing would warp and vanish to fit new anatomy every time they shape-shifted. He didn’t want either of them catching a cold, regardless of the form they were in.

Both of the Dogi had a wiggling pup/child in their arms, smiling. “Thank you, Grillby!” (“They’ll be back in time for bed!”) “BORK!” “Boof!” “.....Yeah, thanks.”

Grillby chuckled silently. “*Have fun.*”

Taking that as permission, the dogs (and kids) vanished into the dark edge of the woods, leaving paw prints behind. Grillby watched for a moment, letting stray snowflakes melt in his fire, before he closed the door.

He took a seat in his easy chair and pulled out a toy catalog. The timing couldn’t have been more perfect. According to Gaster’s notes, it was soon approaching their birthday. Of course, the scientist didn’t care for such things, and only used the date to measure years instead of a celebration.

Even though they weren't born by conventional means, they still deserved to have their birth celebrated. He wasn't sure if they even knew what a birthday was.

They were only a few days apart from each other, even if there was a four year age gap. He decided he would just roll everything into one big birthday to compensate. Now that the kids were occupied, he could scheme without spoiling anything. He took a while, just going through the book and circling what he thought the kids would like.

But then a chorus of howls broke through the quiet chilly air. It was followed by a small, but eerie howl, no doubt belonging to Sans. Not to be outdone was Papyrus' sudden cheerful and loud scream of "**DOGGEH**" shattering the night. It must have been a rather powerful yell, because Grillby could hear snow falling off some of the nearby tree limbs.

He just snorted and went back to trying to decide what flavor of cake to make.

{ Am I falling? }

{ I can't have work to do! }

{ GET UP! }

IT CANT END LIKE THIS }

Gaster gasped, awake and dizzy. He was falling, but standing still. The intense feeling of vertigo spun his mind around to the point where he no longer knew what was up or what was down. He had tried to move his arms out to grasp for an anchor, but they felt... wrong... weak. It was intensely cold, much like a deep freezer. He had tried opening his eye sockets, but it was so dark that he couldn't make out any features.

How long had he been falling?

All he felt was nothing. He felt biting cold, but that was the only sensation he had. Sight, touch, hearing, and taste were all taken from him. He had tried to touch his face, but he felt only a cold numbness, like his limbs were disconnected from his body. He had long given up screaming. In the end, was he really screaming? He couldn't tell.

It felt like months. Years. Eons. For all he knew, the universe could have compressed and exploded again. He had no way of telling.

It gave him plenty of time to think, however.

Once he got used to the nothingness, it was easy to pull inwards and ignore it as much as he could. There was always the instinctual feeling of wrongness from a body he wasn't sure he had anymore, but he could think.

He remembered a fight. Lights. Heat.

His subjects turned against him, and the last thing he saw was 1-S's beam pushing him over a ledge.

He hit... something. Hard but soft, and he flew into a million pieces. It was like being scattered everywhere, but there was no cohesion. There was just drifting as pieces of him screamed in horror of it all.

It all must have come together again. Falling in place. Motion without motion. Finally, he could string thoughts together without the echoing screams inside his head.

He must have died somewhere along the way; he couldn't be sure when.

There was just blackness. The only screams he heard were in himself, but perhaps he had gone mad and was hallucinating such things? Lack of stimulation was quite detrimental to one's health - he studied that intently in the E-1 series. All of them dusted, no longer having any will to live after only a month of isolation in a box with no sound, smell, or light.

Perhaps, if there was an afterlife, then this was his punishment?

He couldn't understand why he was being punished. He may have done less-than-stellar things, but in the end it was all for the good of monsterkind.

Wasn't it?

He couldn't tell for sure. All he wanted to do was figure out what went wrong with 1-S and 2-P. He focused, trying to figure out the details he missed.

Suddenly, he hit something with a wet *splat*. Instantly, light and noise assaulted senses that had become used to nothingness. He had to close his eyes for a second, the light too bright and intense for him to deal with. He could only lie there, stunned, as the constant vertigo finally began to wear off. He was still cold, however, and felt terribly weak.

"heehee! come on, pap!"

He struggled to raise his head from the floor as he heard something rather familiar.

"you can do it! just put the- no! don't put it in your mouth!"

At this point, Gaster had become acclimated enough to open his eyes, and the first thing he did was look down at his body.

He wished he hadn't, a thin static-like scream ripping through his ruined mouth. He was little more than a melting mass of black goop. It was so dark, it seemed to absorb all the color around it until it was so black, it hurt to look at. He raised his arm—well, what he thought was his arm. What managed to rise was a bent thick noodly appendage with a clump of knobs on the end as a mockery of fingers. It all dripped and warped, but the circular hole in his hand remained crisp and clean despite it.

He was, quite simply, a literal mess.

It took several tries for him to get up and find out where he was. To his surprise, he was in a living room, with a purple carpet and pale yellow walls. He looked around, and spotted his two subjects sitting in the middle of the floor. 1-S was showing 2-P how to put things together to make a wooden model dinosaur, with mixed results.

They were both dressed in sweaters and warm pants, sitting around like there wasn't a care in the world. They were... happy?

Gaster was more than a little shocked. He only ever saw fear and obedience from them, but... they could laugh? How interesting.

He reached out a dripping hand to touch them, to see if they were real, but his hand phased right through 2-P's skull. He tried to grab him, but failed. He tried to touch the carpet, and that only gave him a flat surface with no tactile sensation.

He tried screaming, threatening, even using the trigger word, but nothing happened. All that fell from his deformed skull was a bout of white noise. Both subjects continued to play and laugh despite it all, infuriating the fallen scientist to no end.

In a rage he tried to call up his magic, but there was nothing. Nothing at all. He was a visitor in a world that didn't belong to him anymore. There was no influence he could have now.

It took a while to accept it, 'sitting' down in the corner, watching. It was horrifying. Much like Tantalus, there was life right in front of him, but he couldn't touch or experience it.

He was briefly interrupted in his thoughts when that elemental bartender arrived, bringing a plate of peanut butter carrots. Both subjects took a couple, giggling as they popped the veggies in their mouths to chew. He could smell it, but he knew he could not taste or touch it. He just watched as his two creations interacted with the fire elemental in a domestic way. He supposed he couldn't be all that surprised, they were designed to pack-bond. But... something was different.

There was a brief nagging thought that... perhaps his subjects were not what they seemed, but he shook it aside. He needed to deal with one thing at a time.

Soon, the lights and sounds became muted again. His small grip on reality was fading away, and no matter how he grasped it, it slipped through his malformed fingers like sand. He was once again dragged back into the nothingness... the void.

But the brief glimpse he had... it made him feel curious.

After all, he was a scientist.

And he had all the time in the world.

TO BE CONTINUED

Brother

For WD.G – E2 – 001 – S, there was no passage of time.

There was only a dull existence that seemed to stretch on forever. The constant boredom and numbness was once in a while interrupted by sharp instances of pain and activity. Neither of them were good, but 1-S sometimes looked forward to the interactions with the one he called Scary Hands. At least then it was something. The pain was a welcome break from the wide encompassing numbness that kept him lying down.

Most of the time he just laid in his cage. Pacing had become boring in time, what was the point? Though sometimes it was soothing to move rhythmically... but he grew tired of it eventually. There was nothing to do in the dismal expanse of gray metal, so he had to invent his own things to do. He often chewed on the bars with his little teeth, feeling them wearing down and splintering as he gnawed on the bars. Soon they were blunt and would no longer deliver the painful needle-like bites that the others in White had come to fear from him. Sometimes they would make an effort to stop some of his more mindless behaviors, but for this they didn't.

When he didn't feel like chewing on the bars, he'd chew on himself. Mostly, he'd nuzzle and attack the numbers etched into his foreleg. He remembered how it hurt when the round loud sharp thing carved the symbols into his bone. The burning dust smelled awful to his sensitive nose, and no matter how much he screamed, Scary Hands continued on. Even after the long time since then, it still ached and pulsed with wrongness that made 1-S want to set his teeth into it. Even if he managed to damage the symbols, they would just carve them in again.

Every time he managed to chew open his own bones or break something, there would be a confusing blur of green light and it would just be like it never happened. So he continued to do so. Why not? It was something to do, at least.

What he did to himself was nothing compared to what he called the White Ones would do. He was sometimes taken away and given painful hot pinches that would make him convulse and scream. There was a lot of red in those pinches and they hurt so much. He learned that they were called needles. This always made him tired—or rather, more than usual. He probably hated the needles most of all, as everything burned and burned and no matter how much water he would drink, it would still burn.

There were other things that often confused 1-S. They didn't like him chewing himself, but then would break one of his bones to measure how long it took to heal, or how strong it was. He didn't know what to call that at the time, but he knew it wasn't quite fair to him.

Sometimes they would just take him out and yell things at him until his mind seized up and he retreated into the back of his head where nobody would ever hurt him. He would awaken somewhere else, feeling sad and drained. There were also times when he would fall asleep, only to wake up later with bandages on his head or a few food cycles of blindness. His head would hurt terribly after them - there was always a horrible buzzing noise that took so long to go away. Sometimes the silence hurt as much as the buzzing.

He was miserable, but didn't understand the word for the feeling.

It got to the point where he began to refuse to eat and drink. Why bother? He understood that these things would keep him alive, but what was the point of being alive? After the fourth food cycle of not eating, the pain had started to fade away and only left a cool sense of finality. The White Ones ended up forcibly feeding him, but at this point his soul had begun to give up.

It was alright to 1-S. He could just lie down and sleep and nothing would hurt him.

He was shocked out of this mentality when the White Ones opened the door to the cage. It was perhaps a lot of missed food cycles later, he wasn't so sure on time. Instead of dragging him out or trying to force him to eat, they shoved a small bundle of blankets inside and locked the door again.

1-S just stared at the blanket and started backing away when it began to move.

They put a living thing with him? What was he supposed to do with it? He had been ordered to kill living things in the past... was this a test? What was he supposed to do now?

For the first time in a long time, he got up, his limbs shaking with the effort as he carefully crawled forward to investigate the bundle.

He sniffed, touching the bundle with the end of his snout, trying to discern the creature by smell. The bundle made a soft mewling noise and he drew back, confused and surprised.

The bundle... smelled a lot like himself. It was different, but it was similar. The smell of bone and lingering chemicals, and soft indescribable things buried underneath. A good smell, despite the taint of the harsh-smelling liquids seeped into bone. 1-S found himself shoving his snout further into the soft bundle. What was this?

He was stopped when a tiny paw touched the end of his nose as the blanket began to fall away. The being made a soft mew when the source of warmth was gone and it immediately began to crawl over to 1-S.

1-S backed up until his backbone touched the end of the cage. The thing coming towards him on shaky undeveloped legs... was something like him. It was so ridiculously tiny... How could anything be that small? He just watched, completely confused as the tiny being sneezed and wagged its little tail. It opened its eye sockets to look blearily up at the bigger monster, a small smile spreading across its puppylike muzzle.

Across its foreleg were brand new carved symbols. **WD.G – E2 – 002 – P.**

1-S didn't know whether to be relieved or horrified. *A thing like him! He wouldn't be lonely!* There would be someone to help bear the pain and numbness...

But then, they would have to go through the same thing. They would have to deal with it too. Like him, they were born into a life of pain and hardship, bound to the whims of the White Ones.

1-S was conflicted, watching his tiny... litter-mate? Kin? He didn't quite know the word for what the being was to him, but he instinctively knew it was someone very close. The little being finally crossed the cold expanse of metal and settled in to sit under 1-S's legs, purring softly. 1-S huffed and laid down, nudging the being to his side and curling around it. It yawned and fell asleep, purring as it slept. 1-S stretched his snout down and licked at the numbers on the little one's arm. He could comfort the being. He could make a difference.

He could protect them.

Maybe... it was worth it to live? To see what would happen next with this tiny being?

A warm feeling blossomed in his soul, and for the first time in a long time, he felt hungry.

It wasn't long until the food cycle, and Scary Hands appeared personally to give out the brick of hard chewy stuff.

Despite himself, 1-S hissed and bared his blunted fangs at Scary Hands, moving instinctively to shove his smaller charge out of sight.

Scary Hands merely chuckled at this.

{ “Good to see you have some fight left in you, 001. Who knows, your ‘brother’ might turn out like you.” }

Scary Hands tossed in the brick, which 1-S snapped up with a growl.

{ “You’re going to need it. Especially for him.” }

That comment was referring to the tiny sleeping being, 1-S realized. He knew a threat when he heard one, and hissed in response. Scary Hands simply left, seemingly unfazed by 1-S’s little display.

Thankfully, it left them alone. 1-S chewed the bar in half, and then the one half into small pieces for his brother. There was a name for it now. It was an important name. He helped his brother eat the little pieces until he had enough and curled up to sleep again.

...Brother...

What a good word.

No Locked Doors

Grillby sighed and looked at the mess around him. Sauce stains were splattered against the kitchen walls, where they had dried hard and thick. Somehow, there was batter on the ceiling, which constantly dripped stalactites of flour and eggs to the floor below. Noodles were stuck to the cabinets and floor, and there was a mini explosion of flour on the countertop that made it look like a full on snowstorm had occurred. The sink was stacked high with dishes and pots, most of them burned and smoking. Half-cut vegetables and ingredients were mashed up on the floor, and for some reason, there were exactly 10 spoons arranged in a circle around one single whole tomato.

He supposed the mess was inevitable. Since their rescue a few years prior, his children had always enjoyed sitting down to watch him cook. They seemed fascinated and floored by the whole process of making and preparing food. He imagined that they, in their starved state, couldn't really imagine a whole new world of different food and flavors that were now available to them. But now that it was, they were usually there to watch, scrutinizing his every move with their wide inquisitive eyes.

Sans, for the most part, was still as quiet as always, but Papyrus was using his new vocabulary to ask a thousand questions at once. Grillby tried to answer as well as he could, but Papyrus would usually not wait for an answer before he was asking another question.

Eventually, it was Sans who came forward and quietly asked if they could help. A cook at heart, Grillby was delighted that they were showing an interest in something he was passionate about. He resolved to give them a hands-on lesson.

This was the result of it.

Despite the mess, they had managed to make something... edible. They were so proud, and Grillby could only smile as he choked down burnt, crispy noodles and the lumpiest cake imaginable. They were happy, and as long as they were happy, he was.

After the...dinner...he had escorted the children to the living room to play, while he dealt with the mess. Sans, of course, curled up on the couch as usual while Papyrus grabbed up paper and crayons and set to drawing. Grillby, for one, was thankful that Papyrus was out of his chewing phase—he was getting a little tired of replacing eaten crayons on a weekly basis.

Once they were settled down, he went back into the kitchen and shut the door. He pulled on some gloves and unlocked a cabinet in the corner, pulling out cleaners. Of course, when he adopted the children, he had taken all cleaners and remotely poisonous things and kept them in a locked cabinet. Normal children he knew would sometimes get into cleaners, but the risk here was much higher with his children's more canine instincts to get into and taste *everything*.

This was the only instance where he would close and lock a door. The fumes and exposed chemicals were not good for children to be around. He listened to make sure the children were in the other room, before beginning the long task of cleaning.

He was about halfway through scrubbing when the door knob began to jiggle. There was a soft voice from the other side of the door, unmistakably Sans'. "dad?"

"I'm sorry, Sans, you can't come in now." Grillby continued to clean. "It's not safe for you to be in here now."

Sans was quiet on the other side of the door. "why?"

Grillby never really had to explain it before. Most of the time the children were sleeping after a meal, so he could clean while they were unaware of what he was doing. But now, they were relatively healthy... physically, at least, so they were more alert than before.

"Because I am cleaning, and the chemicals I am using are not safe for children to be around," he explained through the closed door. *"It won't be long until I am finished."*

There was a pensive pause from behind the door before Sans replied. "...not safe for you either?"

"No, not really..." It was best to be honest. *"But I will be fine. You do not need to worry about me."*

There was the soft patter of nervous pacing on the other side of the door as Sans was obviously thinking about the situation. Despite it being a few years, he was still extremely protective, which had extended from his younger brother to his adopted father. After a moment of contemplation, the door knob rattled again, this time a little more frantic.

"Sans. It is alright. You can't come in here now." Grillby tried to be firm but reassuring. Sans was still having anxiety issues and there was no doubt being closed off wasn't sitting well with him. *"I am safe. Please go back and look after your brother. I'll be done soon."*

The knob reluctantly rattled one last time before Sans' soft footsteps wandered away from the door and hopefully back to the living room. Grillby sighed with relief and went back to scrubbing away at the stain on the ceiling.

Scarcely five minutes later (which might have been an eternity to two anxious children), there were footsteps in front of the door again. There was a scratch at the door and a soft whine, which no doubt belonged to the youngest skeleton.

"Papyrus..." Grillby sighed. *"I'm fine. I'm just cleaning."*

The first set of scratches was joined by another set as Sans' whines joined his brother's. They both sounded distressed as they did their best to scratch their way through the door.

Grillby frowned. He really didn't want to let them in... but if they were so anxious...

He didn't have the chance to do anything before the crack in the bottom of the door was awash with white light and the sharp high humming of gathering magic filled the air. He barely had time to blink before the door exploded inwards in a mess of light and wooden shards. Pieces of wood burnt in the air and larger pieces landed hard on the floor. The force of the blast caused Grillby to stumble backwards.

There in the doorway was Sans in 'canine' form, his lower jaw split and swung to the side as the last sparks of energy dissipated from his maw, his one eye glowing blue. Papyrus was also in the same form, standing safely behind his brother. Sans' jaws swung in with a click and pulled together again, as he rushed in past the now-removed barrier and straight towards his father.

Grillby was too stunned to really do anything as the older child grabbed him gently by the pant leg and began to pull him to the door as the younger pushed from behind. Still in shock, he allowed himself to be lead out of the room, where the two pushed him on the couch. The two pups instantly climbed on top of their father protectively, growling at the destroyed door and the faint scent of cleaner wafting from the kitchen. Clearly, they decided to 'rescue' Grillby from the locked room where the 'bad things' were.

Grillby learned that day to never lock doors in the house again.

TRUST COVER GALLERY

Over on my Tumblr, I ran a contest to find some cover art for this PDF. Primarily, I wanted to see how people interpreted what I wrote into drawn media. There are so many ways a person can look at a piece of written work and create something based off that, and that for me was the most awesome thing about it. I am incredibly grateful to all that entered. It means a lot to me!

I got such a wide variety of submissions that I knew that I cannot just use one cover, the rest will have to be included in this PDF. Everyone was awesome and It was very difficult to choose the top three, and even then to choose the winner.

The Following pages will include all the submissions along with their Tumblr usernames. Please look these folks up because they all do deserve some attention and praise!

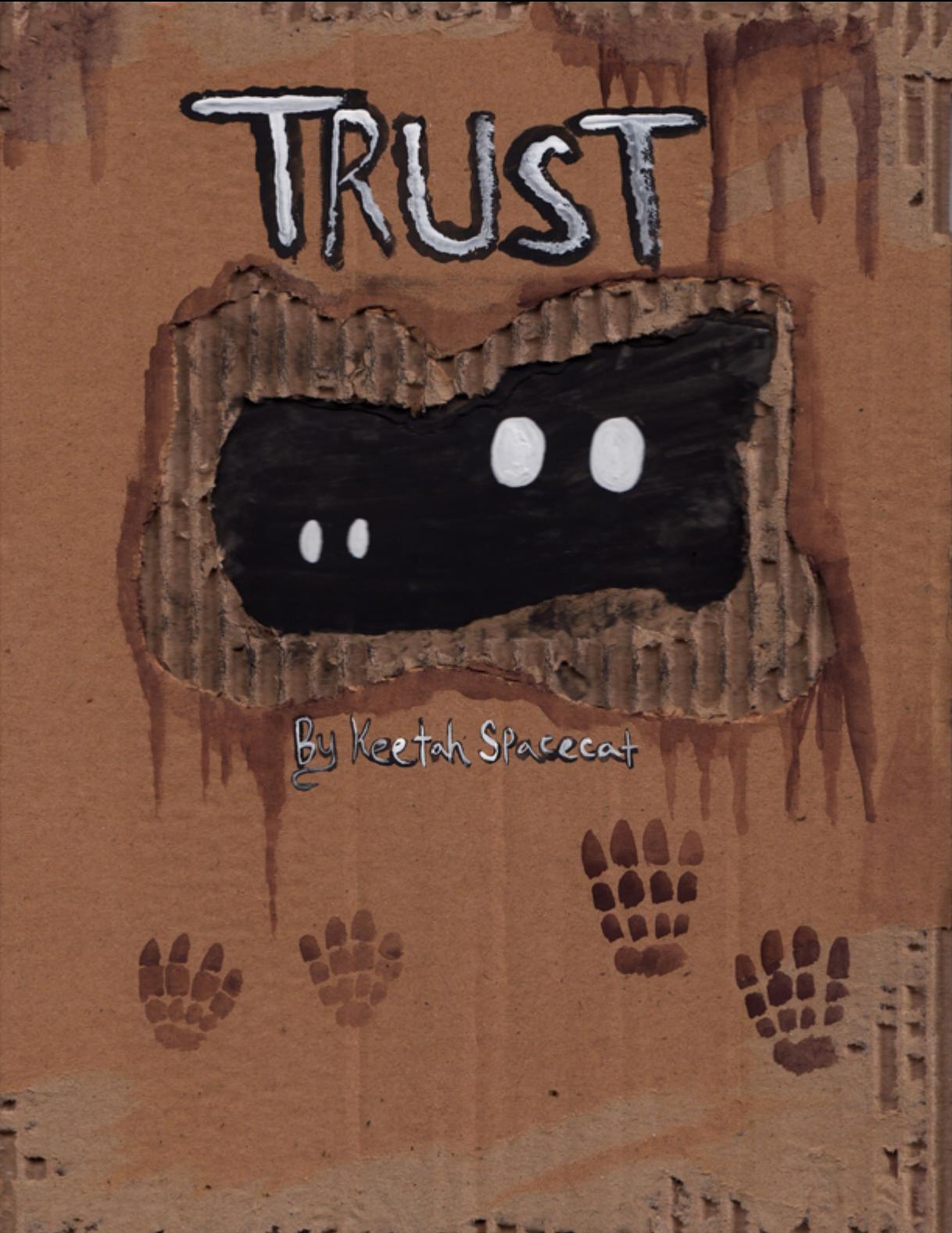




- Keetah Spacecat -

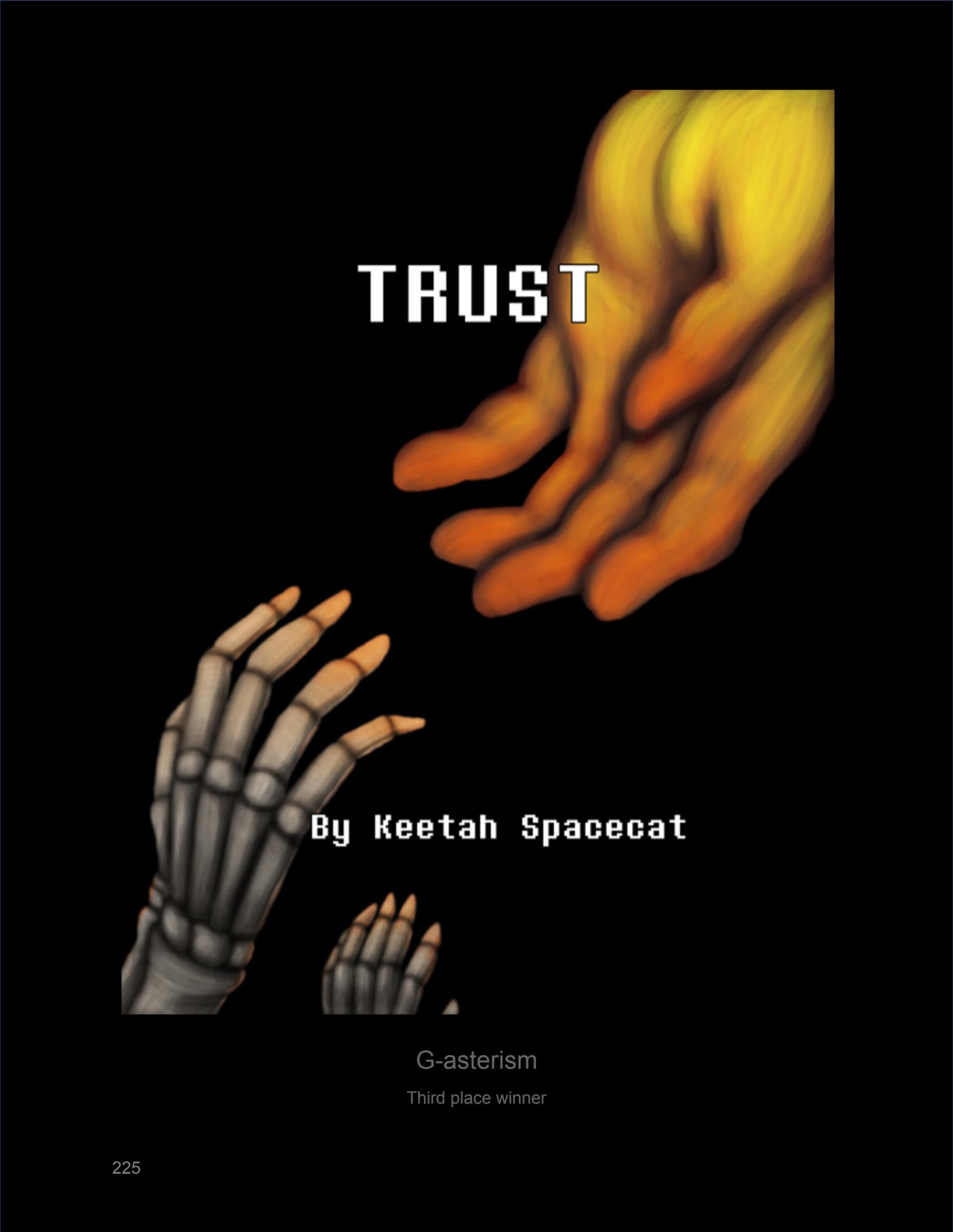
Raza-rays

First place winner



Makeshiftstory

Second place Winner

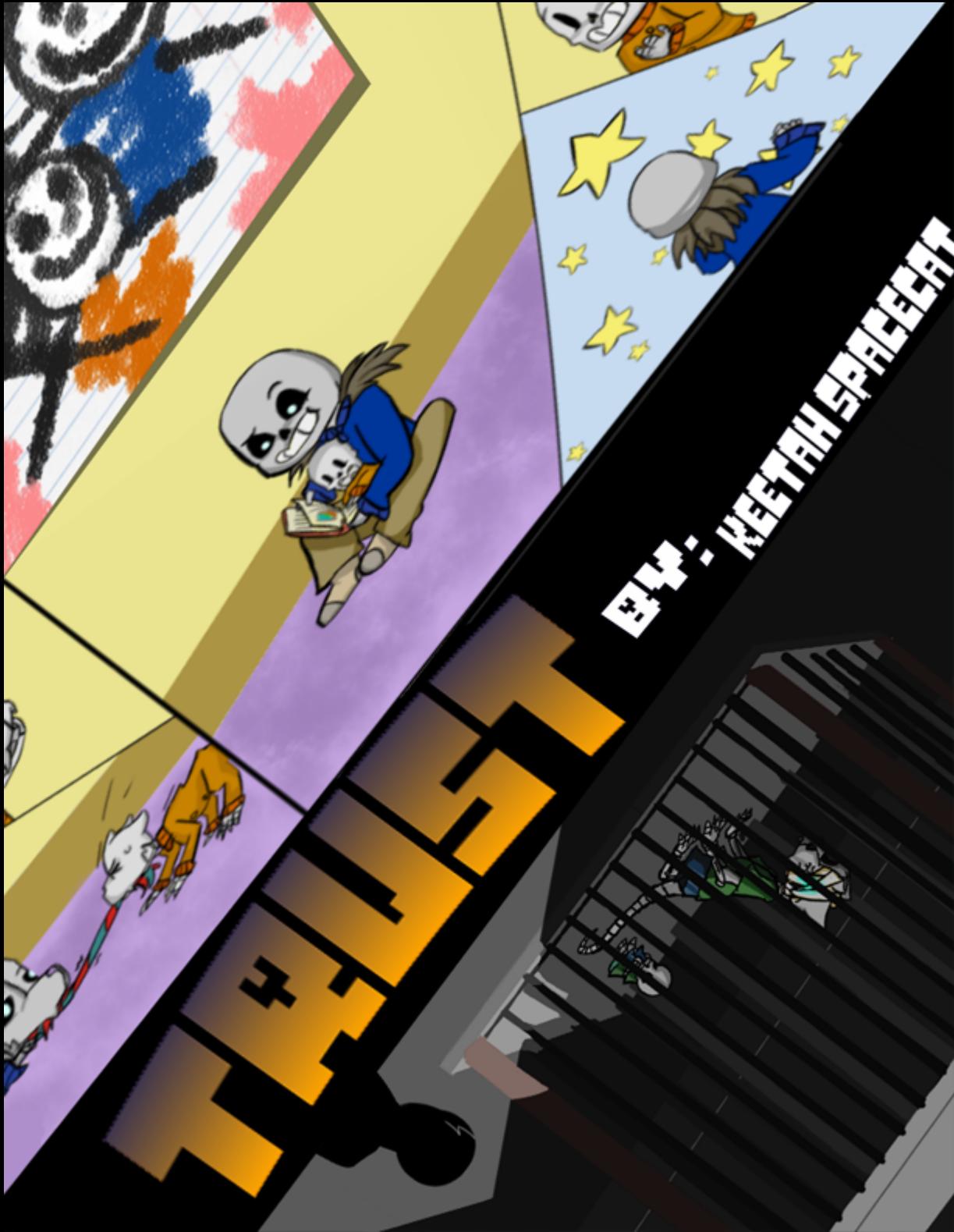


TRUST

By Keetah Spacecat

G-asterism

Third place winner



SCPAG

TRUST



BY: KEETAH SPACECAT

Ichiwashername-o



Kuttiesstuff

TRUST

By K.Spacecat



Mandymiriana

TRUST

By
K. SPACEGATE



Papayapaperss

TRUST: The Fancomic!

This is a comic drawn and planned by the very talented **Comic Wizard E. Cross**. A while ago they asked if they could make a comic based on the fic, and since this AU is open to all, I said yes.

Then C.W proceeded to *blow my mind*.

They draw all of this on a tablet computer, which is unreal to me. They have added their own tweaks, ocs, and changes to make this comic breathe and express their own personal touch. They keep trying and drawing new things, constantly improving and growing as their work does. As an artist, that is the thing that makes me the most happy. I feel incredibly lucky and blessed to have someone like this fic so much that they took it and made it into something new and amazing.

C.W of course, has things in life, so the comic updates whenever they have the time to do so. I have permission to include in here, the first two completed chapters. It is ongoing, and you can look forward to new pages and artwork as C.W release them.

You can follow along at their tumblr page at **trustandblasters.tumblr.com** where not only do they post comics and au art, but sometimes will include their original art that is equally worth viewing.

They took this sandbox of an AU and made a castle out of it and that is *awesome*.

Please enjoy!



This has been going on for a few weeks now.



Something has been rifling through my trash and picking out all of the food.



The Royal Guard gave me an idea of the culprit.



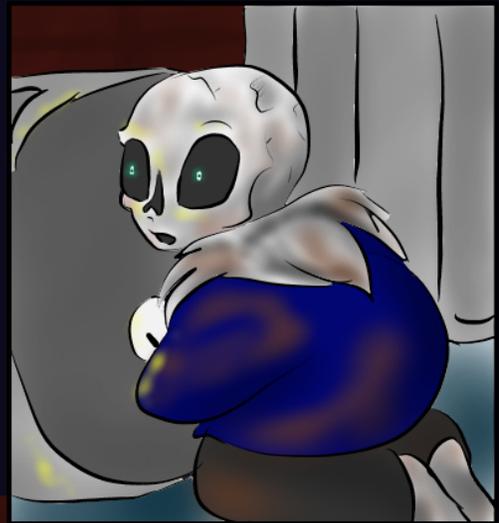
Honestly, I hope I'm wrong.

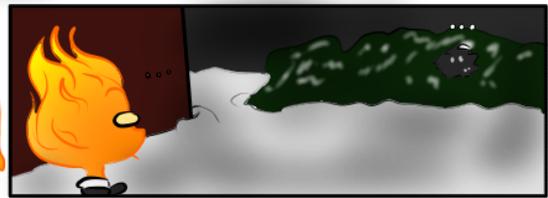
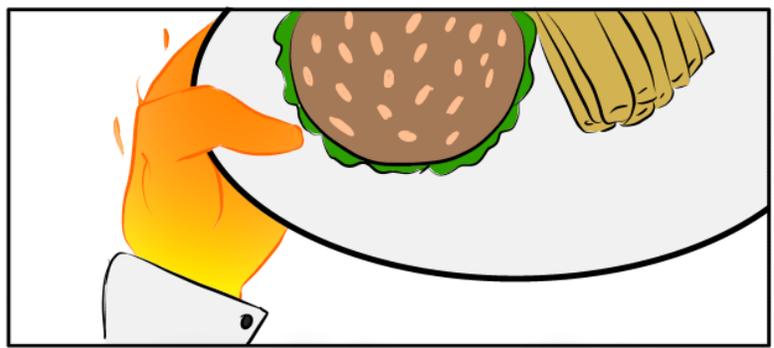
A plan wasn't difficult,
it just required
Patience



It wasn't to
long before I was
Rewarded with
Results

-Rip!
-Scf-
-Scf-







Untouched



It became a daily routine



The footprints get closer each day

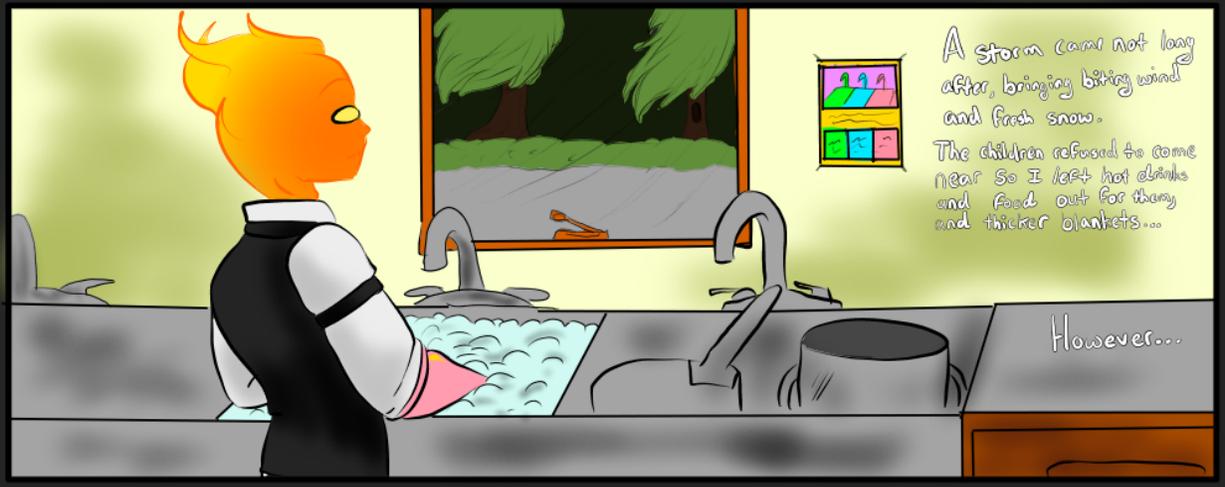


The guard tell me about the sightings of the Skeletal children, though Sometimes they refer to them as skeletal Puppies

as the days pass these sightings happen less and less.



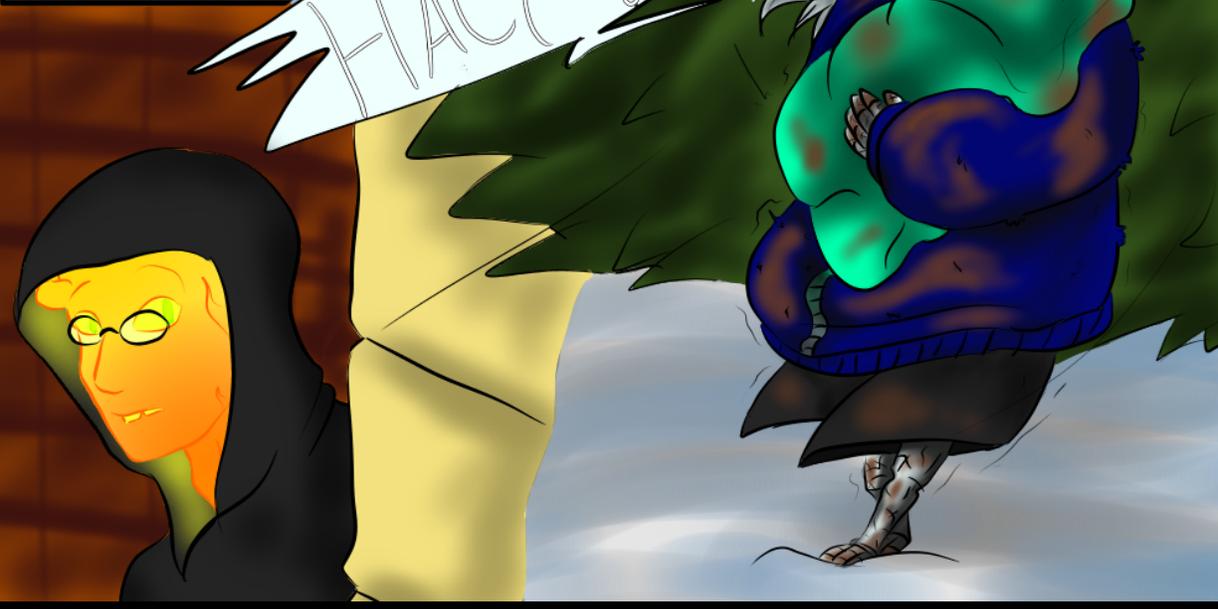
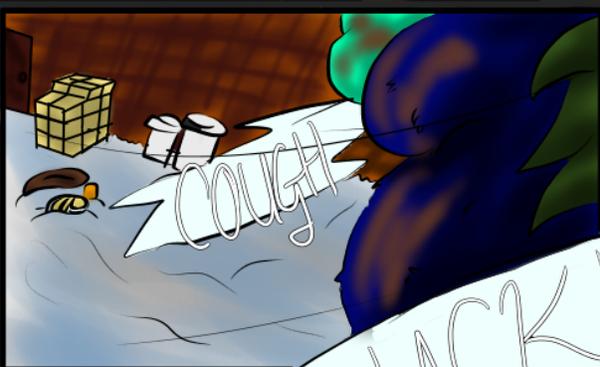
I couldn't always see them and I began 'forgetting' blankets that thankfully vanished.



A storm came not long after, bringing biting wind and fresh snow.

The children refused to come near so I left hot drinks and food out for them, and thicker blankets...

However...





He feeds his brother before himself, and it looks like he gave all the blankets to the younger one as well.





That explains the skeletal puppy sightings.

But to shapeshift so seamlessly at such an early age...

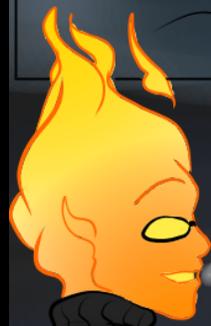
It's alright...

-Kneel-

I'm not going to hurt you or your brother.

-hff-

-whine-



I was worried...

RRRrrrggle!!

-Pant-

When you were eating only half a plate I thought perhaps, you disliked my cooking.

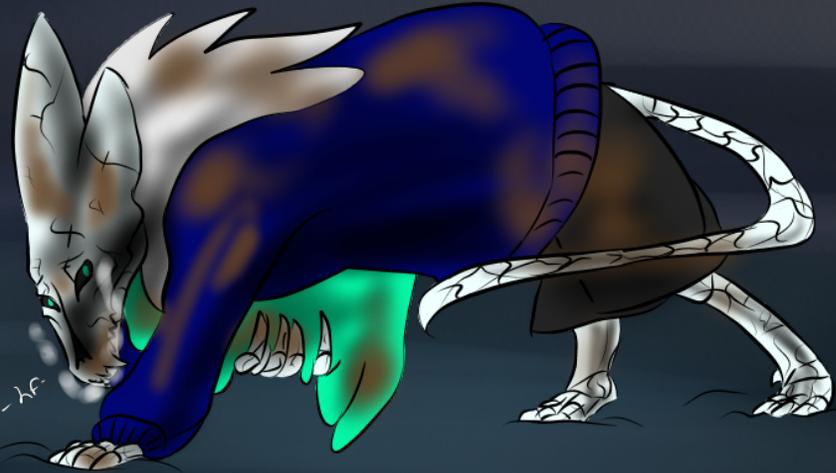
But I can see that you have obviously been too ill to eat much, am I right?



-whine-
-hff-
-huff-

Cough

You aren't well.



-hmm-

-hff-

-hff-

Why don't you and your brother come inside with me where it's warm?

I know... I know you've been very brave looking after your brother so well



-Hhnhngk-

I have a little Cousin
who I look after
occasionally.
It's hard work, isn't it?



-Whine-



You shouldn't have to do this all alone
If you like, I can help you both.

It's your choice.



-hf-

-hf-



You do not have to do anything you do not want to.



-hcrn-

-hf-

-hf-

-hgk-

-hf-

-hf-

-hngk-



-hf-

-hgk-

-hnn-

-hf-

-hf-

-hf-

-hnn-

-hgk-







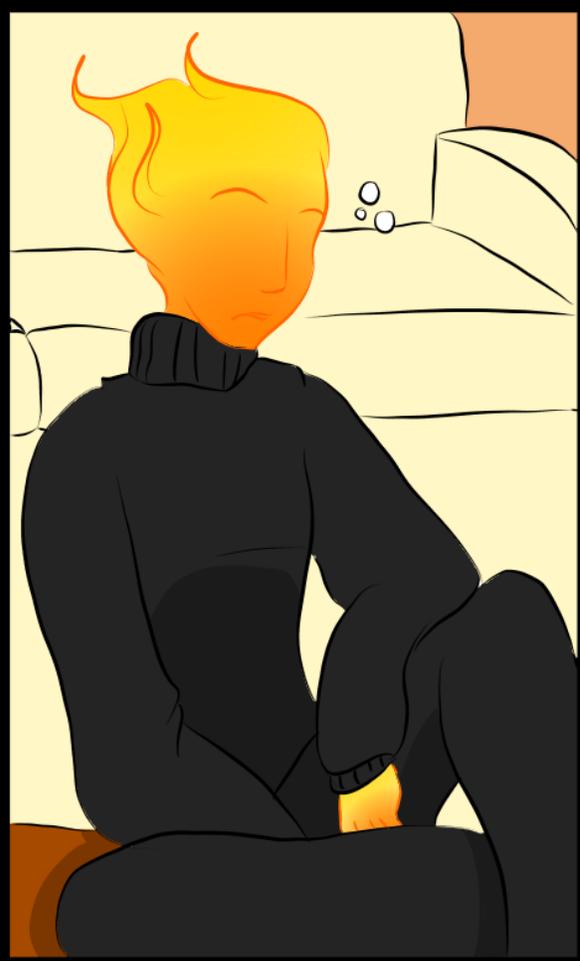
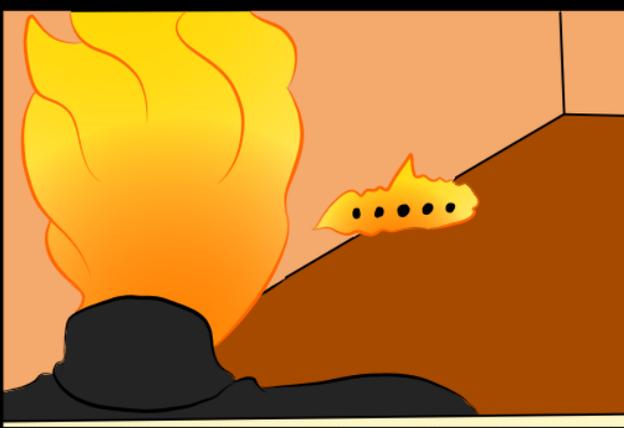
There's more to these children than meets the eye.

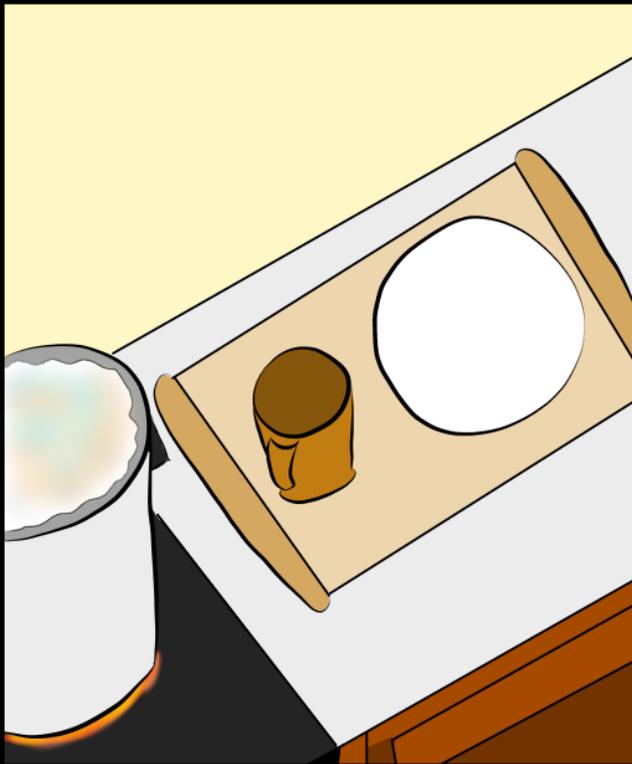


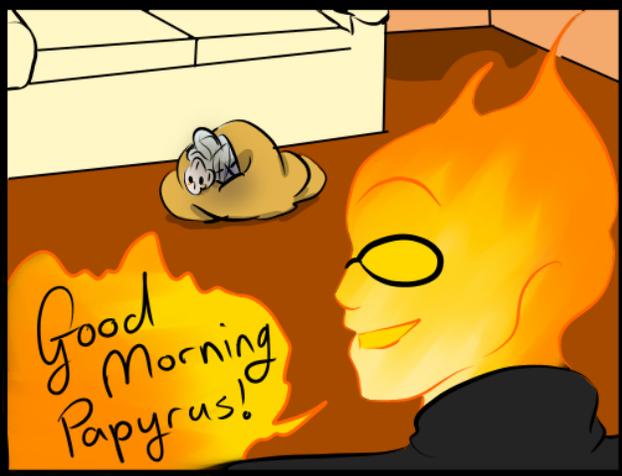
Trust



Chapter 2



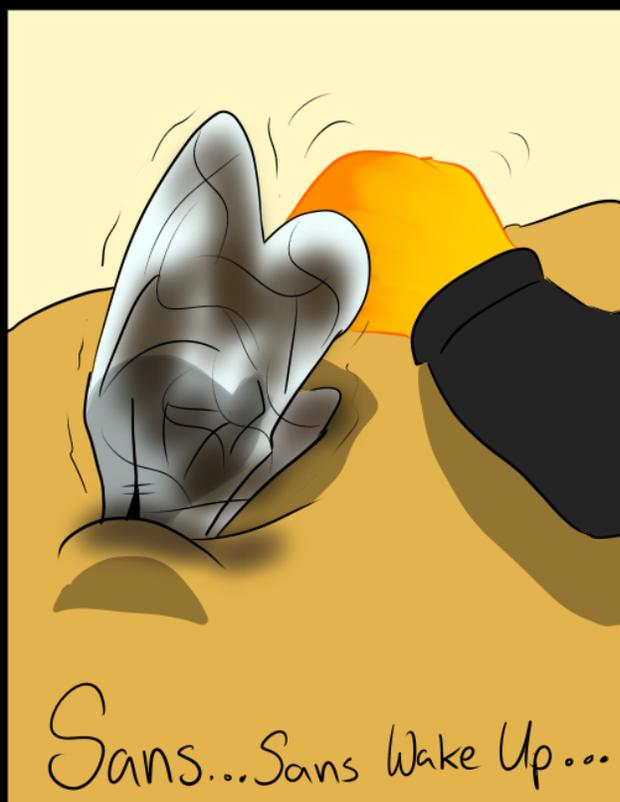
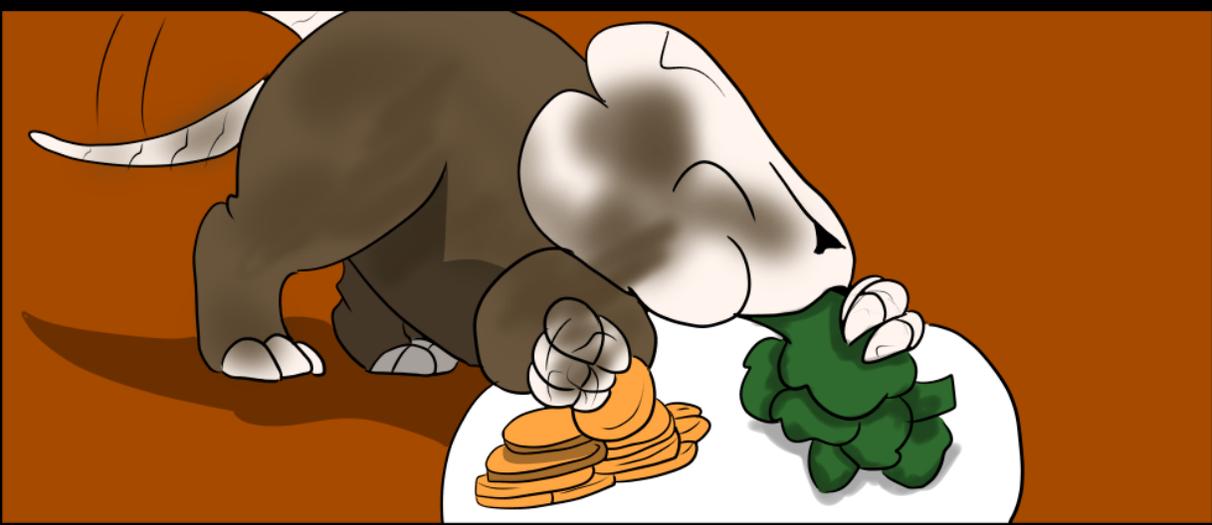






It's alright Sans, I am only seeing to you brother.









I have medicine that will help you feel better

Grr

Grrglrgghk!

...Come again?



blegh



Where's Papy?

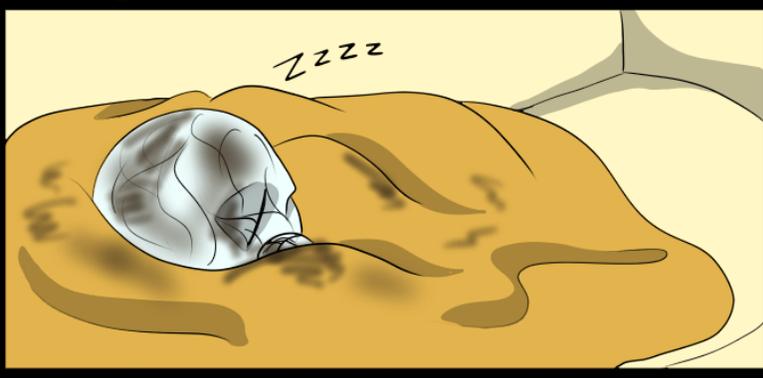


He is... enjoying his breakfast.



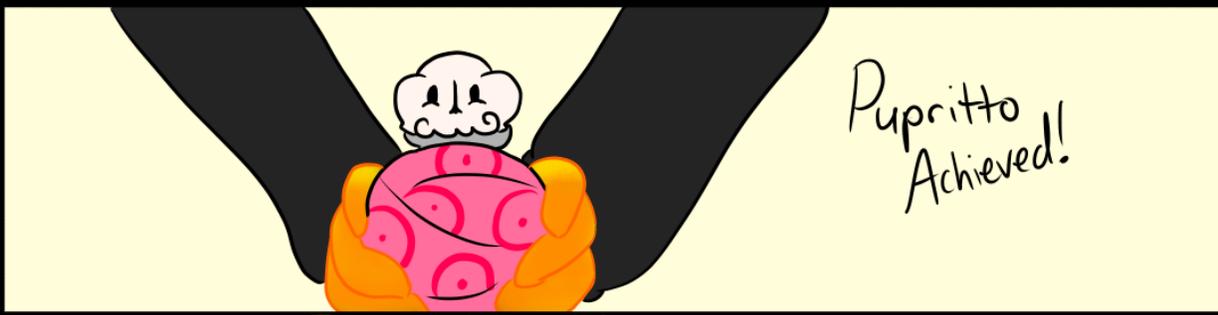
Here



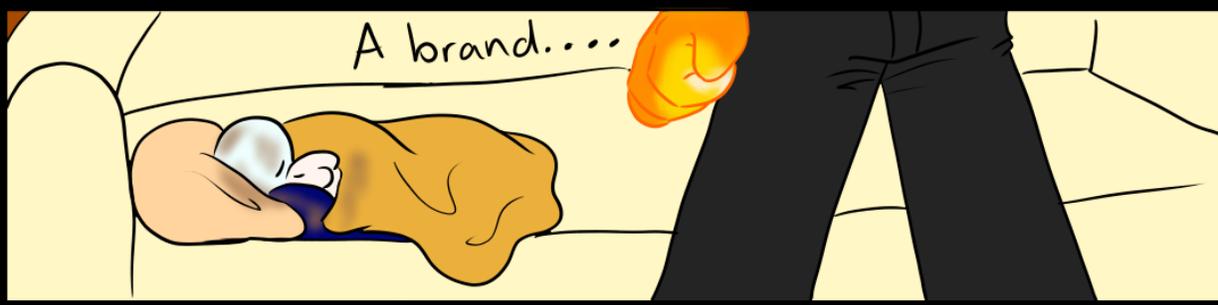
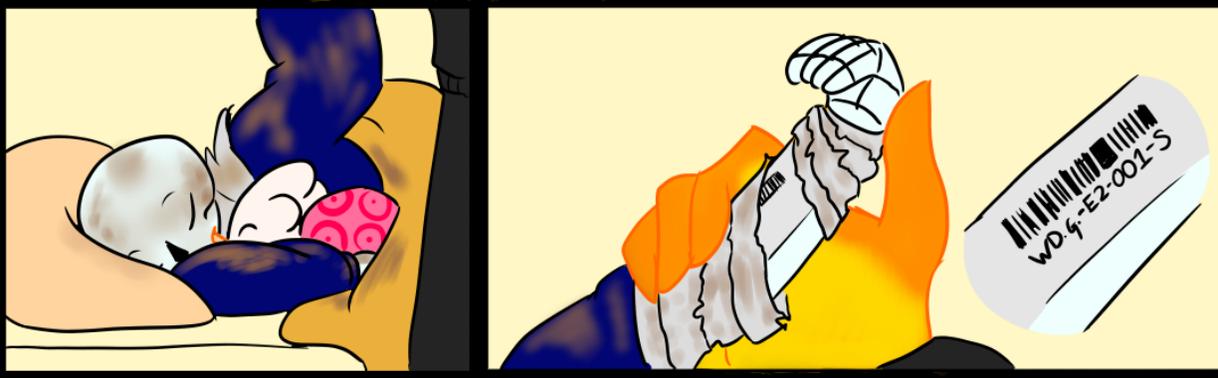




Some of this might fit Sans but... Well, It just has to last until I can go shopping.



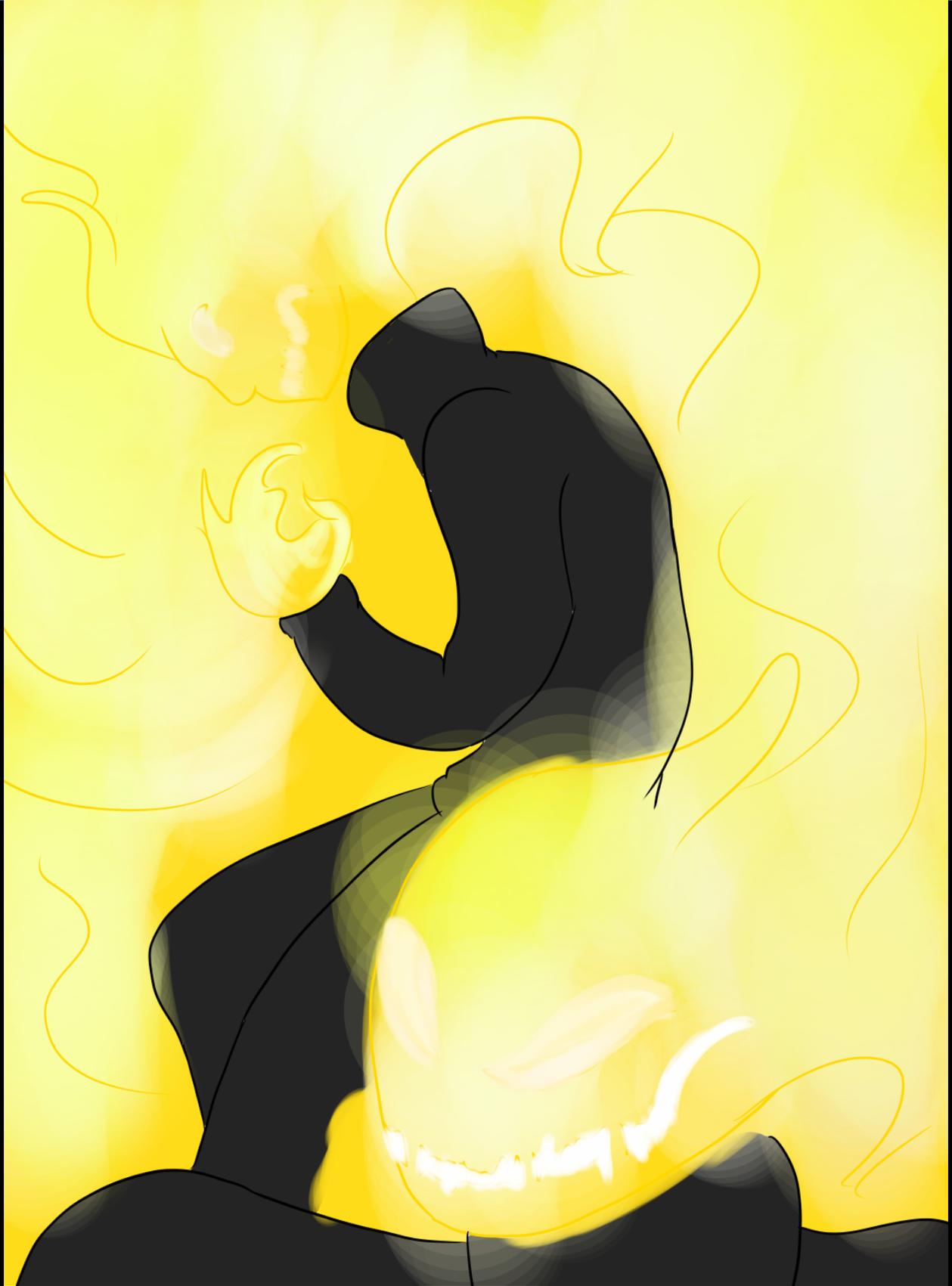
Pupritto
Achieved!



A brand....



Someone...







Continue the comic at trustandblasters.tumblr.com

Final thoughts

And so ends the first PDF in the 'TRUST' series. The sequel, '*The Best Revenge*' is currently being worked on. It's slow, but it's steady. I seriously cannot thank you all enough for your encouragement and feedback. Here's hoping that I will continue improving my writing so you guys can enjoy it!

I wrote his fic while undergoing a very long, and extensive treatment for depression and anxiety. I believe that writing was the tool I needed to focus when things got dark. Undertale itself helped me recover from some past pains and I owe Toby Fox a lot for that. In the end goodness will shine through the evil of the world.

If you guys want to keep up with me, you can find me in other places. You can also just chat with me if you like!

My tumblr is spacegate.tumblr.com

My website is spacecatstudios.net

My AO3 account is archiveofourown.org/users/KeetahSpacecat

My FF.NET account is fanfiction.net/u/8888009/KeetahSpacecat

The Babyblaster AU hub can be found at babyblasters.tumblr.com

There is a TRUST TV tropes page at tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Fanfic/TrustUndertale

You can follow any of those sites for updates and when the fic sequel eventually drops.

Thank you all so much.

-Keetah Spacecat



Despite everything, it's still you.

