

Storyshift Christmas Special: A Solstice Eve's Tale

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Chapter 1: Introduction

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It's been already a few weeks since the liberation of monsterkind and the monster folks from the Underground has settled into a small village near Mount Ebbot. The days are gradually getting colder, and Solstice Eve is getting closer. But what is Solstice Eve, you might ask.

"Solstice Eve is the eternal culmination of hope for our kind", Asriel patiently explained to a bunch of small human children who have gathered around him in a circle. "It's known as the festival of love and friendship. Solstice Eve is the very thing that keeps us alive year for year. On December the 24th every year, it's the time of the year where the sun rises again after it has reached its lowest point. Its sunrays give us the sufficient warmth for us to survive and thrive. Solstice Eve is the time of the year every monster looks forward. We will exchange gifts, have feasts, dance, sing and laugh together all in merry tenderness."

"Well...", a small human asked whispering, "isn't that just Christmas?"

"Christmas?", Asriel asked confusedly, "What is Christmas?"

"Christmas is basically the same thing as Solstice Eve but for humans", another human explained, "We also receive presents and have feasts! It's even on the same day."

"Well, that's interesting that you humans have the same holiday", Asriel laughed, "I didn't know that you celebrated that Christmas thing. Everything I knew from my childhood was Solstice Eve. Wait! When we're already talking about holidays, why don't I read you a little tale about our Solstice Eve? Maybe you might even like it!"

Asriel stood up and went over to a bookshelf. He looked through the books and picked up one, demonstrating it to the human children. It was a book with a shimmering, sparkling cover. The book wasn't too thick. It didn't have a picture onto its cover either. It was simply a book in purple colors and the golden letters etched onto it disclaiming "A Solstice Eve's Tale".

“This – little children – used to be my favorite Solstice Eve story when I was at your age”, Asriel said, “My parents used to read it to me each year. Now, it’s my turn to pass this tradition onto you. It’s a wonderful novel written by my favorite author Gerson. I don’t know whether you have heard of him, but I remember he wrote this story for children like us to give us hope each year on Solstice Eve. You know, our past has been tough, and Solstice Eve was that one day that gave us hope—”

Asriel suddenly went silent. Then, he sat down in front of the children and quickly opened the book. Patiently, he gazed at the group of the human children and gave them a tender smile. Each of them looked curious, craving for listening to the mysterious Solstice Eve’s tale. Just like Asriel has never heard of Christmas before, the humans didn’t know anything about Solstice Eve either.

“Are you ready to listen to the Solstice Eve’s tale?”, Asriel asked.

Each human head nodded. Then, Asriel began reading...

Once upon a time, everything in our land was filled with darkness and demise. Hope was nowhere to be seen. It seemed like the sun would never rise again. Once again, the humans have taken everything from us, casted us down here in eternity, far away from the sun, covered in darkness. It was dark, it was cold, and we were hungry. One fortunate day, a miracle happened. Something as bright as the sun burned above us and lightened up the entire Underground, giving us light, giving us the hope to live. Folks didn’t know what caused the miracle, but everyone was certain that the time when the miracle happened wasn’t a coincidence. It happened on December the 24th, on a merry holiday once called Solstice Eve. Solstice Eve, a holiday monster folks once celebrated, the day where the sun would rise again after reaching its deepest point. We believed that Solstice Eve came back home to save us from our misery. We believed that Solstice Eve wouldn’t leave us in the dark. Even in days where we couldn’t see the sun, Solstice Eve would never leave us in our hearts. From then on, Solstice Eve became part of every one of us. Every year, everyone would celebrate Solstice Eve at the fullest to remind us of our hope that is burning in our souls. Everyone...but a single monster. The name of that monster is simply Amsterdam. Asriel Amsterdam.

“Hey, that guy has the same name as you, Asriel!” “In our world, there’s a big city called Amsterdam! Isn’t that weird?” “I think I even know some singer called Amsterdam or something.”

The children excitedly interrupted Asriel, too excited to keep listening. “What will happen next?”, another human gleefully gasped.

“I was just about to go on about Amsterdam’s story if you didn’t interrupt me like that”, Asriel claimed. “Anyway, Amsterdam was a shady, grim man who despised everything the monsters around him adored. Especially Solstice Eve was a hard time for Amsterdam. That’s because... Amsterdam hated Solstice Eve.”

“Why did Amsterdam hate Solstice Eve?”, a human girl curiously asked.

“Well...”, Asriel began.

While Solstice Eve drew nearer, the world glowed in each color of the rainbow. Everyone dressed up colorfully and decorated their houses with pine twigs. Everyone was talking about Solstice Eve while baking gingerbread cookies and mince pies. Children were running around, throwing snowballs at each other, or having sleigh rides. Except of Amsterdam. The entire time, Amsterdam stayed at home,

not leaving his sacred working room, dressed entirely in black, dark eye bags under his eyes and a frown that makes people believe that he forgot how to smile.

Amsterdam peeked out of the tainted window of his room, seeing monster children running around and jokingly decorating the antlers of a reindeer. Suddenly, he heard somebody knocking at his door. Before Amsterdam would respond, the knocking person already let herself into his room. It was a monster lady older than Amsterdam. She wore glasses and a friendly smile upon her face, but what stuck on Amsterdam the most was her attire. It was as if she straight up dived into a green and red paint can and then accidentally tangled herself into Pinetree twigs. The monster didn't look much different than Amsterdam himself, except being older than him and being a female.

"My child, why don't you go outside for a little bit. This certainly would make you any happier", the monster said with a voice as sweet as caramel drops. Amsterdam annoyingly groaned and rolled his eyes. "Well, just look how happy everyone else is. Isn't that wonderful?", the monster continued after Amsterdam's obvious negative reaction. "Why going outside when those annoying monsters wouldn't shut up about Solstice Eve for just once in their lives", Amsterdam replied without looking at the other monster even once, "This whole Solstice Eve, it's getting on my nerves. What's the point of this stupid holiday anyway?" The female monster sadly shook her head and whispered, "I just wish you would see things like us, my child..." Without any further words, the woman left Amsterdam's room, leaving Amsterdam alone once again.

Amsterdam grimly stared at his wooden desk and clutched his hands together. "See things like us", this sentence stuck in Amsterdam's head. Amsterdam was upset. He couldn't see why everyone else was so excited about this pointless holiday while he himself seems like to be the only one who saw the truth behind everything: "Solstice Eve doesn't do anything. Year for year, we waited for Solstice Eve to liberate us. We hoped that one day, monsterkind would leave the Underground once and for all, but after all this time, nothing happened. Year for year, we were still kept stuck here. After every Solstice Eve, nothing changed, nothing happened. Once the holiday passed, nobody thought about the presumable hope anymore. Solstice Eve is a curse that creates false hope and the illusion of eternal freedom. I cannot wait until this stupid Solstice Eve holiday is finally over."

Amsterdam didn't realize that he just spoke his inner darkest thoughts loud, but he didn't care. Here in his room, nobody heard him anyways. Even if they did, they wouldn't care about him because nobody cares about Amsterdam. Seemingly everyone has forgotten about him. In the days before Solstice Eve, Amsterdam would feel more isolated than ever before. "I just don't see the point of celebrating in a holiday that keeps disappointing us year for year", Amsterdam mumbled, "I don't care. I'd better remain isolated instead of going out there and praising false hope." Amsterdam didn't do much and the days went faster and faster, until Solstice Eve was inevitable. The more Solstice Eve approached; the more nervous Amsterdam got. Until Amsterdam fell severely sick on the day before Solstice Eve, on December the 23rd.

Asriel stopped reading. He read so much that his voice got hoarse. He isn't used to reading such a wall of text in a short amount of time, but he wanted to tell the tale to the human children he was so fond of in his childhood days.

"What happened then?", a curious girl voice asked, staring at Asriel with big, sparkling eyes. "Did Amsterdam get better?", another voice asked, slightly worried, "I'm worried about him."

Asriel chuckled, "I see you at least care more about Amsterdam than the characters inside the story."

"Of course, we do!", a third voice exclaimed fiercely, "Being stuck underground away from the sun must really suck. If I was Amsterdam, I wouldn't be too happy about that either!"

"That's approximately the way we felt back then in the Underground", Asriel said and nodded, "But Solstice Eve was something that gave us hope every year. When I was your age, I felt pitiful with Amsterdam. I wished for him to celebrate Solstice Eve like everyone else, but there wasn't anything the reader could do more than following Amsterdam's story."

Asriel briefly lifted the book and was just about to keep reading when suddenly, the door got banged open and startled Asriel. It was Papyrus, already dressed up in a Solstice Eve kind of tone, holding a mug of hot chocolate in his other hand.

"OH, I SEE THAT YOU'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF SOMETHING. DEEP APOLOGIES FOR MY INTERRUPTION. I WAS JUST LOOKING FOR ASRIEL AND WELL, YOUR MOM TOLD ME THAT YOU WERE HERE TELLING THOSE HUMAN CHILDREN ABOUT SOLSTICE EVE", Papyrus exclaimed with his usually loud, eccentric voice.

"You got it right", Asriel nodded, "I was reading a story to the children. Well, it's my favorite Solstice Eve story, 'A Solstice Eve's Tale', and looks like the children enjoy it just as I did as a kid." "Yeah, I wanna know what happens next to Amsterdam!", a high-pitched child's voice interrupted Asriel.

"THAT'S SO GREAT BECAUSE I KNOW THIS STORY, TOO! IT WAS THE ONE TALE DAD WOULD ALWAYS READ TO ME AND SANS WHEN WE WERE LITTLE", Papyrus happily responded.

"Wow, really? So, you know the story too? That's kinda cool!", Asriel responded.

"ABSOLUTELY! BUT YOU KNOW WHAT'S EVEN COOLER?"

Papyrus peeked into the page Asriel was just on and realized that Asriel has already reached the end of the first chapter of the book. The title of the second chapter was sparkling onto the second page. Curiously, the kids leaned forward to peek into the novel as well, gazing at the beginning of the second chapter with curiosity and excitement. Slowly, Papyrus laid down his hot chocolate mug onto the small table next to Asriel to point at the second chapter of the novel.

"YOU SEE? THIS WAS MY FAVORITE CHAPTER AS A CHILD!! I WISHED THERE WOULD BE ANYONE I COULD READ THIS CHAPTER TO, BUT OF COURSE SANS ALWAYS IMMEDIATELY FELL ASLEEP AS SOON AS I STARTED READING... UNFORTUNATELY..." Papyrus claimed with an ounce of dread in his voice when thinking about Sans' usual attitude. But then, Papyrus' eyes suddenly glowed in excitement, "WAIT, I CAN READ THIS CHAPTER TO THESE HUMAN CHILDREN NOW, RIGHT ASRIEL? HOW ABOUT WHEN WE TELL THIS MERRY STORY TOGETHER?"

"That would be nice, Papyrus!", Asriel quickly agreed and handed the novel over to Papyrus, "My voice got hoarse after all the reading anyways, so it might be a good idea if you catch on from where

we stopped.” Without Papyrus looking, Asriel grabbed Papyrus’ mug and took a sip from it. He needed it for his voice to recover. Meanwhile, Papyrus was already indulged in the story. He took Asriel’s place and placed himself in front of the children. With risen index and the novel holding in the other hand, he loudly exclaimed: “WHO IS READY FOR CHAPTER TWO?”

Of course, all children were ready.

Chapter 2: Quiet stroll into the past

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“That’s it then, I guess”, Amsterdam mumbled, “That’s how my tale ends.” Barely being able to move, Amsterdam stared at the ceiling of his room while he was lying under the cozy blanket of his. More than anything else, Amsterdam wished someone would bring him some warm tea with honey to him, helping him recover his throat. But of course, nobody came. “All they care about is that stupid Solstice Eve”, whispered Amsterdam weakly, “Tomorrow and then, it’ll be over.” Amsterdam slowly shook his head in denial. Even though he didn’t know which illness he had caught, for him, it felt like as if his body was at the edge of bursting apart. “No, this can’t be!”, Amsterdam panicked, “I...I can’t be dying, r-right? This illness I got, it isn’t terminal, right?” Nobody replied to Amsterdam. Of course. After all, it was just him in his room. It was just Amsterdam and his agony. It was already dark outside, but Amsterdam knew sunlight was merely an illusion in the Underground. “There is no real sunlight down here”, Amsterdam said to himself before closing his eyes and pulling the blanket closer to him. Then, he fell asleep.

As Amsterdam woke up again, he realized that he must have been sleeping for a few hours. Tiredly, he shook his head and gazed at the grandfather’s clock onto the wall. His eyes then wandered to his window. Outside, it was very quiet. Everyone must have already returned inside, sleeping, and waiting for the holiday to arrive. “Good”, said Amsterdam, “At least they’re not annoying anyone right now”. While Amsterdam spoke out his thoughts once again, he felt a stroke of agony rushing through his entire body and shivered. It was that feeling again. The feeling of splitting apart. Amsterdam clashed his teeth together, hoping not to die tonight. Luckily, the pain ceased, but there was something else that drew his attention to. With big, open eyes, Amsterdam stared at his room door. The door seems to slowly open by itself, emitting a strange, white light so bright that it hurts Amsterdam’s eyes.

“H-Hey!”, Amsterdam furiously exclaimed and rushed off from his bed, “I’m s-sleeping right now! How dare you to enter my r-room, right now?” The creature behind the door didn’t respond. It straightforwardly stepped towards Amsterdam’s bed, gazing at him with big, empty eyes and an eerie, wide smile in his face. Amsterdam did his best to hide the fear in his voice. He screamed, “W-what do you think you are doing?” The ominous creature stopped right in front of Amsterdam. He patiently reached out a hand at him. Amsterdam stared at the unsettling creature with irritation. He didn’t recognize him from anywhere. Quietly, he whispered, “Who are you?”

“I’M SO GLAD YOU ASKED, DEAR AMSTERDAM! I AM THE SPIRIT OF SOLSTICE EVE’S DREARY PAST BUT YOU CAN JUST CALL ME SPIRIT IF THAT’S EASIER FOR YOU!”, the creature responded with such a joyful voice that surprised Amsterdam. Its energetic self-presentation didn’t suit his eerie, unsettling appearance at all. The Spirit of Solstice Eve’s dreary past looked as pale as a ghost. His face glowed as

white as the moon and his empty eyes as black as the night seem to gaze right into Amsterdam's soul. The big, white teeth inside his permanently wide smile seem to dazzle Amsterdam's eyes. "OF COURSE, I ALREADY KNOW WHO YOU ARE, NYEH HEH HEH!! NO NEED TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF TO ME, ASRIEL!"

Amsterdam briefly shivered when the Spirit mentioned his name. From where did the Spirit of Solstice Eve's dreary past know him? And most importantly, why did he intrude into his room in the middle of the night? Unable to say anything, Amsterdam remained silent. The Spirit went on as usual, "YES, YOU ARE ASRIEL AMSTERDAM! OR SHOULD I RATHER SAY: THE ONLY MONSTER IN THE ENTIRE UNDERGROUND WHO DOESN'T ENJOY THIS MERRY HOLIDAY LIKE EVERYONE ELSE."

"Um...Papyrus", Asriel interrupted Papyrus' storytelling, "I'm pretty sure this wasn't exactly what the Spirit of Solstice Eve's dreary past said."

"NYEH HEH HEH, I KNOW. I JUST THOUGHT I'D ADJUST SOME OF THE DIALOGUE TO MAKE THE SPIRIT OF SOLSTICE EVE'S DREARY PAST APPEAR MORE... HOW DO I SAY, SPICY!", Papyrus replied in glee. "I'M SURE THE CHILDREN WILL LIKE IT!"

"Hm... if you say so, Papyrus", Asriel admitted with a smile. Secretly, he took another sip from Papyrus' hot chocolate when Papyrus wasn't looking. "Anyways, you're the only monster who would say the phrase 'Nyah heh heh' on a daily basis, but I guess it's fine if the Spirit of Solstice Eve's dreary past also keeps this habit. Wait... This makes me think: Why don't we do this storytelling thing together?" Papyrus nodded in approval.

Asriel seated himself next to Papyrus so that he could also peak into the novel. "Yeah, that's so awesome!!", an excited child's voice exclaimed happily, "Now Asriel and Papyrus are BOTH telling us the story of Solstice Eve! Isn't this cool?" "It's called 'A Solstice Eve's tale'", a second voice screamed, "But anyways, it's so cool!" "I can't wait how it's going on!", a third voice said. The excitement of the children got Asriel and Papyrus laughing.

"Well, guess it wasn't such a bad idea of doing the storytelling together according to the reactions of the kids", Asriel chuckled. Papyrus just nodded and said with a smirk onto his face, "I'M SURE THE CHILDREN WOULD EVEN ENJOY THE STORY MORE IF WE IMPROVE A LITTLE BIT MORE. HOW ABOUT THAT?"

Asriel hesitated, but eventually agreed with Papyrus, "We can try it after all." By saying that, Asriel peeked into the novel Papyrus was holding in his hands and continued reading.

Amsterdam's eyebrows tightened as the Spirit mentioned his disgust towards Solstice Eve. "What are you doing here?", Amsterdam furiously asked, "I don't want anything to do with that stupid Solstice Eve! People like you should learn to leave other people alone with your weird stuff! Now go! Go!"

The Spirit of Solstice Eve's dreary past shrugged. "THAT'S EXACTLY THE ISSUE I WAS TRYING TO TALK ABOUT IF YOU DIDN'T INTERRUPT ME LIKE THAT!"

"The only issue here is YOU. Now go!", Amsterdam hissed.

"WELL, THAT'S NOT A VERY NICE THING TO SAY TO AN OLD SPIRIT LIKE ME", the Spirit replied. It even seemed like he was slightly chuckling, "BESIDES, I DIDN'T WALK SUCH A LONG WAY ONLY TO TURN BACK JUST BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT READY TO FACE YOUR DEMONS TODAY:"

"Which demons?", Amsterdam asked irritated, with slight disgust in his voice.

"YOUR DEMONS OF THE PAST, OF COURSE", the Spirit said.

Amsterdam has jumped out of his bed by now. Fiercely, he threw his soft blanket away and tried to push the Spirit to the way out of his room with force. The Spirit didn't resist, however. "Out! Now!", Amsterdam shouted, "No talking about Solstice Eve today, you Spirit of Solstice Eve's dreary past!" Suddenly, Amsterdam crouched onto the floor. The pain of his illness has flooded his body once again. With angry eyes, Amsterdam glared at the Spirit. "It's all your fault, you see?", Amsterdam exclaimed with full force in his voice while still crouching on the floor, "You see, I'm very sick today, so leave me alone!"

"NOT BEFORE WE HAVE UNCOVERED THE PAST", the Spirit protested and helped Amsterdam back onto his feet again. When Amsterdam was up again, the pain disappeared as sudden as it has appeared. "YOU MUST KNOW. MOST OF YOUR BODY'S PAIN COMES FROM YOUR SOUL. A WEAK SOUL MOSTLY EQUALS A WEAKER BODY. AFTER ALL THE PAIN YOU MUST HAVE ENDURED IN YOUR PAST, YOUR SOUL IS DAMAGED, AND THE ONLY WAY TO HEAL IS TO UNVEIL THE PAST:"

"Hmpf! You just made that up", Amsterdam said in disbelief and another streak of pain shocked his body. "Besides, how will you do that? Sitting next to other and talking about feelings or what? Don't say you want to give me therapy."

"YOU WILL SEE, DEAR ASRIEL", the Spirit replied patiently and reached out a hand at Amsterdam, "TAKE MY HAND:"

"You better make that work", Amsterdam grimly groaned and reluctantly laid his own hand into the Spirit's hand, squinting at the Spirit skeptically. Before he knew what was going on, he was suddenly jeeted into the air and screamed the air out of his lungs. Frantically, Amsterdam clutched both of his hands onto the Spirit's hand and looked down at his feet in fear. He must have banged straight through the ceiling of his room and was probably over 10 feet over the ground. Nevertheless, Amsterdam couldn't see the slightest leak in the roof and didn't feel any pain either that would normally come from the pain. Skeptically, Amsterdam glanced at the Spirit.

"Are we going to the s-surface?", Amsterdam asked as they were flying higher and higher. The world below them kept shrinking. At this point, Amsterdam realized how small the Underground was. He clung tighter on the Spirit, not wanting to fall.

The Spirit laughed lighthearted and said, "NO, SILLY! WE'RE HAVING A TRIP TO THE PAST! DON'T WORRY THOUGH. THIS IS JUST A QUIET STROLL"

"A quiet stroll, seriously?", Amsterdam shouted, still looking at the world below him. The Spirit didn't reply, and Amsterdam realized that his feet have found back to the ground again. The white, sparkling snow under him felt freezing cold onto his body. Confusedly, he stood up, the Spirit standing next to him. "NYEHHEHHEH!", the Spirit chuckled, "TOLD YOU IT WAS JUST A QUIET STROLL, BUT OUR JOURNEY HAS ONLY BEGUN! LOOK WHERE WE ARE NOW."

Amsterdam did what the Spirit said and looked at the world in front of him. It looked like the Underground he always knew. People were buzzing and hassling through the streets, looking distressed and excited at the same time. The monsters around him made small talk as they decorated their houses with colorful streamers and all sort of pine twigs. Amsterdam noticed most of them were talking about Solstice Eve. Some children were playing happily in the snow, building snowmen, and throwing snow at each other. The snowfall was more intense than usually but aside from that, there wasn't anything unusual. Annoyed, Amsterdam shook the fallen snow from his fur.

"What are we doing here? It's just the Underground... on Solstice Eve", Amsterdam dreadfully exclaimed, pointing at the playing children. Suddenly, a small child ran straight through him as if Amsterdam wasn't anything but thin air. Shocked, Amsterdam backed away. At this point he realized the child who just ran through him wasn't just any child. The child looked exactly like Amsterdam, but many years younger than him. "Wait, was that me?"

"WELCOME TO THE PAST!", the Spirit next to him exclaimed. He joyfully pointed at the group of children while the young Amsterdam happily joined their play. "WELCOME TO YOUR PAST", the Spirit corrected himself. Amsterdam didn't reply. His eyes were glued onto the small version of him who was playing in the snow alongside with the other monsters. Playfully, they pushed each other into the soft, cold snow which warmed up a little bit after the children fell onto it. High-pitched laughter filled the air. Mini-Amsterdam seemed happy. "AWWWWWW!! YOU WERE SO CUTE AS A CHILD!!", the Spirit suddenly squealed excited, "ALSO SO TENDER AND PLAYFUL! I WONDER WHAT HAS CAUSED YOU TO BECOME THIS KIND OF PERSON YOU ARE NOW." Amsterdam squinted to him and asked, "What are we supposed to do here now?"

"YOU SEE, ASRIEL? EVERYONE CAN DO WHAT THEY WANT, IT'S JUST UP TO YOUR OWN DECISION TO WHOM YOU'RE SHARING YOUR KINDNESS TO", the Spirit replied, "YOU MUST MAKE SURE YOU'RE MAKING THE RIGHT DECISION. LISTEN TO YOUR SOUL AND IT'LL EXACTLY TELL YOU WHAT TO DO."

“Alright, I’m done. We’re going home now”, Amsterdam bluntly said. He turned his back to the children and was just about to leave, when he almost ran into an older lady. Amsterdam backed aside until he remembered again that he wasn’t an entity in this point of time. At least that’s what it seemed like. The lady stepped right through Amsterdam to the group of children. “Um...how am I supposed to return home, now?”, Amsterdam confusedly asked the Spirit, but the Spirit only turned his head and warmly smiled at Amsterdam. “Ugh, don’t tell me that I am stuck here!”, Amsterdam exclaimed.

Overjoyed by the arrival of the older lady, small Amsterdam jumped into her arms as she gave him a big, warm embrace. “Mama!!”, the child joyfully exclaimed. “Mama...”, Amsterdam echoed quietly. The mother took her child onto her hand while he waved back at his friends the last time. Amsterdam’s eyes silently followed his past self. He tried to hold his tears back when suddenly, the Spirit roughly pushed him aside and calmly told him, “COME, LET’S FOLLOW THEM!” Before Amsterdam could possibly resist, the Spirit already took his hand and lifted off the ground. The next moment Amsterdam could realize, he found himself into a neat, tidy bedroom. The walls were covered with warm colors. Amsterdam could see it was already evening. In the dim, warm light of the table lamp, Amsterdam’s past version was sitting tranquilly onto his bed, his mother next to him. Then, the door opened, and another figure stepped into the room, smiling warmly.

“Ma... Dad”, Amsterdam whispered. He turned to the Spirit, who didn’t seem to say anything, “My parents...” The Spirit patiently nodded and pointed at the scene. The father has sat down onto the other side of the child and gave him a warm hug. The parents seem to talk with young Amsterdam, but neither Amsterdam nor the Spirit seem to understand the words they’re saying.

The Spirit nervously scratched his forehead and mumbled, eyes glued onto the happy family, “SEEMS LIKE YOUR CONSCIOUS MIND HAS BEEN SUPPRESSING THIS MEMORY THE ENTIRE TIME BECAUSE I CANNOT UNDERSTAND A WORD THEY’RE SAYING.”

Amsterdam lowered his head and just mumbled a weary, “Yeah.” “HM... THAT’S QUITE INCONVENIENT FOR SOMEBODY LIKE YOU. I’VE SEEN COUNTLESS MINDS AND MET VARIOUS KINDS OF SOULS BUT A COMPLEX MIND LIKE YOURS IS QUITE SELDOM!”, the Spirit went on. Amsterdam nodded. He pointed at his family.

“Look, this was on Solstice Eve. It was the day where my parents...”, Amsterdam suddenly stopped, “My parents were warriors. They promised to me that this night will be different. We didn’t celebrate because that year, my parents promised to free monsterkind...”

The moment Amsterdam spoke out these words, voices suddenly filled the room. “Are you sure you’re gonna make it?”, Amsterdam heard his past self’s squeaky voice cautiously ask. “Of course, honey. After all, today is Solstice Eve”, a softer voice replied. The mother bowed forward and gave small Amsterdam a gentle kiss on his forehead, “Solstice Eve gives us the strength to fulfill all our hopes and dreams. Solstice Eve is the eternal culmination of hope for our kind. It keeps us alive every year.” “But this year”, the father intervened and petted small Amsterdam’s head, “It’s time for us to be more alive than ever before. Aren’t you happy? Aren’t you excited? You’re going to be free.” “I’m gonna be free”, the child whispered with a wide, innocent smile on his face.

“I thought my parents would be heroes this night”, Amsterdam mumbled, looking at his younger self tightly hugging both his parents, “I had the hope burning inside me that my parents would free the

entire underground. Spirit, you must know, a human was fallen in the Underground not long ago. My parents planned to use their soul to cross the barrier together, collect more human souls and shatter the barrier. I didn't know how they will do this though. I just believed they would succeed."

"HOW DID THEY CROSS THE BARRIER AND FREE MONSTERKIND THOUGH IF I MIGHT ASK? DO YOU REMEMBER ANY OF THIS?", the Spirit curiously asked. Amsterdam shook his head, "I...don't remember." "THAT'S ALRIGHT!", the Spirit said, "LET'S HAVE TO LOOK TOGETHER!" "Spirit, I don't know", Amsterdam hesitated. But it was already too late. The Spirit fiercely took Amsterdam's hand and dashed into the sky.

The next moment, blinding yellow light as bright as the sun covered the entire sky. Blazes and flames rained down from up above, lightening up the sky in red, orange, and yellow hues, making the night seem as bright as the day. Firework was everywhere to be seen and explosions couldn't be overheard. The light brightened up the Underground. Amsterdam could hear the folks under him screaming and cheering, claiming that finally, the sun has risen again. It was at this moment when Amsterdam realized that he was on the surface. He gazed upon the magically purple sky and wished he didn't. When he raised his glance, he saw his parents burst into dust, their pain distorted faces stuck in his memory, jaws opened, arms reached out, screaming for help, but Amsterdam couldn't hear their silent screams. Just as this, his parents exploded into dust, without any trace left of them. Everything Amsterdam could further hear were the explosions of the weapons surrounding him.

Amsterdam turned around and noticed the human surrounding him, screams of war. Then, the scenery shifted. The small child from before stood there, his small fragile body hidden behind a huge rock, hands hold in front of his chest, staring at the orange and red firework in the sky with widened eyes. "The beasts have fallen!", screams from in front rang into Asriel's ears. Asriel couldn't pull his eyes off the scenario, although he knew how much it must have hurt him. "Mama...", Asriel whispered, tears running down his round face, "Papa..." Amsterdam quickly rushed to his smaller self, trying to embrace him, but his arms slipped right through Asriel's body as if he was merely a ghost. A vision which wasn't even real. "You promised me that we're gonna be free", the poor child whispered, wiping off his years with the sleeve of his sweater.

"Spirit, there must be a way to help him", Amsterdam hoarsely exclaimed, fiercely pulling at the Spirit's right arm. The Spirit stared at Amsterdam with weary, blank eyes. He shook his head, "THERE'S NO WAY TO REWRITE OR RESET WHAT WAS ALREADY SET IN STONE IN THE PAST." "There MUST be a way!", Amsterdam yelled furiously, "YOU are the Spirit of Solstice Eve's dreary past! There must be something you can do!"

"I AM VERY SORRY, ASRIEL, BUT MY HANDS ARE TIED", the Spirit shrugged, remaining calm, "I WOULD LIKE TO HELP YOU WITH EVERYTHING THAT RESONATES IN MY SOUL. I SEE YOUR PAST IS SCARRED AND YOUR MEMORIES ARE BLURRED. ON THE OTHER HAND, YOU MUST KNOW IT'S THE EVENTS OF THE PAST THAT SHAPE YOU THE WAY YOU ARE NOW. REWRITING THE PAST WOULD LEAVE THE PRESENT UNDETERMINED."

"Stop with this nonsense!", Amsterdam yelled, but suddenly went silent again. Slowly, he nodded, still gazing at the miniature version of him, frozen in place, unable to cope with the trauma. Dreadfully, he

gazed at the Spirit and then whispered, "It's not nonsense. The past...it can't be undone. It will be like this...forever..."

The Spirit gazed at Amsterdam, dreadfully. He mumbled, passion audible in his sudden soft tone, "*I UNDERSTAND YOUR GRIEF, I UNDERSTAND THE PAIN YOU MUST BEEN THROUGH...*" The Spirit tried reaching out at Amsterdam, trying to embrace him. Appalled of the Spirit's act, Amsterdam aggressively backed off, tears running down his face. While backing off, Amsterdam wiped his tears away, viciously staring at the Spirit. He opened his mouth and wanted to say something but didn't know what to say. All he could say was, "Back off, Spirit! B-back off!"

Before Amsterdam could possibly identify his confused emotions, sounds as loud as rushing water filled the air, almost deafening his ears. Amsterdam gazed around. The winds began moving around him and the Spirit, faster and faster, like a hurricane. All colors, all shapes merged into a single brown mass, something unidentifiable, something unsettling. Amsterdam lost the ground below his feet. He realized that his past self has perished. Voices filled the atmosphere, but Amsterdam didn't understand any of those voices. It was too loud. It was too much. His gaze wandered to the Spirit, who seems to look unsettled yet calm.

The Spirit reached out, taking his hands, looking him directly into his eyes. Defensively, Amsterdam slapped the Spirit's hands away and struggled free. Fearful, he asked, "W-What's happening right now?" "*THOSE ARE A LOT OF HEAVY EMOTIONS WHICH YOU ARE EXPERIENCING RIGHT NOW, LITTLE ASRIEL*", the Spirit calmly explained, "*IT'S TOO MUCH FOR YOUR MIND TO COPE WITH. YOU MUST RELAX. YOU MUST LET IT ALL GO.*" "Relax? Let it go? Are you kidding me?", Amsterdam furiously shouted. As he did, the hurricane became wilder, threatening to tear Amsterdam and the Spirit apart. "After all, it's YOU who brought us two into this perfidious situation! I already lost my parents; I too do not want to die today!" "*YOU'RE NOT GOING TO DIE*", the Spirit defended, being fiercer than before, "*LISTEN TO ME. LET GO OF EVERYTHING. EMBRACE YOUR FEELINGS!*" "No!!" "*YOU...LISTEN...*"

The Spirit struggled of finding the right words, "*WE'RE ALMOST AT THE END, YOU KNOW? TRUST ME. IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY.*" "You know WHAT?", Amsterdam snapped, "It's NOT going to be okay!" The hurricane around them roared louder. "Nothing is going to be okay!" The walls surrounding them grew higher, pushing them further and further into the sky. "Nothing was okay in the first place, and nothing will ever be okay, don't you understand?", Amsterdam yelled over all the yet unbearable roaring of the storm, "You are supposed to understand me! Are you NOT the Spirit of the dreary PAST? You said it yourself! The past cannot be undone, it's all LOST! Listen..." Amsterdam hesitated. As he looked at the ground, he suddenly spotted the small, fearful version of himself. He shivered. "Listen", Amsterdam hoarsely said, "I don't care whether I'm dying today, after everything that is I-LOST!"

The Spirit's eyes widened out of shock for a second. "*DON'T SAY THOSE KIND OF THINGS*", he begged, "*PLEASE...I KNOW YOU ARE STRONG. YOU CAME SO FAR...DEEP IN MY SOUL, I KNOW YOU'RE STRONG ENOUGH TO LET IT ALL GO!*"

"I already said, I don't CARE!", Amsterdam shouted, "I once cared, I once thought Solstice Eve is going to save us, but Solstice Eve failed us all! My parents failed me! The human soul failed me! YOU failed me!" The hurricane became louder. Then, there was a crack! Amsterdam said something else but couldn't hear his own voice in midst of the noise. He knew the Spirit was replying to him, but he couldn't clearly hear his words either, or did he care. Instead, Amsterdam heard different voices. Voices of a choir. Singing,

Oh, my lord, it's Solstice Eve

The lights, the colors, it's the miracle of Solstice Eve

Solstice Eve, the holiday that would never leave us alone

The lights as bright as the sun, the colors as warm as the fire

It's a sign for us to keep doing

It's a sign heaven sent us to stay determined

It must be Solstice Eve

It must be the miracle of Solstice Eve

Soon, we will be freed

Soon, Solstice Eve would be our savior

Oh! The sun has finally risen again

Risen after many days of darkness and gloom

It is our time to cherish this sacred holiday forever

Amsterdam shut closed his eyes, crouched together and violently pressed his hands onto his ears. But no matter what he does, the voices just get louder and louder, infiltrating every cell of his mind.

CHERISH THIS HOLIDAY FOREVER

CHERISH THIS HOLIDAY FOREVER

CHERISH THIS HOLIDAY FOREVER

"NOO!!", Amsterdam exclaimed, "This is not true! Spirit, you know this! Spirit, STOP THIS!!"

Amsterdam frantically looked around, but the Spirit was nowhere to be seen. It's just him in the storm now. Him, surrounded by the voices. Surrounded by the merry floating faces of various kinds of monsters. Singing his ears deaf. Suddenly, it all went quiet. Amsterdam fearfully took his hands off his ears and opened his eyes again. He found himself lying on the floor of his quiet, familiar room. No single trace of the Spirit of Solstice Eve's dreary past seen or found anywhere. There was no trace of the hurricane, the cursing faces of the singing voices either. Was all this just a dream? Amsterdam confusedly rubbed his eyes.

“Spirit?”, he hesitantly yelled into the room. But there was no response. Amsterdam slowly stood up and immediately felt a streak of pain strike his body again. Oh right! He remembered. It was that sickness which was plaguing him the entire time. However, Amsterdam noticed that in the time he spent with the Spirit in the past, he hadn’t felt a single strike of pain at all. That was strange. At least, he knew that he’s back in reality again.

“AHEM...I THINK THAT’S THE END OF THIS CHAPTER!”, Papyrus exclaimed cheerfully, holding the novel into the air like a trophy, “IT WAS VERY FUN TO TELL THIS TALE WITH YOU, ASRIEL! ESPECIALLY SINCE WE ADJUSTED QUITE A FEW THINGS, NYEHEHEHEHEH!!”

“Adjusted only a few things?”, Asriel skeptically exclaimed, “We basically rewrote the entire chapter! And I think we exaggerated quite a lot with the acting.”

Only now have Asriel and Papyrus realized that they’ve been pacing up and down the entire time they were telling the story. Apparently, most human children have grown more tired during the day, rubbing their eyes and yawning. Nevertheless, it’s clear that they enjoyed the storytelling. Asriel jumped up and took the novel from Papyrus’ hand, opening the novel at the page they stopped reading from.

“I mean, look! We skipped this entire part. And I think we dismissed this part of the dialogue as well”, Asriel said.

“OH, THAT DIALOGUE WAS BORING ANYWAYS!”, Papyrus replied with glee, “REMEMBER? WE WANTED TO KEEP EVERYTHING EXCITING FOR THE KIDS, RIGHT CHILDREN?”

“That was so cool!!”, a girl yelled excited, jumping up and down. “Yes, you two did fantastically!”, a boy exclaimed, wildly flapping with his hands. “It was so awesome!! I love it!”, another girl shouted, clapping her hands together, “Especially that Spirit of the unready past or something! He has a great personality and I like his goof!” “No way! Amsterdam was way better!”, the hand flapping boy from before protested. “It doesn’t matter who was better!”, the girl said.

Soon, a whole discussion about which character had more sympathetic depth has sparked across the crowd. Sweet, excited children voices filled the air, trying to prove their point yet showing no resentment towards each other. They were treating each other with the warmth that Asriel would’ve just wished for Solstice Eve.

“I think we did everything just fine”, Asriel chuckled, clinging the novel onto his chest, “To be honest, I also like your version of the Spirit of Solstice Eve’s dreary past better than the version in the original. You did a great job, Papyrus! Besides, look...” Asriel pointed at the chattering crowd of children, “They cannot even agree about who of us did better!”

“NYEHEHEHEH, THAT’S TRUE!”, Papyrus laughed, “MEANING THAT I CLEARLY WAS THE BETTER STORYTELLER!”

“Hey!”, Asriel growled amusedly. “JUST KIDDING, NYEHEHEH!”, Papyrus smirked and playfully petted Asriel’s head. Asriel joyfully joined Papyrus’ laughter, “You know, I’d be pretty upset if you took all the credit for yourself.”

“SAME!”, Papyrus exclaimed, “LOOKS LIKE YOU’RE JUST LIKE ME WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, SOMETHING LIKE A MINI-PAPYRUS RIGHT?” Papyrus pulled Asriel closer to himself and gave him a big, tight cuddle. Asriel contently replied to the cuddle and snuggled his face onto Papyrus’ shoulder. “Or maybe you’re an older version of me”, Asriel replied with a smile in his face, holding tight on Papyrus.

Suddenly, the door got banged open and Papyrus reflexively let go of Asriel. Another voice coming from the door asked skeptically, “What’s all that noise that seems to come from here?”

Chapter 3: Now, Look!

← [To the beginning](#)

“I know the days before Solstice Eve have already been busier than usually-”, the voice lamented and entered the room, revealing the person behind the voice. Chara halted when they entered the room and spotted Asriel and Papyrus in front of the children crowd. Glaring at the present people in the room, they asked confusedly, “Papyrus, Asriel, what are you two doing here?”

“Oh, we’re just telling a merry tale to these children”, Asriel explained, showing Chara the novel, “It’s called ‘A Solstice Eve’s tale’ and Papyrus, and I already finished the first two chapters. Do you know this story?”

Chara shrugged and nodded her head. In a playful tone, they stated, “Sadly, I don’t know any stories revolving Solstice Eve. Culture shock you must know.”

“What?”, Asriel exclaimed in disbelief, “Papyrus didn’t read this story to you not even once?” Papyrus nervously looked away. In a slightly embarrassed tone, he stated, “WELL IT LOOKS LIKE SANS AND I EVENTUALLY LOST TOUCH WITH THAT STORY AND WE DIDN’T FIND MUCH TIME EITHER TO DO ANY STORYTELLING FOR CHARAKTERNY EITHER...WHAT A PITY, I HAVE REALIZED JUST NOW.”

Papyrus stepped over to Chara and took them into his arm. “WHAT A PITY BECAUSE THIS STORY OF YOURS, ASRIEL, IS VERY HEARTWARMING AND SWEET”, Papyrus claimed as Chara affectionately clung onto Papyrus’ arm and snuggled onto him, “IT WOULD BE VERY GOOD IF CHARA KNEW ABOUT THIS SOLSTICE EVE’S MIRACLE!”

Asriel nodded and sat down, unfolding the novel onto the right page. “Then, let’s go on with the story!”, he exclaimed. With his right arm, he demonstrated Papyrus and Chara to sit down next to him as well. So, they did. Papyrus picked up his mug of hot chocolate – which has cooled down quite a lot in the meanwhile – and took a sip from it. “COLD, BUT STILL TASTES FANTASTICALLY!”, he stated and drank another sip.

Chara smirked at Papyrus. “Can I also have a bit?”, they asked while reaching out at the mug. “UGHH!!” Papyrus didn’t look very amused. “WHY DOES EVERYONE HAVE TO

STEAL FROM MY HOT CHOCOLATE THESE DAYS?”, he lamented, directly glaring at Asriel, “RIGHT, ASRIEL?” Asriel blushed and looked away, quickly mumbled, “That’s not true.”

“I heard you had a joyful time here before”, Chara said dreamingly, still leaning at Papyrus, staring outside the window. It has begun to snow in the meanwhile whilst Asriel and Papyrus were telling the story previously. Countless scraps of snow flew down and landed onto the white, sparkling ground. Chara glanced at Asriel and then went on, “You and Papyrus, you were screaming like maniacs the entire time and according to the joys of the children, I assume they liked your story. Say, is that Solstice Eve’s story an interesting one?”

Asriel and Papyrus burst into laughter at the same moment. “Well, it’s just”, Asriel began, but was soon interrupted by Papyrus, “WE DECIDED TO REWRITE THE STORY A LITTLE BIT TO-” “To make it more interesting and appealing for the kids!” “THAT’S WHAT I WAS TRYING TO SAY”, Papyrus yelled. Asriel replied gleefully, “Bad for you! Besides, it’s you who interrupted me first!” Chara also joined the laughter, “Well, so that’s the case! No wonder why everyone has been so noisy the entire time.”

Chara shrugged, eyes directed at the falling snow again, saying slightly quieter, “I would be more than delighted if I could join you, but unfortunately, I don’t know any of the story...” Chara lowered their head, clinging their arms around their body, “Not many stories were told to me. I...” Chara hesitated, “Sometimes, I feel so much behind you all. You told me so much about Solstice Eve the past years, but I...I almost don’t know anything about Christmas which I could share with you.”

Asriel walked over to Chara and sat down next to them. Gently, he laid a hand onto their shoulder. Slightly irritated, Chara raised her head, but soon replied to the gesture and held Asriel’s hand. “That’s not a big deal, Chara”, Asriel said, “You can still join us. Papyrus and I were not entirely going by the script anyways, why not try something entirely new? And this time, you can join us, too!” “AFTER ALL, EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS IS THAT WE’RE HAVING A GOOD TIME WITH THE CHILDREN!”, Papyrus intervened, smiling confidently yet warmly, “DON’T WORRY, CHARA, YOU WILL DO A GREAT JOB!! I BELIEVE IN YOU!”

“Hm...if you think so”, Chara hesitantly said. Timidly, they looked at the expectant, sparkling eyes of the young humans, wanting to know the rest of the story. Chara pointed at themselves, looked directly at the children, and spoke to the crowd, “Hello, my name is Charakterny, also called Chara, and I am going to tell you the...um...” “A Solstice Eve’s tale” “...Yes, ‘A Solstice Eve’s tale”, Chara said, holding tight onto Asriel’s hand, “I must be honest, I’m new to this whole Solstice Eve’s tradition as well, just like you, but I will give my best. Together with my friends of course.” Saying this, Chara kindly smiled at Papyrus and Asriel.

“To make things easier for Chara, I will do the beginning of this chapter”, Asriel said, raising the novel again. He glanced at Chara, “You can join in any time when you feel ready to, okay?” Chara nodded, looking more confident than initially.

It took a few minutes after Amsterdam has grasped that the Spirit of Solstice Eve’s dreary past must have brought him back into his room again. However, it still wasn’t entirely clear for him whether the

things he has seen have been real or merely a dream. There was no logical explanation for the phenomena which have occurred in the time he had that trip into the past with the Spirit. Amsterdam glanced at the grandfather's clock. No minute has passed since the Spirit of Solstice Eve's dreary past has taken him onto that journey. Neither could Amsterdam see any leak or hole onto the ceiling of his room where the Spirit has straight up beamed into the sky. Confusedly, Amsterdam rubbed his forehead. "Finally, this nightmare has ended", he exclaimed, being quite tired. A sudden pain in his stomach forced him to crouch onto the floor, clenching both his arms around his waist. His face distorted due to the pain. "That sickness...", Amsterdam hissed, "That must be the reason why I'm seeing those kinds of things. Spirits, trips to the past. Everything else..." Amsterdam clenched his arms tighter around his chest, "I'm going insane. I'm so sick that I'm going insane."

Despite of the pain which is still rushing through his body, Amsterdam stood up. He glanced across the room and his eyes rested at the cozy bed in the corner. In a gloomy tone, he mumbled, "Maybe, I should get some rest. Just tomorrow and this stupid holiday will meet its end". Pain stroke Amsterdam's body once again but at this point, Amsterdam didn't care anymore. He was used of the pain. Rubbing his head, he made his way to the bed when suddenly, sounds and voices occurred from all corners of his room. Amsterdam pressed his hands onto his ears. "Not again", he groaned, "I'm going insane again". Amsterdam tried his best to ignore all the noise while he made his way to his bed, but the noise just got louder and louder. "I just must go to sleep now, and all this will end", Amsterdam said to himself. He reached out his hand and intended to grab at the blanket, but his hands slipped through thin air. At this point, Amsterdam realized that his bed just mysteriously vanished. In the corner, where his bed usually lies, was merely a big patch of emptiness, covered in dust and dirt, as if the bed was never there in the first place. "What is going on?", Amsterdam stuttered, still staring at the blank, empty spot with disbelieving eyes. The noise became louder, and Amsterdam could hear what that noise exactly was.

It was as if he was standing in the center of a busy restaurant although he knew that he was in his private, quiet room. Alone. Despite all of this, Amsterdam couldn't overhear the busy pacing of various monsters, the clinking of silverware and plates, the chattering, gossiping voices and the high-pitched, excited screams of children. The storm wildly aroused outside while the flickering of a campfire filled the atmosphere. Bells were ringing. The chewing of food was audible, and the cracking of cookies could be heard everywhere. Amsterdam perceived a soothing scent of freshly baked gingerbread and another scent of oven bread directly taken from the oven. The scent of tomato sauce also floated in the air, merging with the aroma of candles and smoke. "What's all of this?", Amsterdam asked himself. He looked around in his room. There wasn't anything unusual. The weather outside was tranquil. It wasn't snowing. Not a single trace of wind could be seen outside Amsterdam's window, despite the roaring storm demolishing Amsterdam's ears. Amsterdam carefully glanced to the door. It was shut close. Not a single trace that it has ever been opened the last few days.

"Maybe, I should check where that noise comes from", Amsterdam hesitantly thought. All this came weird to him. There was a small kitchen in his house in the next room, but Amsterdam knew that he was living alone. The kitchen couldn't possibly be the source of all the noise, which would equivalent at least fifty monsters. Amsterdam's house wasn't even large enough to fit fifty monsters and there wasn't anybody seen on the streets either. Amsterdam knew that it was all in his mind yet again, but having no opportunity to sleep, he also knew that he would be annoyed to death if he didn't at least examine the source of the sensory stimuli.

Amsterdam slowly approached the door, opened it, and cautiously glanced into the hallway. It was a long, dark hallway, walls made of dark oak planks, doors left and right. He didn't see anything out of the order, yet the noise and the scents remained. "Hello?", Amsterdam exclaimed into the hallway.

No response. Amsterdam stepped out of his room and went down the hallway, looking left and right, trying to find anything suspicious. "Anyone there?", he asked. The doors left and right of him were all closed. Suddenly, Amsterdam stopped. He couldn't remember the hallway of his house being this long. After all, he only had a few rooms: The kitchen, the bathroom, the living room, and a guest room. However, this hallway seems almost a mile long. Amsterdam spotted a faint, but warm light shining from the end of the hallway. He squinted to spot the source of the light better and indeed, the last door was open. Amsterdam scratched his head. "Hello?", he shouted through the hallway. There was still no response. Amsterdam hesitated. Eventually, he ran straight to the opened door and entered the room.

The light was blinding, but soon, Amsterdam's eyes got used of the yellowish orange, warm light. The mysterious noise and scent immediately ceased. It was an entirely empty room. Amsterdam's eyes wandered around. Then, a figure he has never seen in his entire life stood right in front of him, covered in a thick, cozy looking, green winter coat, wearing a colorful scarf and a crown made of holly leaves and all kind of berries. The figure wore almost knee-high, leather boots. White scraps of snow hung into their hair. The most characteristic feature about them however was their wide, jolly smile under the rosé cheeks of their round, friendly looking face. "Welcome to the Reality, dear traveler!", the entity exclaimed and raised their arms into the air. Amsterdam stared at the figure irritated.

"W-Who are you?", Amsterdam asked, crossing his arms, skeptically raising an eyebrow.

"I am the Spirit of Solstice Eve's hopeful present!", the Spirit presented themselves. Arms still risen, they stood onto their tip toes and graciously turned around, their winter coat wavering in the air. "I am the entity who represents this merry holiday Solstice Eve in all its faces and facets, scents, and sounds, even colors and lights! One can say, I am Solstice Eve myself!", the Spirit of Solstice Eve's hopeful present demonstrated with a voice as fierce as a burning fire yet as gentle as honey.

"Ugh, it's such a dumb spirit again!", Amsterdam groaned and rolled with his eyes. Viciously glaring at the Spirit, he hissed, "Spirit, I already told your stupid pale brother that I want to be left alone with that cancerous Solstice Eve holiday, got it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, dear. Besides, it's the Spirit of Solstice Eve's hopeful present, if I might say so", the Spirit cheerfully replied, now pacing dramatically around Amsterdam, "What was your name again anyway? The Hague?"

Amsterdam rolled his eyes again. "What do you want to show me, Spirit of Solstice Eve's hopeful present?", he asked, still squinting at the Spirit, "Are you here to bring me to that incidental and pointless holiday?"

"Exactly!", the Spirit exclaimed and energetically shook the snow out of their voluminous, wavy hair. The snow flew Amsterdam straight into the face. The Spirit giggled, "Oops, sorry, Utrecht! That was your name, right? There has been a wild snowstorm outside and quite some of it got tangled in my hair." The Spirit held a hand in front of their jaw and burst into jolly laughter. Then, they grabbed Amsterdam at his shoulders and turned him around. The environment surrounding them twisted and suddenly, Amsterdam found himself outside of his cozy, familiar home right in the middle of a street. The Spirit ecstatically jumped into the air and reached their hands out at the falling snow while doing quite some twists. They waved at Amsterdam to demonstrate him to follow them, "C'mon! It's time for celebration!"

Amsterdam reluctantly followed. The noises, the lights and the scents flooded his senses and muffled him in. At this point, Amsterdam realized that the Spirit has brought him onto a busy market full of monsters buzzing around left and right of him. Irritated, Amsterdam accidentally bumped into an older

monster lady, backed off and bumped into another monster. However, those monsters didn't seem upset at all. Instead, they all cheerfully yelled at Amsterdam, "Merry Solstice Eve!" Amsterdam squinted, searching for the Spirit. "Walk a little quicker! We don't have all day!", the Spirit exclaimed, keep waving their hand. The Spirit was already way ahead, cheerfully jumping up and down. Amsterdam quickly rushed to the Spirit, warped into countless "Merry Solstice Eve!" greetings. As Amsterdam has caught up with the Spirit, a crowd of children rushed past them, joyfully screaming, and pushing each other into the soft, tender snow. "Merry Solstice Eve, Eindhoven!", the Spirit shouted, shaking both of Amsterdam's hands and then pointing at the marketplace with open arms, "Look around! Isn't this wonderful?" "No", Amsterdam grunted, arms crossed, "It's loud and busy, there are way too many people, the scents are irritating, and the lights are blinding my eyes."

The Spirit burst into laughter once again. Seemingly out of the nothing, they pulled out a cardboard box, took a pair of ear defenders and dashed it upon Amsterdam's head. "There you go! Helps a lot if loud noises irritate you!", the Spirit said and pushed a pair of sunglasses into Amsterdam's face, "Wear sunglasses if you've got light sensitivity! Also, there's no need to return them to me afterwards, because-", The Spirit smirked, "-they are yours now. It's a gift for you, from me!"

Amsterdam took the ear defenders and the sunglasses off and dropped them onto the ground. "I don't need any silly gifts", he said, "I don't belong here in the first place. Besides, my name is Amsterdam."

"Alright, Rotterdam!", the Spirit giggled. They lifted the cardboard box and tossed it into Amsterdam's arms. Reflexively, Amsterdam caught the box and looked inside. It was filled with all kinds of toys, from wooden trains, over plushies to cardboard games and playing cards. "Go pick the toy you prefer the most!", the Spirit said, pointing at the box, "On Solstice Eve, there must be something for everybody! Or in other words: Everybody belongs somewhere! You must just find out where you belong! Until then, I will show you everything there is to see on Solstice Eve!"

Amsterdam tossed the box away which accidentally knocked off a few bypassing children. "I don't want to see anything!", Amsterdam shouted disgusted, but the Spirit didn't seem to have heard him and kept frolicking through the streets and alleys. Every now and then, the Spirit rushed to one of the stands to take an item and shove it into Amsterdam's face. "Hot chocolate?", the Spirit asked while dropping a cup of hot chocolate into Amsterdam's hands. Amsterdam grimly shook his head. The Spirit immediately took the cup again and chugged the beverage, "More for me then!". The scent of gingerbread and mince pies filled Amsterdam's senses, especially when the Spirit tried shoving some star shaped cookies into Amsterdam and asked, "Cinnamon stars?". Amsterdam defensively turned his nose away from the baked goods and accelerates him pacing. "Haha, why in such a hurry?", the Spirit behind him wheezed and Amsterdam ran faster, staring straightforward, hands balled up to fists, "You are even walking faster than I am! I see that you are growing to enjoy this merry holiday!"

"No! I am not!", Amsterdam snapped as he suddenly turned around, arms stretched out from his body, directly glaring at the Spirit, "Just tell me what you're trying to convey me about that moronic holiday!". Amsterdam rolled his eyes, said sarcastically, "Oh, the toys, the cookies, the hot chocolate, it's all so merry-", Amsterdam suddenly frowned, stopping the sarcasm, "-NOT! Just stop with your childish hypocrisies and leave me alone, you stupid Spirit of idiocy and ignorance!"

The Spirit went very quiet. Their usual jolly, wide smile has disappeared. With widened, shocked eyes, they glared at Amsterdam and timidly held their hands in front of their chest. The snow was swirling above the Spirit and Amsterdam and slightly tangled the Spirit's wavy hair. "I didn't mean to upset you or to convey you anything about Solstice Eve. I just thought seeing the holiday at its best would make

you change your opinion”, the Spirit whispered in a guilty tone, “If there was anything I was doing wrong, just go and tell me. There’s no need to snap at me like that.”

Amsterdam opened his mouth. Then, closed it again. There was something, he wanted to say but he couldn’t find the words for it. At this moment, Amsterdam realized that the busy market around them has disappeared, and he was standing in midst of a tranquil, calm square covered in thick, white snow. A lone pine tree also covered in snow stood next to them both. The snow roared in Amsterdam’s ears and the snow fell at Amsterdam’s hair and melted as soon as it met his white fur. “Just tell me if I’m doing anything wrong”, the Spirit calmly repeated. Amsterdam looked away. In the distant, he could see the colors and lights of the marketplace.

“That’s the problem!”, Amsterdam furiously exclaimed, pointing derogatively at the market, “You said you wanted to show me the holiday at its best and THAT’S exactly the problem!”. Amsterdam raised his arms and went a few steps into the Spirit’s direction. Then, he halted, pointing at the market again, “That Solstice Eve is all about conveying the illusion of an ideal, perfect world where everybody is happy and shouts ‘Merry Solstice Eve’ when, there’s nothing merry about Solstice Eve! Everybody is just ignoring all the issues that are going on in our world just to celebrate this ignorant holiday where everything is perfect, everything is supposed to be perfect, everything MUST be perfect!”. Amsterdam panted. He realized that he must have lashed out again. He carefully glanced at the Spirit.

The Spirit nodded comprehensively and asked in a tranquil tone, “So, you’re saying everything about Solstice Eve is always perfect and merry?” Amsterdam nodded and replied grumpily, “Well, didn’t you see how everyone was happy onto that market earlier?”, he stopped and revised himself, “...how everyone was pretending to be happy?” “I did. And I understood that this isn’t the side of Solstice Eve you wanted to see”, the Spirit replied calmly, “That’s why I will show you another side of Solstice Eve.” The Spirit gently took Amsterdam’s hand and warmly smiled at him. They paced a few steps forward and whispered, “Follow me.”

“Where are we going?”, Amsterdam asked as the Spirit took him with them. In the next moment, he found himself and the Spirit standing in front of a simple, wooden detached house. The house was decorated with lights shining in all kinds of merry colors, a wreath with wine red berries hung on the dark, wooden door and the borders of the roof was framed with green, pine twigs. A mistletoe hung right between Amsterdam and the Spirit which the Spirit quickly ripped off. “Do you recognize this house?”, the Spirit asked, smirking widely. Amsterdam glanced at the sign next to the doorbell. ‘The family Amsterdam’ was engraved into the sign. Amsterdam nodded. “What are we doing at my aunt’s house?”, he asked in a grumpy tone and dismissably averted his glance from the Spirit and the house, “I don’t think aunt Vajèn would’ve wanted to see me here after the way how I dismissed her the past days.”

In this moment, a female monster wearing a frilly dress in mainly green and red colors frolicked through the faintly lighted street. It was the same monster who has entered Amsterdam’s room just a few days ago. She had a wide, merry smile on her face – which looked surprising like Amsterdam’s face – and her big, round eyes were sparkling behind her glasses. Cheerfully, she waved her arm up and down and exclaimed expressively, “I wish you a merry Solstice Eve and a happy New Year! May you and your family stay healthy and happy over the holidays!” “Spirit, look...”, Amsterdam dreadfully said and points at the cheerfully waving monster, “This is my aunt Vajèn Amsterdam. She’s a walking ray of sunshine and the life of every party. She’s already such an annoying person, but the days before Solstice Eve are simply unbearable with her. Being so obsessed with Solstice Eve isn’t normal for a monster like her anymore!” “Normal is subjective, you must know”, the Spirit replied, “Maybe you don’t know Vajèn as well as you think you know her.”

The Spirit pointed at Vajèn who was still waving to the street. Like a ball full of energy, she was ecstatically wishing her opponents a “Merry Solstice Eve!” and a “Happy New Year!” while walking backwards to the entrance of the house. She pulled out her keys, then opened the door and entered the house. Then, she collapsed. Her cheery smile from before immediately ceased. With her right arm, she faintly rubbed her forehead and leant onto the walls of the hallway. Sitting halfway onto the ground, leaning halfway on the wall, Vajèn sighed. Her eyes were blank, staring into thin air. Her eye bags became more visible than before. Not a single trace of a smile in her face. Amsterdam couldn’t pull his eyes off Vajèn. Never in his life has he seen his aunt this exhausted. Vajèn glanced at the clock hanging over the merrily decorated chimney and folded her hands over her face. “At least a few minutes before Mars would come back with the children”, she tiredly sighed, stood up and headed to the kitchen, “I should better prepare some treats. Children are usually very hungry after a sleigh ride in the snow.”

It was just now that Amsterdam noticed Vajèn was carrying several, heavy bags with her when she placed the bags onto the table of the kitchen. Vajèn opened the first bag and started preparing dinner. Out of Amsterdam’s surprise, it wasn’t much out of the unusual. Not a rich feast that one would usually expect on a big holiday like Solstice Eve, just warm, regular dinner with some cookies for the children. “I hope this will be alright for the children”, Amsterdam heard Vajèn whispering and noticed an ounce of worry in her soft, friendly voice, “It isn’t much. Last year, we had more, but this year, it was hard for all of us.” Vajèn stepped to the stovetop and ignited it with her magic while she rambled something about rising prizes and food shortage in the Underground. “I’m sure Mars knows that I was doing my best”, she mumbled. The entire time, Amsterdam hasn’t seen Vajèn smile not a single time. Vajèn looked tired, sometimes tripping over her own feet, or grabbing into thin air. Vajèn stepped into the living room with another bag holding in both her hands. She almost tripped over a random toy lying on the ground. Frustrated, she placed the bag under a pine tree lit up by candles and let herself fall onto the couch. “I could really need a pair of new glasses”, she said to herself, fiddling with her hands, staring onto the ceiling, “But purchasing all these presents for the kids did cost me enough money, especially I couldn’t find Mila’s desired toy anywhere. I hope she will be happy with the substitute.”

“Doesn’t look very much like a ray of sunshine for me”, the Spirit considerably whispered, “I guess the days before Solstice Eve are not only unbearable for you.” The Spirit glanced at Amsterdam and smiled warmly. “I have never seen Vajèn like that before”, Amsterdam whispered, “To be honest, I have never celebrated Solstice Eve with Vajèn’s family.” Amsterdam’s eyes wandered to the chimney. Rows of fluffy socks hung right over the flickering fire. There were exactly five socks, each sock with a name carefully embroidered into it. Amsterdam’s eyes rested onto the three socks in the middle, already entirely filled with treats. ‘Tijs’, ‘Levi’ and ‘Mila’. Vajèn’s sock was still empty. “I just wish I got something for Asriel too”, Amsterdam suddenly heard Vajèn saying and tried to listen closely, but the further words Vajèn was saying were incomprehensible for Amsterdam who could merely see her lips moving.

Suddenly, the bell rang and ripped Vajèn out of her lament. Surprised, Vajèn jumped up from the couch, rushed to the door and yanked the door open. Her smile has returned onto her face, but Amsterdam saw that it was forced. “Mama!”, a high-pitched female voice squealed. Amsterdam saw a small girl at approximately the age of nine years jumping into the arms of her mother and snuggling her face into Vajèn’s shoulder. Her big eyes quivered and tears were running down her face. “Mama, Levi was mean to me again!”, the girl wept and pointed at a slightly older boy, “Go punish him!” “That’s not true! Mila’s lying again!”, the older boy named Levi furiously exclaimed. Vajèn sighed yet put a smile on her face. With one arm holding Mila, the other holding Levi, she accompanied them to the couch and sat down. “Levi, what did you do?”, Vajèn asked sternly, looking at the boy. “He hit me

at full force! He's so cruel!", Mila yelled. "I didn't hit you!", Levi exclaimed, "You begged me to throw that one snowball to me!" "But not right into my face!" "You said you would catch it!" "You're so mean to your little sister!", Mila shouted and stormed off the room. "Go apologize to your sister right now!", Vajèn scolded, and Levi obediently ran off into the direction Mila fled to. "These children...", she sighed exhausted.

Two further figures stormed into the living room, one being significantly older than the other. "Hold on! You're carrying all the snow into the living room!", Vajèn gasped. The younger monster immediately backed off and quickly took off his winter boots. "Sorry, Ma", the monster gently apologized. Only now did Amsterdam notice that he was carrying something unrecognizable in his arms. Something made from several wooden planks. The other monster – also carrying some, but less wooden planks – took off his boots and followed the younger monster. "I know, we came back earlier than you expected", he explained calmly, guilt lying in his voice, "The sleigh broke, and the children ran off before Tijs-", he pointed at the younger monster carrying the broken sleigh, "-and I could follow." "That sleigh was new, Mars! And expensive! What did you do?", Vajèn stood up, shockingly exclaimed. Mars briefly quivered. His eyes averted from Vajèn and shifted to the ground. "Besides, I'm not done with all the preparation yet!", Vajèn sighed frustrated. She took a deep breath and flapped her right wrist into the kitchen's direction a few times, said bluntly, "To the table now. We will eat soon." Mars just nodded. Without any further words, he vanished into the kitchen.

Tijs dropped the broken sleigh onto the ground, walked over to his mother and laid a hand onto her shoulder. "Mom, you look tired.", Tijs said. Amsterdam noticed that despite of his rather rational sounding voice, he got the softness from his mother, "I could help you a little if you don't mind." "No no, it's alright, my child!", Vajèn shook off, taking Tijs' hand from her shoulder and pushing him into the kitchen's direction. Amsterdam spotted her usual wide smile in her face which didn't fit together with her tired eyes and her sloppy movements. She was faking it again. "Are you sure you don't need any help with the preparation?", Amsterdam sensed worry in Tijs voice. Vajèn energetically shook her head again, exclaiming, "You don't have to worry about me today. After all, it's Solstice Eve." Forcefully, she dragged him into the kitchen, where everyone else has already seated. Amsterdam and the Spirit followed. "She could really need some help", Amsterdam whispered. "Yup, poor woman", the Spirit replied.

It was a small kitchen with an unstable looking, irregularly built wooden table, just enough to fit a family of five. Vajèn has already placed all the dishes onto the table when she suddenly released a grunt as she noticed that Levi and Mila were missing. Quickly, she left the table and returned, dragging her two children with her. "You, see? Vajèn's family isn't as merry and unproblematic as you imagined, not even on Solstice Eve", the Spirit patiently said and pointed at the family. "I didn't know how much Vajèn was struggling on Solstice Eve, Spirit", Amsterdam said while watching Vajèn place some mashed potatoes and brussels sprouts onto the children's plates. "I don't understand", Amsterdam said frustrated and pointed at Mila spitting out a brussels sprout much to Vajèn's distress. "What do you not understand?", the Spirit asked calmly. "I don't understand why she puts herself in such a hassle on purpose", Amsterdam said, "I don't get it why she stresses herself so much because of some stupid holiday. Wouldn't it be better for everyone if they weren't celebrating Solstice Eve at all? Vajèn wouldn't be so stressed. The children wouldn't be arguing. The family would've had more money. The sleigh wouldn't be broken. They're just trapping themselves in this pointless tradition, that's what I see." "Maybe, you're not seeing everything yet", the Spirit replied. "What do you mean?" "Just listen, and you will understand", the Spirit smiled at Amsterdam and glanced at the family again. Amsterdam followed their glance.

All family members raised their glass, shouted, "For a merry Solstice Eve!", and drank their beverages. Mila quickly chugged her orange juice and took a bite out of some bread Amsterdam couldn't entirely identify. "This meal is the best, Mama!", Mila squealed with a full mouth and swallowed another spoon of mashed potatoes, "Except of the brussels sprouts, but that's for you, adults, not for us children!" "Thank you, my daughter!", Vajèn exclaimed, her eyes sparkling of joy, "I'm very happy that you're enjoying this year's Solstice Eve's meal, but please...no talking before swallowing. I certainly don't want to see the chewed food in your mouth." Vajèn chuckles as she said this, and Mila fiercely nodded. "Sorry, Ma, but I'm just so hungry after our sleigh ride!", Mila replied after having swallowed everything. "I remember last year's Solstice Eve meal being slightly different", Levi said, gazing at the brussels sprouts. Vajèn nodded. "Yes, this is true", she said and abruptly stopped. There was a brief pause until Mars picks up the conversation. He kindly smiled at all three children with a wide, jolly smile that Amsterdam knew from his own father. Thinking of this, Amsterdam repressed a tear and fixated his eyes on Mars.

It took a while, until Mars began speaking. His voice was deep and strong, yet friendly and gentle. "What your mother was trying to say was, that", Mars briefly cleared his throat, "she did a lot for us to enjoy a joyful Solstice Eve. After a long and tough year of waiting, we deserved to cherish this holiday today. Solstice Eve is a reminder to all of us that no matter what hardship we're going through, we will survive. We don't have much in our lives and our upcoming future feels chaotic and unpredictable, but celebrating with you today, no matter how small it is, makes all the pain and worry worth it." Everyone began cheering as soon as Mars finished his speech and Vajèn rushed to him and gave him a tight hug. Tears ran down her cheeks, but Amsterdam saw that she was smiling, genuinely smiling this time. "You...you couldn't have described it more perfectly, honey!", Vajèn wept. She took off her glasses and wiped her tears away. "Papa, stop, you will make Mom cry", Mila exclaimed, halfway laughing, leaning over to Levi, giving him a hug, "Just like Levi made me cry!" "That's not the same thing, Mila!", Levi chuckled and replied to her hug. Tijs has also joined in, embracing both his younger siblings, and laying his cheek onto Mila's head. "Mama cries of happiness", he explained. "Well, if that's the case, then crying is a good thing, right?", Mila laughed and petted Tijs' head. Tijs smiled and replied, "Not always, but now, yes." The three children snuggled a while before they let go of each other. Merely the parents were still hanging onto each other.

"Don't worry when Mama is crying, children", Vajèn calmly said, genuinely smiling at all her children, both arms flung onto her husband's neck, "Mama has been in a lot of stress. Sometimes, crying works as a stress relief. You can even say-", Vajèn lovely smirked at Marks, "that Solstice Eve works as a stress relief compared to the rest of the year. That's quite ironic, huh? Since Solstice Eve is the thing that causes me all this stress in the first place." Vajèn chuckles and the entire family joined her laughter. "I told you that you could need some help if you just let me", Tijs said, winking to his mother. "You're not alone, Mom!", Levi exclaimed. Vajèn nodded. She suddenly let go of her husband, sat onto her own seat, and shoved a spoon of mashed potatoes into her mouth. Her smile has faded. With quiet and serious voice, she said, "There is someone who is alone, today." The table went silent. Everybody lowered their heads and stared at their plates. Their smiles faded as well. Amsterdam knew of who everyone was thinking at this moment, but before he could silent or halt the conversation, Vajèn verified his assumptions. "Asriel."

Tijs rolled his eyes. Levi made a sound as if he was about to throw up. And Mila drearily hit both her hands and her head onto the tabletop. "What?", Vajèn asked, worry filling her eyes, "What's wrong with your cousin?" "Who cares about him?", Levi loudly groaned. Tijs whispered sternly, "We don't talk about him..." Mila raised her body, stemmed her fists into her waist and looked upon the ceiling with a serious glare. Then, raising her right index, she fiercely exclaimed, "What is NOT wrong with him?" Mila then stood up from her seat, pacing around, lamenting, "Not once, not once on Solstice

Eve did he spend time with his family! He is always so grumpy and scary, dressed in black. Yuck! He never gives us presents, and he hasn't even given me a present EVER! He hates Solstice Eve! He hates us! I think he hates us so much because he hates Solstice Eve!"

Amsterdam quivered, hearing his little cousin ranting about him. Tears quilled up his eyes and he clenched his teeth together. Vajèn took Mila into her arms and compassionately petted the soft flock of hair onto her head. "Don't you think you're a little extreme?", she softly asked. "No!", Mila exclaimed fiercely, "Asriel hates us! He wants to KILL us!" Amsterdam's jaw dropped. He crouched together and flung his arms tightly around his waist, trying to repress the tears that are trying to leave his eyebags. "Mila thinks that I want to kill them?", he whispered, tears now inevitably oozing out his eyes. "Now, that's indeed extreme", the Spirit commented. "I am scared of him, he looks so threatening", Mila went on, shivering. "She's scared of me?", Amsterdam whispered. He took off his glasses to wipe his upcoming tears away.

Suddenly, everything went dark around Amsterdam, but Amsterdam could hear Vajèn's comforting voice anyway, "Mila, Asriel doesn't want to kill you", Vajèn made a brief pause, "He has been very sick this year and I'm worried about him. I just wished", Vajèn paused again and went on with a quieter, softer voice, "He would at least celebrate his last Solstice Eve with us" Her voice was barely a whisper. Although Amsterdam didn't see her face, he could hear the worry in her voice. "...his last Solstice Eve with us", Vajèn repeated. Amsterdam didn't know why she repeated that clause but then, comprehension hit his head like a pain streak and knocked him off. Amsterdam felt like he was falling into black void. He didn't know what was above him and what was below him.

"S-Spirit?", Amsterdam fearfully exclaimed, reaching out an arm, looking forward to the Spirit, but there wasn't anything else than pitch blackness around him, "Spirit, answer me!" The Spirit didn't answer. Amsterdam heard Vajèn's voice again, "Children, you must know why I mentioned him. His sickness has been very severe in the past days-" "Nobody cares!", Levi's voice interrupted. Then, all voices ceased. "Spirit, please!", Amsterdam begged.

"Unfortunately, our mutual journey must come to an end, Amsterdam!", the voice of the Spirit rang into Amsterdam's ears. Amsterdam turned around, but the Spirit was nowhere to be seen. Everything was spinning. Everything was black. "Spirit where are you?", he yelled. The Spirit ignored his question, went on, "Much to my disliking, I will have to leave you. The present is merely a small time-window that is followed by a bigger, undetermined period of time. It might sound scary when I'm telling you that things will be unpredictable, but whatever you're going through, listen to your heart and make the right decision!" "Spirit, please tell me what is going on here!", Amsterdam kept yelling, trying to determine from where the Spirit's voice rang from. "Farewell, Amsterdam!", the Spirit exclaimed, and their voice eternally ceased, leaving Amsterdam alone in the falling abyss. Amsterdam said just one thing, "Mila, I don't want to kill you."

"I think that's enough reading for today!", Chara proudly exclaimed and collapsed into Asriel's arms. Quickly, Chara raised again, chuckling nervously, "Sorry, it's just all the reading got me very tired. I hope I made a good impression. I was really doing my best representing the Spirit of Solstice Eve's hopeful present!"

Asriel embraced Chara and softly stroke their hair. "Let's ask the audience", he said. His eyes wandered to the children crowd. "It was so awesome!!", a child cheered on, "You did a fantastic job, Charakterny!" The other children joined the cheering and Asriel playfully bumped his elbow into Chara's waist, said smirking, "Told you they'd like it!" Chara blushed and smiled softly. "Yeah!", another child exclaimed, "Chara is the best Spirit of Solstice Eve's hopeful present!" "Really?", Chara

asked, blushing again, looking at the ground. "Yeah!", the children yelled. "Well, I'm glad that you enjoyed my storytelling", Chara said smiling. They raised their glance upon the children again and leaned further onto Asriel's shoulder, "It was an experience for me too and thanks to this miraculous story, we all learned quite some valuable things about Solstice Eve today!" The children fiercely nodded.

"Anyway, I must say, the Spirit of Solstice Eve's hopeful present even convinced me about the vast importance of Solstice Eve!", Chara went on, "I can't wait to know how Amsterdam proceeds to think about Solstice Eve. Papyrus, what do you think about this chapter?"

Chara glanced over to Papyrus, who – whilst they now noticed – has fallen asleep and now lies onto the ground, snoring loudly. Asriel briefly chuckled. "Papyrus?", he asked, gazing irritated at the sleeping Papyrus, "Papyrus!" Papyrus just turned around and proceeded snoring. Chara freed themselves from Asriel's arms, walked over to Papyrus and loudly clapped their hands together right next to Papyrus' head.

Papyrus startled. His body shot into the air, and he frantically turned his head around a few times. "NYEH! WHAT? WHERE? WHO?", he babbled while pacing up and down, "WHAT HAPPENED?" Everyone burst into laughter. Papyrus halted his pacing and stared at the children, then at Asriel and Chara. Embarrassed, he scratched his head and looked away, rambling, "WELL, I... I GUESS I MUST HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP, NYEHH..." "You guess?", Chara smirked. Papyrus frantically nodded and folded his hands together.

"WELL, THIS SOLSTICE EVE STORY IS PRETTY LONG AND... THAT'S NOT YOUR FAULT CHARA, YOU DID YOUR JOB FANTASTICALLY, BUT I ALWAYS THOUGHT THE CHAPTER WITH THE SPIRIT OF SOLSTICE EVE'S HOPEFUL PRESENT IS RATHER BORING", Papyrus said, "SO, I FELL ASLEEP. I MEAN, WHO CARES ABOUT THE PRESENT ANYWAY?"

"I certainly care about presents!", Chara said. They smiled and looked at the children, who seem quite tired as well. Some of them were yawning. "I guess after so much storytelling, a small break wouldn't harm us, so we can refresh ourselves, fetch some hot chocolate and finish that story", they said and began feeling the weight of their eyelids. Chara yawned, "What about that, children?" The children faintly nodded, smiling tiredly but their eyes sparkled due to the eagerness of knowing more about the story.

"you guys don't seriously think you're going to finish that story without me losing a single word about it", another voice exclaimed.

Asriel, Chara, and Papyrus turned around and spotted Sans standing in the door frame, wearing his usual wide smirk, and leaning against the frame. Sans stepped into the room, snapped the book out of Asriel's hands and opened it. "be some good buddies and let me have my turn in the fun now."

Sans turned to the children now and said, "just gonna warn 'ya, kids. this part of the tale will send you shivers down your spine."

Chapter 4: Actions have consequences

← [To the beginning](#)

Amsterdam fell and fell, pitch blackness surrounding him. He called for help, but there was no response besides the roaring of the winds around him. Then, Amsterdam felt the ground beneath him again. Face forward, he landed into the soft, cold snow. He shook the snow out of his fur, stood up and took off his glasses to wipe further snow from his face. "Where am I?", Amsterdam exclaimed into the empty abyss he landed into. It wasn't snowing and besides the faint whistle of the winds, it was completely silent. Amsterdam shivered. He noticed that – wherever he might be now – it was significantly colder than he was used of. Amsterdam stared into the seemingly endless snow desert. "Hello?", Amsterdam hesitantly asked. There was no response. Amsterdam frantically looked around. "Spirit?", he yelled, "What is going on here?"

"i see you've been busy, huh?", a deep, unsettling voice rang out behind Amsterdam. Amsterdam frantically turned around. It was a mysterious, hooded creature, shorter than Amsterdam by a few inches. With huge, pitch black, empty eye sockets showing up under his black hood, he directly stared at Amsterdam. "if you keep going on like this you certainly wouldn't like that happens next. don't tell me that i didn't warn you, then."

Unable to say anything further, Amsterdam stood frozen in place, glaring at the entity. The hooded figure began slowly pacing around Amsterdam and shivers ran down Amsterdam's spine. Due to unknown reasons, the mere presence of that creature emits a strange, frightening coldness. "i am the spirit of solstice eve's not determined yet to come", the creature introduced himself and stopped right in front of Amsterdam. The Spirit's empty eye sockets met Amsterdam's reddish-brown eyes. At this point, Amsterdam noticed that the Spirit didn't have any pupils, just empty, black eye sockets. "are you also gonna say something or am i doin' all the talkin' now?", the Spirit bluntly asked, "after all, it was you who called me in the first place."

Amsterdam swallowed. He was still too overwhelmed to say anything. He has so many questions in his head but didn't know how to put them into words. Something about the Spirit of Solstice Eve's not determined yet to come told him better not to mess with him. "hm...not such a talker, huh?", the Spirit eventually said and suddenly yanked his left arm out of his pocket. His left eye flashed in an incredibly bright, light blue glow. Forcefully, he pushed his left arm into the left direction and Amsterdam immediately, before he could even realize, flew away pushed by unknown forces. Amsterdam clashed onto something sturdy. His left shoulder was hurting. Rubbing his left shoulder with his fingers, Amsterdam looked around, irritated about what has just happened. The Spirit stood right next to him. He raised his left arm again, but this time pushed it upwards. Amsterdam immediately jumped into the air and landed onto his feet again. "look around, buddy", the Spirit said. His voice was deep and calm, yet there was something unsettling lying in his voice. Something that Amsterdam couldn't describe.

"So, when you're the Spirit of Solstice Eve's...not determined yet to come...", Amsterdam hesitantly whispered, his voice sounded oddly hoarse, "...you are going to show me the f-future?" "oh, so apparently you can talk?", the Spirit calmly replied, eerily grinning at Amsterdam, "wow neat. that makes quite some things easier for both of us." Amsterdam didn't know how to react to this unexpected response, so he just shrugged and looked around. As he did so, he couldn't believe what he was seeing. Suddenly, he knew too well where he was. It was his home, the Underground.

It was the same, snowy location the Spirit of Solstice Eve's dreary past, and the Spirit of Solstice Eve's hopeful present brought him to, but there was something different about the Underground this time. There was something unsettling and Amsterdam immediately knew why. No monster could be seen anywhere. The buildings around Amsterdam were completely demolished and a thick layer of dust covered the snow below him and the walls, windows and roofs of the houses. A thick, white fog covered the atmosphere and made it hard for Amsterdam to breathe. Amsterdam's glasses fogged up, so he had to take them down and squint to recognize further things. But no matter how much he looks around, he couldn't see any other monster besides himself and the Spirit. The dreadful coldness eats through Amsterdam's entire body and consumed each of his cells. Shivering, Amsterdam clutched his arms around his body and tapped up and down. He squinted over to the Spirit who didn't seem to freeze at all.

"W-What happened to the Underground?", Amsterdam fearfully asked. "genocide", the Spirit hoarsely mumbled. "WHAT?", Amsterdam exclaimed. The Spirit nodded and paced forward. Without further words, Amsterdam hastily followed the Spirit. The grey dust under his feet cracked with every step Amsterdam made. Amsterdam suddenly stopped. He realized that the dust he was stepping on were actually the decayed bodies of hundred and thousands of deceased monsters spread across the ground. Amsterdam looked up. At this point, he realized how profoundly demolished the houses left and right from him were. Most doors were ripped off and most windows have been shattered. The walls of some houses have even collapsed. Some houses lacked roofs or had destroyed, thrown down chimneys. Suddenly, the unknown force dragged Amsterdam forwards and slammed him onto the ground next to the Spirit. "hurry a bit, ok? time doesn't wait", the Spirit exclaimed calm, but seriously. Amsterdam nodded and stumbled after the Spirit. His feet were still hurting due to the clash.

"Spirit, I-I don't understand. What do you mean with genocide?", Amsterdam asked, glancing at the Spirit. But the Spirit has averted his gaze from Amsterdam. "What happened? Were there any survivors? Where...I mean when...are we? And...", Amsterdam briefly hesitated, "What does all of this has anything to do with Solstice Eve?". The Spirit didn't reply. "Who killed...everyone?", Amsterdam asked again. The Spirit halted. With an arm flap, he forcefully made Amsterdam to halt as well. "a human fell into the underground not long after solstice eve", the Spirit mumbled and Amsterdam heard a slight quiver in his deep voice, "they were responsible for everything. just look what they did." Amsterdam looked at the demolished buildings again. No monster could be seen anywhere. "not even i know their reasons for doing so...", the Spirit said, seemingly looking at something in the distance, "but it is clear that hope is nowhere to be seen. we, especially the ones fallen under that human's blade, will never see the sun ever rise again." The Spirit turned to Amsterdam, staring directly at him with his soulless, black, pupilless eye sockets. He then whispered, pure, freezing coldness lying in his voice, coldness which made Amsterdam shiver, "solstice eve is dead."

"W-What?", Amsterdam quivered, frantically pacing, waving his hands up and down, "But this... What about all the hope? All the joy the monsters shared on Solstice Eve. It's all gone now. This...this can't be..." Amsterdam stopped rambling. He was merely breathing heavily, not knowing what to think now. "funny that it comes from someone like you, i must say", the Spirit calmly replied and Amsterdam saw that bright, light blue glow flashing up in his eyes again, "someone who has hated solstice eve year for year and refused to ever visit his family on that once merry holiday." Amsterdam froze and stiffly nodded. "anyway, you wanted to see the survivors, huh?", the Spirit coldly went on. Amsterdam nodded again. Still paralyzed, he whispered, "If there were any." "i know one who survived but you wouldn't like it all to see her like that."

With those words, the Spirit lifted his arm. Once again, Amsterdam felt his body flying to a different direction and forcefully clashing into a wall. Pain ate through his right shoulder this time and consumed his entire body. Still freezing, Amsterdam stood up, trying his best to ignore the unbearable pain pulsing in his body. He stumbled a few steps forward. The Spirit calmly showed up next to him, directly gazing at him with his empty eye sockets. Then, the Spirit abruptly averted his glance. With his mysterious powers, he ripped the relatively unscathed, wooden door open. Amsterdam's gaze glued onto the detached house. He recognized the house of his aunt Vajèn, but it looked so off and incomplete without all the merrily glowing lights and the rich Solstice Eve's decoration the house usually thrived in at Solstice Eve. "can you go in by yourself or should i help out?", the Spirit asked in a surprisingly blunt tone. Startled, Amsterdam hassled inside, not wanting to be painfully slammed by the Spirit again.

Amsterdam looked around in the living room. The couch was thrown over, most wooden chairs and tables were broken, and the floor was covered with all kinds of toys, almost all of them being destroyed, broken, stabbed, or ripped apart. Amsterdam stared at the chimney. Not a single trace of fluffy socks with names engraved into them. The wooden floor was covered with a thick, almost black layer of dust. Amsterdam swallowed, gazing at the dust beneath him. "Vajèn", he hoarsely croaked, almost being unable to make any sound, "Spirit, did she survive?". The coldness lying in the air forced Amsterdam to clench his teeth together. He was shivering horribly. "Did...did Vajèn Amsterdam s...survive?", Amsterdam whispered persistently year fearfully. Only with effort could he avert his gaze from the dust and look at the Spirit. "i don't know, kid", the Spirit replied oddly calmly, slowly shaking his head, "she left her family the day after solstice eve and exiled herself somewhere far away. man, your absence must have really upset her." The Spirit casually shrugged, "nobody knew what happened with her ever since."

"She left...her family...and her c-children", Amsterdam asked, slowly pacing around again, "...because of me?" The noise of the cracking dust under Amsterdam's feet rang like roaring guns in his ears. "yup", the Spirit nodded, "since you refused to show up at solstice eve one again." "Why did she do that?", Amsterdam said, shock lying in his voice. "man, you ask too many questions. bold of me to firstly assume that you were mute", the Spirit impatiently said, raised his left arm and slammed Amsterdam out of the living room. Amsterdam felt the stairs painfully clashing against his back as he flew upstairs until his face met the hard surface of a wooden door. Amsterdam rubbed his back as he opened the door and quickly hassled inside before the Spirit could demolish him even more. But soon, he wished he didn't. Inevitably in front of his eyes hang a noose. Dust was accumulated around the noose and onto the ground. Carefully, Amsterdam approached the noose and attentively investigated the dust. It was a lot of dust. Thick, grey dust. Also, the noose hung too high for any monster of Amsterdam's size to possibly survive. "mars amsterdam", the Spirit's voice behind Amsterdam wearily mumbled. Tears threatened to quill up in Amsterdam's eye sockets. "No...", Amsterdam weakly whispered. His throat was dry, and a shiver ran down his spine. For one second, Mars' lifeless body flashed up, Mars' throat hanging on the noose, his empty, blank eyes staring in opposite directions. "No!", Amsterdam fiercely exclaimed. In the next second, the noose was empty again. No trace of Mars' body. Just dust.

"No...", Amsterdam whispered a third time, "W-why?" Tears inevitably ran down Amsterdam's cheeks, faster than any rushing stream. Amsterdam collapsed onto the ground. He covered his eyes with both his hands and started heavily sobbing as the tears kept running down from his eyes. "it was his response of his wife leaving him", the Spirit yanked his arm upwards and pulled Amsterdam onto his feet. He then levitated the tissue box from the nightstand and offered Amsterdam some tissues. Amsterdam nodded and wiped his tears away. "yeah, pretty bad to make a decision like this, but it did at least spare him from the human's blade. unlike your two cousins tijs and levi." Amsterdam

froze. "tjjs amsterdam and levi amsterdam were two wonderful boys and still had their whole lives ahead them. too bad that they had to meet their sudden end", the Spirit said, "if you want, i can also show it to you-" "No!", Amsterdam suddenly exclaimed. The Spirit ignored Amsterdam's exclamation, instead went on as usual, "...but for that we need to travel into the past of the future, so welp...it'll be quite a little complicated." The Spirit turned around and exclaimed, "spirit of solstice eve's dreary past! hello? are you th-" "NO!", Amsterdam snapped, fiercely interrupted the Spirit, "No! Stop!! Spirit...I beg you! Make this stop!!"

Amsterdam frantically stepped towards the Spirit of Solstice Eve's not determined yet to come and hastily shook him, desperately staring into his soulless, blank eye sockets, feeling cold, wet tears onto his cheeks. "Please...I can't take this anymore!!", he desperately begged. "so, i guess you do not want to see your two cousin's last living moments, eh?", the Spirit calmly replied. "NO!", Amsterdam yelled, "I mean, yes! I mean please don't make...make this s-stop!" Amsterdam clasped his hands upon his face. "aight, if you don't wanna, it is what it is", the Spirit said, "however...", the Spirit gently levitated Amsterdam off the ground and pushes him out of the room, "there is one last thing that i must show to you." "One further thing?", Amsterdam gasped. The Spirit nodded. For the first time, small white pupils flashed inside his big eye sockets. Only for a short moment, until his eye sockets returned to his original blank slate again. "just this one thing and imma spare you", the Spirit said in an unusually reassuring tone, "c'mon, you will rock this." Frightened of what to see next, Amsterdam glanced at the Spirit as he levitated the tissue box and fiercely threw it at Amsterdam. "you gonna need this though", he said.

Amsterdam caught the tissue box and quickly wiped his tears away, still looking doubtfully. "don't worry, pal. we won't see anyone dying", the Spirit said and jokingly winked at Amsterdam, "we will meet a survivor...the survivor." The environment suddenly shifted, and Amsterdam found himself in a cold, dark basement. He looked around. Dim light was glowing from a corner of the basement, but aside from that, the basement was almost entirely empty. The moist air quivered Amsterdam's senses. It was as cold as in the rest of the house, if not even colder. "Solstice Eve, save us all, our hope is burning in our hearts, our hope will prevail", a shivering, quiet voice of a little girl was singing from the corner. Fear lied in her fragile, whispering voice. "Solstice Eve, save us all, when we promise to stay alive, we will never fall", the voice went on singing. Carefully, Amsterdam approached the singing voice. As he drew nearer, the body of the singing voice revealed herself. It was Mila, crouched in the corner. She was wearing dirty clothes and her fur was messy and unkempt. Her eyes were sunken and huge, dark eyebags have appeared under her once hopeful eyes. But now, Amsterdam couldn't see a single spark of hope in Mila's eyes. By now, he noticed that Mila was holding a dimly glowing candle in both her hands, clinging the candle tight to her body, almost if she was trying to warm herself up.

"Merry Solstice Eve, Mila", Mila whispered to herself, staring at the flickering light of the candle inside her hands, "Merry Solstice Eve." Only now did Amsterdam realize how fragile the young girl was. Shockingly, he couldn't avert his gaze from her profoundly torn up, covered in dirt and snow clothes. "Merry Solstice Eve, Mama, wherever you might be right now...", Mila whispered, holding the candle tighter to herself while repetitively rocking her small body back and forth. A single tear sparked up under the warm candlelight and Mila forcefully pressed her lips together. Amsterdam saw that she was biting herself on her tongue. "this is your cousin mila amsterdam", the Spirit explained, "the only survivor of the amsterdam family..." The Spirit abruptly stopped and promptly looked away, just mumbled incomprehensively, "guess, i don't need to explain any further. have a look by yourself." "Merry Solstice Eve, Dad. I will always remember the words you said last Solstice Eve, no matter what happens", Mila said, and gently laid the candle aside. More tears showed up in her eyes,

"Merry Solstice Eve, Tijs. It-", Mila swallowed, "It was fun to ride on the sleigh last year with you. I will n-never forget you and...I will never forget you either, Levi. Although you sometimes picked on me or were mean to me, I I-love you and I...I will never forget what a good brother you were to me."

"Mila...", Amsterdam considerably whispered. His eyes were glued onto the pitiful pile of fur and clothes once known as his bubbly, happy-go-lucky little cousin. "Mila, what happened to you", Amsterdam mumbled. Mila began to sob loudly, sounding fiercely as a raging fire yet fragily as thin China. Tears ran down her eyes and soaked her hands, dripped onto her poor clothes, and stained the dirty, seriously torn mattress she was sitting onto. "M-Merry Solstice eve, f-family", Mila said. With glassy eyes, she stared at the candle. Its small, orange flame was flickering in the wind, desperately trying to survive through the coldness and the moisture. "We d-deserved to cherish this holiday today, right?", Mila wept, her voice quivered, "That's true, isn't it, Dad? That's what you said-" "That's what you said, right? That's what you said!", Mila yelled with widened, tear-filled eyes. Violently, she punched the wall and yelled, "you said if we celebrate, all the pain will be worth it, no matter how small it is! And you, Tijs... Didn't you say sometimes, crying is a good thing?"

Mila violently bit herself onto her lips. Her fangs pierced through the flesh of her mouth and caused a bleeding wound. Mila screamed due to the pain. Fiercely, she kicked the wall. The mattress flung aside and knocked off the dimly lighting candle. The flame immediately perished. Darkness consumed the room and swallowed Mila's poor, fragile body. Amsterdam stepped closer to Mila. All he could hear from Mila was merely a quiet whimper. "I... I will promise you, dear family, I...", Mila said. She tightly clung her hands onto her body. Her empty eyes were fixated onto the dark wall in front of her. "I promise you that I will always...always celebrate Solstice Eve until-", Mila quivered. A faint smile appeared on her face while more tears soaked her cheeks. "Until the very end. D-Don't worry. I will survive no matter what." Blood dripped down her chin, yet Mila was still smiling. She repeatedly whispered the words, "I will survive no matter what", followed by the phrase, "I will not disappoint you, f-family." Amsterdam stood there and watched. Stared at Mila, unable to find the right words to say anything. Slowly, he felt tears tickling in his eye sockets. He felt the weight of the tissue box in his hand yet didn't make the effort to wipe away his tears as he felt something wet running down his own cheeks.

"Asriel...", Mila's voice hit Amsterdam like a lightning stroke, "Asriel, why? Why did you do this? Why..." Mila's voice ceased. Her smile vanished. Barely audible, she just whimpered, "Why must you kill everyone? Why?" Amsterdam startled. "I didn't kill them!", he yelled releasing all the air in his lungs. He reflexively jumped in front of Mila and impatiently shoved the tissue box which he was holding in his hands into her face. "I-I'm right here! See? I don't want to harm you", he exclaimed and offered Mila a tissue, "It was the human who killed everyone. Not me!" But Mila didn't seem like she has heard Amsterdam. "Why...why did you have to do this?", Mila cried and violently shook her head. "I didn't! It was the human! Please believe me, Mila!", Amsterdam yelled desperately, "See Mila? I'm here. Don't be afraid of me, I'm helping you." Amsterdam stepped towards Mila and stretched his arm out to gently lay it down onto Mila's shoulders, but his arm shifted right through Mila's body. "Why do you hate us so much!", Mila yelled, now sobbing at full force. "I don't hate you!", Amsterdam shouted. Abruptly, he turned to the Spirit. "Spirit, you must help me!", he yelled, "You must make Mila see me, please! I must communicate with her! I must-", Amsterdam briefly paused, "I must proof her that I am innocent! That I didn't kill her family or the other monsters and that I don't hate her!" "What did we ever do to you?", Mila's sobbing voice painfully rang into Amsterdam's ears. "Spirit, please!"

"i fear this is impossible", the Spirit dreadfully whispered and calmly closed his pitch-black, empty eye sockets, "there is no way for you to communicate with mila." "Why?", Amsterdam yelled, "There must be a way!" The Spirit shook his head. "no", he simply said. "WHY?", Amsterdam frustrated

shouted. "i will show you why", the Spirit exclaimed. In the next second, the basement and Mila both vanished before Amsterdam's eyes and Amsterdam was pulled into a thick, milky white fog. He clashed onto something hard and as he raised his glance, he realized that the Spirit must have brought him to a cemetery. Gravestones filled the snowy landscape and reached till the horizon. Amsterdam noticed that he has clashed against yet another gravestone. It was simple, grey Granite, probably too simple for a gravestone, cut into a skew, asymmetrical rectangle. Unlike some older gravestones in the distance, this gravestone didn't look like it stood on the cemetery for too long. Amsterdam read the engraving of the gravestone in front of him. His guts froze to ice, and he immediately felt his heart slip into his feet. His lungs failed to breathe. He felt like the ground being pulled away beneath his feet and everything around him seems to spin. Onto that gravestone stood...

...his own name...

It lacked a date of death but came with an additional engraving: "Solstice Eve failed to heal his soul over many years. This year, Solstice Eve has failed to heal his disease..."

"No!", Amsterdam exclaimed, "This can't be!". Suddenly, he felt the pain of his illness pulsing in his body again which consumed his body like a raging fire, threatening to shatter every single cell of his body. An agonizing stroke of pain swallowed him, and then another. It wouldn't stop. Tears ran down Amsterdam's face. The pain was so unbearable and strong, for Amsterdam, it felt like his body was splitting apart and his soul was bursting into a hundred pieces. Amsterdam collapsed onto the ground. Everything was spinning around him. His surroundings turned into a homogenous grey mass. His head hit the hard surface of the gravestone and he failed to feel his limbs anymore. "S-Spirit! I don't want to die!", Amsterdam yelled, "I don't want this to happen! Is it too late? I haven't celebrated Solstice Eve yet!" Just at this moment, Amsterdam's body entirely shattered, and he felt his thousand pieces of dust spreading across the cemetery.

Amsterdam jolted out of his bed. His fur was entirely soaked with sweat, and he felt the cozy mattress of his familiar, comfortable bed under his body, the soft pillow under his head and the weight of his fluffy, now sweaty blanket above him. He clenched his hands tightly onto the blanket which immediately got soaked by his sweat. "S...Spirit?", Amsterdam exclaimed through the room, "Spirits?" There was no response besides of the whistle of the wind outside. Excessively, rubbing his limbs and his face, he quietly whispered, "I'm alive. I'm still alive. It's...it's not too late, right?" Amsterdam quivered. He frantically turned around and more sweat ran from his forehead. Amsterdam heavily panted, flickering with his eyes, quickly scanning his surroundings just to realize that he was lying in his cozy bed in his well-known room again. It was still dark, and no single monster soul could be seen outside. Amsterdam's eyes immediately wandered to the grandfather's clock on the wall and then checked the calendar standing onto his working desk. December the 24th, 7:00 a.m. "It's not too late!", Amsterdam jumped up. "The stores will be open right now!", he loudly exclaimed, "It's not too late!" With these words, Amsterdam quickly grabbed a bag from the cloak stand and rushed outside.

"I must not waste a minute!", he yelled, rushing through the snowy streets with the bag tightly clung in his hands. He stormed into the convenient store and nearly knocked off an employee. Amsterdam halted, turned to the now grumpy looking employee, and cheerfully exclaimed, "Merry Solstice Eve, Sir!" The employee rolled his eyes, scratched his head, and mumbled unpleasantly, "Always those late customers", before going on with his chores.

Chapter 5: An Ending

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It was evening. It was dark outside and colorful lights glowed up every house near and far. The family Amsterdam has already gathered under the merrily decorated pine tree beneath the soothing flickering fire of the chimney. Suddenly, the door got slammed open and Asriel rushed into the living room. He was carrying heavy, colorful bags in both his hands. On his head, he wore a frilly, shimmering headband with two wobbling, green glittering, pine tree shapes. There was another holly leaf attached onto his black sweater. "Happy holidays!", Asriel restlessly exclaimed. According from his exhaustion, he must have run for quite a while. Five pairs of surprised eyes widely stared at him. Tijs and Levi dropped their jaws. Mila, who was previously sitting at Vajèn's lap, insecurely grabbed Vajèn's arm, leaned upon her shoulder and defensively hid her face. "Asriel?", Vajèn exclaimed in disbelief. "What is HE doing here?", Levi snorted and crossed his arms.

Asriel walked over to Mila and gently tapped her shoulder. "Mila, this is for you", he said and handed a small, but lovely packaged present box over to Mila, "Merry Solstice Eve." Mila shyly looked up and took the gift box. Hesitantly, she pulled at the shining, gold ribbon and slowly unwrapped the present. It's revealed to be a toy set consisting of various strategy games. Mila's eyes sparkled. Her mouth formed a big, genuine smile. "This is EXACTLY what I wished for Solstice Eve!", Mila happily exclaimed. She rushed to Asriel and embraced him. "Thank you!", Mila shouted, "Thank you!" "That's exactly the present I was searching for Mila the entire time", Vajèn whispered, still not believing what she was seeing. "Yup, and that's not all", Asriel replied and freed himself from Mila's embrace. He bowed down and revealed a shiny, brand-new sleigh from the bag. "I heard that the old sleigh broke, so I bought you a new one", Asriel said and dropped the sleigh in front of Tijs and Levi. Fascinated, the two boys were all over it. Carefully, they investigated every part of the beautiful, wooden sleigh. "Just make sure not to break this one too soon", Asriel added and chuckled. "Hold on a minute. So...", Tijs interfered, skeptically squinting up to Asriel while both his hands still rested upon the sleigh, "You bought this sleigh just for us?" Asriel nodded smilingly. "Thank you...I guess", Tijs said confusedly. He quickly averted his glance from Asriel and focused onto the new sleigh again.

Asriel reached in his bag once again and pulled out a third item. It was a huge, cozy-looking, self-knitted stocking jam packed with all sorts of goods. Upon the stocking, there was a note with the word "Vajèn" artistically written onto it. Asriel gave Vajèn the stocking and said, "Merry Solstice Eve, Vajèn." Vajèn glanced at her own, empty sock hanging over the chimney and looked back at the fully filled stocking she received from Asriel. Tears emitted from her eyes. Quivering, she pulled Asriel closer to her and tightly embraced him as tears kept running down her face and dripped onto Asriel's shoulder. "Don't cry, Mama", Mila quietly squealed, walked over to Vajèn, and lightly petted her mother's shoulder. Vajèn didn't respond. "Sometimes, people cry out of joy", Tijs explained and sat down onto the sleigh, "Or when they experience any other strong emotion." "So, what kind of emotion is Mom experiencing right now?", Levi asked irritated. Tijs shrugged, "I don't know. Anyway, why don't we go out and test our cool, brand-new sleigh?" "Yeah!", Levi excitedly exclaimed and abruptly jumped up. Mila on the other side calmly shook her head and pointed at her toy collection. "I'm already playing with his", she said and waved her hand into door direction, "You two go." With these words, the two boys took the sleigh and stormed off the house while Mila sat down and occupied herself with her gift.

After a while, Vajèn let go of Asriel but still stared at him with wet eyes and opened jaw, unable to find her words in the shock. "You're doing so much for your family just for make this one day memorable for them. I made this stocking for you to give you some recognition for your endless

efforts”, Asriel said. He clung his left arm onto his right shoulder and looked ashamed onto the ground. “I am sorry that I didn’t appreciate your efforts sooner. Or this holiday”, he went on with a significantly quieter voice. Mila surprisingly halted her playing and glanced up to him. “I didn’t see how important Solstice Eve is. I am very sorry for letting my past trauma manifest in my present and determine my future. I know, this isn’t much I can provide...”, Asriel raised his head again and faintly smiled, “but I hope this will make everything you work on worth it.” “I...”, Vajèn stuttered.

She gently petted her nephew’s head. Her hand then wandered down and stroke his soft, left cheek. Asriel smiled. Vajèn faintly smiled back. Tears threatening to emit from her eyes again. “I’m just so glad you decided to come today”, Vajèn cried, “And I cannot be gladder than now.” In this moment, Mars returned from the kitchen and held a pot filled with food into the air. Merrily, he exclaimed, “Asriel, do you want to eat anything? Since Mila refused to eat her brussels sprouts, there is enough left for you.” Mila instantly frowned at Mars who has burst into laughter, but Asriel simply nodded and stepped over to Mars. “I guess I can eat something”, he replied. The entire family laughed. Asriel smiled.

After today, the sun will rise again, and Amsterdam knew that. From this day on, Amsterdam’s sickness got better day for day. After he has entirely recovered, he never got sick ever again. The three Spirits of Solstice Eve spared him as well and didn’t bother to visit him anymore. Amsterdam’s soul shined the brightest among all monsters and lighted up the entire Underground with merry and hope. From then on, Amsterdam never skipped a single Solstice Eve celebration. No matter how small or insignificant things might be, the joy that cured Amsterdam’s soul felt indescribable. Year for year, Amsterdam strived for a better future for his kind, for his family and for himself without withdrawing him from his loved ones. He has finally seen the sun rise again. Until his dream of a better future comes true, Amsterdam was certain that...

“...he will survive”, Asriel read and closed the novel, “The End.”

The children already looked too tired to cheer. Some of them have fallen asleep, while others were leaning against the wall and looking upon the storytellers with heavy eyelids. A young woman entered the room. “Hello children, time to go home again”, the woman greeted the children in a friendly tone, “How was your day with Asriel?”

“It was fantastic!”, a girl replied and rushed towards the woman. Tired yet excited, she pointed at the four storytellers and exclaimed with glowing eyes, “Not only one, not two, but FOUR kind monsters told us a magical tale about Solstice Eve, and we learned so much!” “Four?”, the eyes of the woman sparked up confusedly. She followed the little girl’s glance and Chara waved back at her.

“Exactly”, Asriel said and chuckled, “I decided to read the children a tale. My friends heard of this and decided to join, so why don’t we all contribute into the story?”

“WE EVEN DECIDED TO ADJUST A FEW DETAILS BUT EVENTUALLY, WE ENDED UP MAKING OUR OWN VERSION OF THE SOLSTICE EVE’S TALE”, Papyrus exclaimed, “I MUST SAY, IT WAS ANYTHING BUT BORING!”

“It certainly was a beautiful tale about Solstice Eve to tell children”, Chara added, “I agree with Papyrus. It was interesting, nothing that I have ever done before.”

"also it was cool of you guys to include me. as the spirit of solstice eve's not determined yet to come, i had a ton of things to show amsterdam about the future", Sans said and smirkingly winked, "a skele-ton."

"Amsterdam? The Spirit of Solstice Eve's not determined yet to come?", the woman confusedly shuttered. Then, a smile appeared onto her face, and she said chuckling, "I guess you kids have a lot to tell me when we're on our way back to town, huh?"

The children nodded. One boy in the back yawned and said, "Probably not now. The story was so long, it got me tired." "Me too", another kid said and also yawned, "but it was such a wonderful story! I guess it's my favorite Solstice Eve story by far!"

"*You only know this one, kid*", Chara kindly interfered. The kid briefly looked down and laughingly admitted, "Yeah right." Tiredly, they closed their eyelids but snapped into the air the next second. Their eyes were sparkling, and they exclaimed, "But you can tell us more Solstice Eve stories next year!" "*Sure thing*", Chara said, turned to the others and winked, "*But only if we're doing it together, right?*"

"OF COURSE, CHARA!", Papyrus happily agreed, "EVERYTHING IS ALWAYS MORE FUN WHEN WE'RE DOING IT TOGETHER! RIGHT, SANS?"

Papyrus punched into Sans' shoulder. Sans quickly nodded and mumbled, "i agree."

"Oh my gosh, that'll be so cool!!", the kid exclaimed. "Then, we can tell you some Christmas stories in exchange!", the girl from before yelled excitedly, "There are endless Christmas stories, we can go on like forever!"

It didn't take long for the children to gain their mental energy back. Soon enough, they frolicked through the entire room, screaming joyfully, jumping up and down while frantically waving their hands into the air. "How about another story, now?", a boy loudly screamed. Another boy pulled on Asriel's arm and jumped up and down, shouted, "Yeah, that'll be so cool!!"

Asriel pulled his arm away and kindly petted the boy's soft-blond hair. "Not now", he patiently said, "Mrs. Gonzalez already came to pick you little sprouts up. Next year, there will be plenty more stories to tell."

"Yeah, that's true", Mrs. Gonzalez replied. She quickly cleared her throat and waved her wrist towards her body to demonstrate the children to gather round. "Children, come! We need to hurry if we don't want to miss the train", she exclaimed. The children immediately rushed towards Mrs. Gonzalez.

One by one, they said "Goodbye" to the four storytellers before vanishing behind Mrs. Gonzalez and rushing out into the beautiful, snowy streets. "what now?", Sans casually asked after Mrs. Gonzalez and the children were gone. Chara shrugged, "*I honestly don't know. Guess we can do anything we want to, now.*"

"*Look, guys!*", Chara exclaimed and pointed out the window where big, white snowflakes floated down from the sky and gently landed onto the ground, covering the world into a thick blanket of snow. "*It has been snowing for quite a while since we were telling that story to the children. Perhaps, we can go out and have a nice time in the snow!*"

Sans agreeably nodded. "That's a great idea!", Asriel exclaimed. Only Papyrus shook the head and frowned, "IT'S ALWAYS SO COLD OUTSIDE, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT'S

SNOWING. AT TEMPERATURES LIKE THESE, I'M GETTING ONE FROSTBITE AFTER ANOTHER. NYEH!!!" "welp, of course you can also stay inside while we're having fun outside, bro", Sans casually replied.

With an arm swing, Sans slammed the door open and stepped outside. "See you later, Papyrus, if you decide to drop by after all", Chara said smilingly and followed Sans outside, waving with their hand at Papyrus. Papyrus squinted at Sans and Chara and replied in displeasure, "I WILL BETTER STAY INSIDE AND FETCH ANOTHER CUP OF HOT CHOCOLATE, WHICH WILL WARM ME UP COMPARED TO THE FROSTY SNOW OUTSIDE!"

"No problem, Papyrus! See you later!", Asriel exclaimed and left the room to run after Chara and Sans. Outside through the opened door, Papyrus could hear Asriel excitedly yelling, "Who's ready for a snowball fight?"

"SNOWBALL FIGHT?", Papyrus surprisingly repeated. With a risen hand, he loudly exclaimed, "NOT WITHOUT ME!"

With these words, Papyrus rushed outside. Immediately, he got a snowball thrown right into his face. Irritated, he wiped the snow off his face and glanced into the round. "WHO INITIATED THIS FIGHT?"

Asriel quickly pointed at Chara. Chara pointed at Sans and Sans pointed at Asriel. In the meanwhile, Papyrus formed three snowballs and threw one at each of them. At this point, the snowball fight has officially begun.

If this isn't Solstice Eve, I don't know what it is. Some of you might call it Christmas, but isn't it all the same? Right, everything which matters is this merry festival of warmth and compassion that warms up every monster's and every human's soul and fills the air with magic. Hopefully, this little story has warmed up your soul as well. Just remember one thing, before you go: No matter how you're planning to celebrate Christmas, Solstice Eve, or any other holiday this year, all that matters is having a nice time with your loved ones and yourself. Only then may the magic embrace in your hearts.

THE END.