Secretly Yours

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Secretly Yours

by Melda Burke

Summary

Red gets you as a roommate for his wallet's convenience and ends up liking you a bit too much. One day, you're late coming home from work, so he decides to search your room for clues as to why. What he finds catapults you both into an awkward, tsundere dance around emotions.
Sans growled deep in his throat. His rings clacked against the glass of the coffee table beside him as he repeatedly tapped his fingers in an anxious, impatient rhythm. His eye lights flashed toward the clock. Twenty-five minutes past the hour and you still weren’t home. It wouldn’t have bothered him at all, if it weren’t for the fact that your commute never took longer than ten minutes.

When the monsters broke the barrier, Red’d finally put his foot down concerning Boss’s controlling behavior. He even got his own apartment, but it turned out that racism equals unequal pay and he was unable to easily foot the bill of rent for the place, despite juggling two jobs. So, he’d begrudgingly set about getting a (semi-illegal, considering his place was a one-bedroom) roommate. You had been the only one who’d answered the ad who he could somewhat stand. You were quiet, respectful of alone-time and personal space, plus you barely came out of your pseudo-room (which was converted out of the small area intended to be a laundry room). He wasn’t entirely surprised to learn you had a mini-fridge, a microwave, and a camper’s stove in there, and so what if he’d peeked that one time you left the door open. It was his apartment in the first place, so he’d deserved to know.

He played absently with the phone in his pocket, but remembered he didn’t have your number. Not that he would have called, anyway. What would he have said? Ask you where the hell you were and demand you come home? Nope, that would make it look like he cared; which he definitely did not. He just needed to make sure, if you were dead, he wouldn’t be implicated. Not that he was afraid you were dead. You were probably just working late.

You kept a work calendar on the inside of your door, which he knew about, but had never cared to look at. He could check if you were working late tonight, and if you weren’t…he stopped with his hand on the knob. What if you weren’t working late? A thousand possibilities ran through his skull, and he jerked the door open too hard out of sheer temper. He ground his teeth together as he ran the tip of his index finger down to the correct date. No overtime, no shift change…today was supposed to be a normal workday for you. “C’mon, you idiot.” He growled under his breath. At this rate, he’d have to search your room for clues. “Where the fuck are ya?”

You were a neat freak, neater even than Papyrus had been, to the point where he knew he’d have to be surreptitious about his clue-hunt. You’d notice it if anything was out of place, he was sure, and he didn’t want to give you any ideas or expectations. He also didn’t want to disturb the comfortable peace you two had going on; the whole ‘you–do-you-and-I’ll-do-me’ thing was really working for him. He could admit that he didn’t feel like fucking that up.

Your twin bed was lodged at the far end of the room, as near to the exposed metal of the boiler as you’d dared to go, and was neatly made. The mint-green blanket was partially tucked over your pillows, which were dressed in chocolate-brown covers that matched your sheets. A few stuffed animals were perched atop your pillows, including the one he’d grumpily shoved into your arms on your birthday last month, and now that stuffed black cat seemed to be glaring back at him as a rebuke for his invasion of your privacy.
Your laptop was situated neatly under your bed and plugged into the outlet between your bed and the painted, Ikea bookcase he’d helped you build because, damn it, you were shit with tools and he didn’t wanna have to take you to the goddamned hospital again. He picked through the books with his eyes and saw nothing that indicated the cause of your absence, so he moved on.

You weren’t entirely an introvert by choice; he knew it was mostly because you were new to Ebottcity. You were there for the work opportunities; fresh out of college, and ready to starve between low-paying internship jobs before you finally gained a satisfactory amount of experience for your resume to get a second glance. Still, if he didn’t know better, he would’ve said you were avoiding going out of your room entirely. The camper’s stove, of course, is the best proof of that.

“We have a kitchen, stupid.” He rolled his eyes. The stove sat on the microwave, which was on your three-drawer nightstand that served as your cooking space. He opened one drawer after the other; inside were spices and a few food items that didn’t need to be refrigerated, plates and silverware, and cleaning supplies, in that order. He even checked the mini-fridge and found himself somewhat impressed at how you’d managed to fit so much stuff in there. No wonder you barely had anything on your side of the big fridge in the kitchen.

A passing thought crossed his mind; did you feel unwelcome in the apartment? He realized he wasn’t exactly the easiest monster to get along with, but he’d done his best to appear accommodating, which was saying a lot. He’d even clean up his messes in the common areas most of the time. Should he get a mat for the bathroom or something? He’d noticed you took a lot of baths and spent a lot of time in there, so maybe he should put effort into sprucing it up a bit as a gesture of goodwill and tolerance between roommates?

He continued to snoop through your things. A stack of plastic storage tubs caught his eye and he reached for the one at the very top. He pulled the top off to find a large number of yarns in a variety of colors and thicknesses, as well as a few looms and hooks. He hadn’t known you were a knitter, but it made sense. The next bin contained similar supplies; only this one seemed to contain sewing and embroidery stuff. He huffed in frustration as the last box also turned out to be a dud; nothing except a bunch of beads, a pair of jewelry pliers, clasps, and what-not. He carefully replaced the tubs.

An hour had passed by now, and he was on the verge of breaking something. He was running out of places in your room to search and he was beginning to suspect he’d find nothing. Your desk was the only place he hadn’t checked. He pulled out your chair and sat in it with a contemplative, irritable sneer twisting his boney features. The desk was nothing fancy; it was another Ikea purchase and the reason he’d learned to never trust you with tools in the first place. He ripped open the first drawer and found several cheap notebooks, along with a few pencils, erasers, and pens. The next contained more of the expected; post-it notes, a stapler and staple remover, a hole-punch, color-coding stickers, a calculator, et cetera. The final drawer, however, required a key to open, but that wasn’t a problem for him. He gathered a small amount of magic on the tip of his finger and worked it around inside the lock until he heard a click.

“Whatchya got t’ hide, doll?” He murmured as he pulled the drawer open.

His mouth dropped open in surprise. He’d been expecting a diary or some other girly shit, but it was just a framed picture; a picture he only vaguely remembered you taking with him on your birthday. In the pic, you were clutching that damned stuffed cat like a lifeline and he was looking away from the camera with a blood-red blush staining his cheekbones.

Red let himself recline a bit in your chair as he turned the frame over and popped the picture out. On the back, there was the date and a small note; 25th birthday w/Red. It had been written in red ink and
his name had been followed by a tiny, scarlet heart. He stared slack-jawed at the little heart for a few heartbeats. He shouldn’t read too much into it, women did that little heart thing all the time, didn’t they? But the doubts he had couldn’t restrain a shit-eating grin from growing on his face.

He quickly replaced the picture, locked the drawer, and all but leaped out of your chair before shoving it back in place. He shut your door behind him, made his way back to the living room, and flopped down on the couch to wait. He almost didn’t care that you’d been gone so long because of the opportunity he’d been presented. Almost.
Women And Wooing

Chapter Summary

WARNING: ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE ARE MENTIONED IN THIS CHAPTER!

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who has reviewed, given kudos, bookmarked, or even just clicked on this story out of mild interest. I very much appreciate how much you love the story. Also, if enough of you are *ahem* interested, I'm considering making an unabashed PWP ending to this story, which will be optional, of course, so that those of you who aren't looking for that won't have to avoid the story altogether. The rating will go up with that addition, though, so just a word of warning in that regard.

“Where the hell’ve you been?” He grouched at you from his usual place; lounged like a cat across the couch. “Been outta my skull tryin’ to figure it out.”

You snorted and hung up your purse. “The gym, silly. I tried to tell you this morning, but I guess you’re not capable of comprehending a proper sentence before you’ve at least had your second cup of coffee.” You flopped down on top of his feet and smirked at him when he cursed.

“The fuck? Someone tell ya you’re fat or somethin’? You don’t need to go to the fuckin’ gym.” He decided to ignore your slight about his caffeine addiction. “You tell me who said you’re fat…now.” He demanded.

“Relax, Red. I just felt like I should start actually going now that I’m not getting all my exercise running up around trying to get to classes on time.” You leaned your head back with an exhausted sigh. “How’s your day been?”

“Oh, fuck all.” He grumbled. “First, I had to deal with shitheads at work, then I waste time watchin' the clock thinkin' my roommate's lyin' dead in a gutter. No, I had a FUCK-tastic day, thanks.”

“Relatively good then.” You translated with a slight smile. Usually, he ranted for hours about the stupidity of his customers at his various jobs. It wasn't like him to be a worry-wort. Maybe he actually did have a pretty shitty day and you'd exacerbated it by being late. It wasn't your fault; you'd tried to tell him about it before you left for work that morning, but he was rarely capable of putting on a shirt before his second cup of coffee, let alone comprehending a conversation.

He grumbled out an unintelligible reply before practically running into the kitchen to pour himself a shot. You followed at a slow, even pace. Your muscles felt scalded from your workout and you didn’t feel like straining them with quick movements. He slammed the empty shot glass down after downing it in one gulp. "Gimme your number."

“What?” You balked at his request. What was up with him? He absolutely hated calling or texting
anyone; he pretty much only owned a phone because of the convenience of portable access to the internet. Had you freaked him out to the point where he felt this was necessary? Perhaps, you should start leaving post-it notes every time you changed your plans, just in case. He came from a pretty rough place, so maybe he was used to expecting the worst out of any situation and you should be more considerate of that.

He interrupted your thoughts with a gravelly, growling reply. “I said, gimme your number. So, next time I won’t have to consider calling 911 if you decide to ‘go to the gym’.” He emphasized the last bit with a hiss. He gulped down his alcohol and was quick to measure himself out another.

“I’m sorry I worried you.” You bit your lip nervously and fidgeted with the edge of your shirt.

“Whatever, just gimme the damn number.” He snarled and tossed the shot glass carelessly into the sink.

“Sure, if it means that much.” You rattled off your digits to him and he punched them into his phone. ”But...are you okay? You’ve gone from zero to sixty in, like, three seconds and I just want to know if we’re still cool. I swear I told you this morning that I’d be late getting back tonight, but I’m still sorry I’ve upset you.” You flashed him an apologetic smile. "I don't want my favorite skeleton to get himself too worked up every time I decide to work out."

The tension in his shoulders lifted a bit and he squeezed the top of his nasal bones. “I’m your favorite?”

You winked. “Well, considering you’re the only skeleton I know…” You pushed at his shoulder playfully when his face fell, though he tried desperately to hide it. “Of course, you’re my favorite, you numbskull! You’re my favorite everything."

“Heh...good one.” He gave you a wry, half-smile. He took a breath and let it out slowly. You noticed that he was eyeing you up and down, like he was trying to figure something out. His eyes locked on to your hand and he frowned. "You never wear jewelry. What's the story behind that?"

He was talking about the thin, faux gold band inlaid with a green crystal that encircled the middle finger of your left hand. You wiggled your digits playfully at him. “I like how yours looked, so I saved up for a little bling of my own. That’s my secondary excuse for being late today. Hope you don’t mind I copied you. It’s not real, but-“ You shrugged, uncaring. “I like it.”

“Gold looks good on ya.” To make a point, he slid a ring off his own index finger, grabbed your hand, and let it fall down your finger. It was about three and a half sizes too big, but he didn’t seem to care. He turned your hand this way and that, admiring how it shone brightly against your skin under the florescent kitchen light.

The ring was blocky, and you couldn’t make a proper fist with it on, but it was still pretty cool to look at. There was some kind of red stone in the setting, maybe garnet or ruby, and it was admittedly a bit gaudy; not something you’d have the guts to wear. You took it off and tried to give it back to Red, but he shoved your hand back. “Keep it. Looks better on you, anyway.” He said gruffly.

“Seriously? No. This must’ve cost you two months rent, at least.”

“If I say keep it, you keep it. I’ve got a few more.” He bristled at your refusal and showed you the rest of his fingers, each one circled by a thick band of gold. “I’ve got another set in my room, too. Don’t worry ‘bout it, for fuck’s sake.”

You gnawed at your lip until an idea popped into your head. You zipped by Red, setting the bottle
down as you did so, and ran into your room. He watched as you dug through those plastic storage
tubs and brought out a length of black cord, secured the ends to the gold-toned clasp by smashing a
couple of crimp beads with your pliers, and slipped his ring onto the cord. You twisted the screw-in
clasp to secure it around your neck, and then trotted back out to show him. “Thanks, Red! I mean,
you really shouldn’t have, but…thanks!” You babbled on. “I’ll get it re-sized as soon as…Red?”

He was staring intently at the ring around your neck. You’d cut the cord without measuring it first, so
it hung a bit too long and had found a home in your cleavage. You followed his gaze and glanced
down. “Like I said…looks better on you.” He crossed his arms before turning his head away and
gritting his teeth like he was in pain. Sweat formed on his forehead; his breathing was now heavy
and he was blushing like mad.

You cocked your head inquisitively to the side. He’d never acted this weird in the entire six months
you’d known him. “Are you sick or something?” Was it possible for monsters to literally worry
themselves sick? You knew emotions could do as much as determine a monster's death, which was
why monsters were both infinitely more powerful and infinitely more weak than humans, but, then
again, you were still learning about monsters. After all, it had only been eight months since the
monsters announced their presence to the humans by breaking the ancient barrier and clawing their
way to freedom.

That got his attention because he whipped his head back around to pin you with a confused glare.
“N-no.” His fists balled up, while his eyes kept flicking between the ring and your face. “You…like
my style, huh?” He finally managed to ask after a few tense moments of silence. His eyes never left
the swaying gold ring, and his tongue swiped a few times over his teeth as if he were trying hard to
process his thoughts into words.

“Uh…yeah…”

“Hold on a sec.” He vanished from the kitchen, but re-materialized only half a second later with an
older, more worn version of the jacket he always wore. “Put it on.” He ordered firmly.

You weren’t sure where he was going with this, but you followed his command because it was
getting a bit chilly now that most of the heat you’d worked up at the gym was starting to fade. You
slipped your arms into the jacket and watched bemusedly as his sockets widened and he opened his
mouth in a vain effort to form words. Your fingers didn’t reach the cuffs of the sleeves, so, when you
reached up to scratch at your head, half of the sleeve flopped over your hand. “Um…Red?

“That’s yours, too.” He finally managed to say. His voice sounded like he’d gargled rocks, and it
made a shiver run down your spine. He circled you like a shark in chummed water. On his third trip
around, something inside his eyes seemed to break; his grin had gone feral as he eyed you head to
toe. “I look pretty fuckin’ good on you.” He grabbed your shoulders hard.

“Red, what are you doing?!” His sporadic moods were seriously concerning you. He’d never acted
so unstable, despite his broody attitude.

“Nothin’.” He denied, even as he lovingly fingered the cord around your neck. You tried to struggle
out of his grip. He was starting to scare you. Red had never scared you before. Sure, he was usually
a temperament guy, but you’d never pegged him as the type to hurt people without a reason (even
if the reason was often morally questionable). He wasn’t exactly hurting you, though, he was simply
holding your shoulders to keep you in place. His sharp fingertips found a knot in your muscle, which
caused you to hiss through your teeth. “You need to relax.” He prodded further along the tendons
that led up your neck. “Being wound up like a piano wire isn’t good for humans; ‘stress kills’ and all
that jazz. Why don’t ya go have a hot shower, I’ll mix us up a few drinks, and we can settle in.
Maybe order a pizza for dinner. Whaddya say, angel?”
It wasn’t unusual to spend an evening with him, sharing drinks and enjoying quiet companionship. He did not possess a talkative personality, and that had always been perfectly alright with you, but he seemed to be keen on conversation today for some odd reason. He let you go and you went on to silently contemplate his strange, baffling behavior all the way through your shower.

When you returned, you almost couldn’t believe what you saw. He must have taken a shortcut to the store while you were cleaning up because there were several grocery bags littering the kitchen floor. Your gaze happened to land on a sandwich bag packed full of bud, which was sitting on the counter in plain view and that gave you a good reason to pause. He didn’t smoke it that often, he much preferred a flavored cigar over a weed cigarette. You noticed he’d picked up a new pack of his favorite cherry cigars, too, but why would he pick up so much pot? You didn’t smoke, so it certainly wasn’t meant for sharing.

He’d always been courteous about it before; keeping the fan on and the window open if he couldn’t go outside, and he rarely smoked with you around to begin with. He probably was just low and arranged a deal before heading back. He had some solid connections with people of dubious moral character, but you had a distinct feeling he was safer while making those transactions than most other people. After all, most humans didn’t have the guts to go toe-to-toe with any monster, let alone this monster in particular. He was, after all, well-recognized as the third most powerful monster to have emerged from the Underground. He’d never bragged to you about his power, but you’d learned it from an article a while back, and the fact had stuck like glue in your head. You supposed it should have alarmed you, but it actually did the polar opposite; you felt safer with him around.

“You wanna go ahead an’ order the pie while I put this shit away?” He had an unlit cigar clenched between his teeth.

You pulled up the delivery app on your phone, placed your order, and set about helping him put the groceries away. The ‘groceries’ being three cases of alcoholic root beer, two tubs of vanilla ice cream, two bottles of cream-liquor, an apple pie, cherry-infused vodka, baker’s chocolate and a small variety of actual food items. It was an odd mix, but he was the one that knew about these things. After everything was put away, you settled for watching him measure, scoop, pour, and shake out a couple of floats. He finished them off with a smirk and a garnish of shaved chocolate.

You’d had no idea he could cook…if mixology even counted as a true culinary skill, that is. He handed you a foamy, creamy cup full of his creation. He gently bumped your cup with his. “To bad decisions and good memories.”

You savored the concoction for a moment before taking a larger sip. As it turns out, Red had a talent for this and you enthusiastically told him so. He led the way back to the couch, so you both could wait for dinner to get there. The pizza arrived on time; hot, heavenly, and greasy enough to pair well with the root beer floats. He made more of an effort to keep a conversation going the entire time. “I’m gonna whip up some brownies after we finish this up.” He grinned wolfishly, so that his golden fang glittered in the low light emitted by the television. “You wanna try one?”

You’d thought hard for a moment. “Don’t you usually go for the super strong stuff? I don’t know if I’d be able to handle that.”

He waved dismissively. “I’ll cut you one a quarter the size of mine. I’m here for ya, you’ll be fine.” His reassurances did the trick because, honestly, you were curious and weed was definitely no worse than alcohol as far as these things go. You trusted his experience and, if there was anyone in the world you’d allow yourself to be high around it would be him.

Your necklace caught the light as you shifted positions. His eye lights zeroed in on the little glint of gold, and your breath hitched in your throat as you suddenly realized what this was about. You
swallowed hard because *no*, he had no interest in you. You were probably like a little sister to him or something like that by now, and that’s why he was being so sweet. He didn’t want a bookish, scrawny, small-town girl. He’d want some sort of femme fatale-type like Morticia Addams or Laura Croft. He definitely had no interest in a self-conscious homebody like you. This was wishful thinking, this was you latching onto a gesture of friendship and twisting it completely out of context.

You swirled the melted cream at the bottom of your cup around and tried to push away the mild sting of heartbreak. You’d always had a thing for the bad boys; motorcycles, black leather, sex, drugs, and rock’n’roll, but you’d never found anyone who pressed that button harder than Red. Sure, he was about as cuddly as a cactus most of the time, but his left canine wasn’t the only bit of him that was made of gold. You sighed forlornly before closing your eyes in defeat; why were you torturing yourself with hope?
“So, is your nickname Red because your magic is red or is red just your favorite color?” You were lying on his lap, and completely blitzed out of your mind from a single sliver of his brownies. “Did I mention you’re a fantastic cook? ‘Cuz you are. Which is a huge relief because I’m shit in the kitchen.”

Red snickered into his hand. “Course I am, I’m the one who had to put out the potato you accidentally lit on fire, remember?” He could still clearly recall how the poor, torched spud was reduced to little more than a crumbling coal by your hand. “And I really dunno why people started calling me that, but I guess it just fits.”

“If it fits, it ships.” You nodded sagely.

“Fuckin’ A, babe, is there even anything left up there?” He chuckled and jokingly poked at your temple, which made you whine and cover your eyes like a little, anime waifu. “I should’ve set up a camera, this is priceless.”

“It’s a Kodak moment.” You mumbled, and that sent him into another fit of laughter. “Ugh, don’t laugh, you did this to me.”

He put up his hands defensively. “Hey, I just made the brownies. You’re the one who said ‘yes’.”

“Not fair,” You protested. “I’d say yes to anything you wanted to give me.” You pulled your head up from its home on the armrest and leaned against his shoulder.

His mouth went dry as he stared down into your eyes. Fuck, what was he supposed to say to something like that? A thrill shot up his spine as he considered his options; go for it or stall and test the waters before he made his move. He chose the latter because, ultimately, he didn’t want to mess up his one chance. This was his only chance to have something his brother could never lay claim to. You hated Boss, judging from your cold exchanges with Papyrus whenever Red invited him over, so there was no overhanging threat that he’d try to steal you away like he’d made a point of doing with everyone and everything else in Red’s life.

Red snaked his fingers through the lightly frizzed waves of your hair and massaged your scalp as he thought things over. “You gettin’ sleepy, doll?” You muttered something into the fur of his jacket that he took for an affirmative answer, so he took a shortcut from the couch to your bed where you both could lay down more comfortably.

He had only a hint of a buzz, just enough to take the edge off his nerves, but he didn’t feel like disturbing you by getting up, so he reached out with his magic and brought the pan into your room. He bit down into another and saw you smiling up at him so sweetly he nearly choked. He beat his chest and coughed. “Somethin’ wrong?”

You shook your head shyly. “You just look so…happy.” You reached over and touched his mandible. “I’m happy that you’re happy, Red. I wish I could see you smile more often.”

“Don’t know what you’re talkin’ ‘bout.” He smirked. “I’m a bag of sunshine, toots.” A silly grin grew on your lips and, for some reason, that sight hit him harder than anything; you, with tousled hair and your pupils were blown wide, looking at him like he was actually worth a damn. Stars, he’d never wanted to kiss a woman more in his entire life, but he just turned his head up to stare at the ceiling.
No matter what, no one could take this night from him, and he’d kill the sorry son of a bitch, man or monster, who would dare to take you out of his arms right now. Murderous inclinations aside, he was feeling more confident by the minute. “Red?” He looked back down, surprised to see that you were frowning. “I want… I want to do something, but…” You worried your lip so hard that a minuscule drop of blood beaded in the corner of your mouth. “I’m terrified you’ll say ‘no’.”

He scoffed. “You could ask me to take a shortcut to the moon right now and I’d oblige. Whaddya want?”

You opened your mouth to say it, but then snapped it back shut. “You’ll hate me.” Your eyes were going shiny with unshed tears. “I shouldn’t.”

“Aww, not the waterworks.” He groaned. “Yer killin’ me over here. C’mom, ask me.” You fiddled with the zipper of his jacket indecisively before you appeared to gather your courage. You said it so quietly that he furrowed his brow and leaned in closer. “What was that, doll? Didn’t catch it.”

“K-kiss me?”

He felt like a professional linebacker had put a shoulder into his chest at full-speed, so great was his surprise. He caught the back of your nightshirt before you could run away in mortified dismay. “Where do ya think you’re goin’?” He pulled you back against his chest and wrapped his arms around your waist. An adorable blush had bled from your cheeks down to your neck and you tried to avert your eyes, but he corrected that by gently grabbing your chin, angling your head up and around to meet his eyes. “I think a kiss can be arranged.” He purred into your ear.

Your lips tasted like chocolate and cream, and he sorely desired to give in to the urge to turn you around to have a proper go at it, but he was supposed to be taking his time with this. He growled frustratedly into your mouth as he fought with himself. He sucked in a sharp breath through his nose when you answered with a moan of your own. He funneled every ounce of his self-control into pulling back. “I got a question for you, too, angel.” He rubbed his thumb over your bottom lip. “Wanna be my girl?” He winked. “I promise it’ll be a pretty sweet gig.”

“This isn’t happening.” You stated breathlessly. “I’m dreaming.”

“Angel, I know I’m a real dreamboat, but this is for real.” He dipped back down to teasingly nip at your lips.

You gave him a fake glare of annoyance. “You’re right. My dreams of you never involve puns.”

“Oh, so you dream about me, do ya?” He licked up the side of your neck just to feel you shudder. “Do tell.” He dragged the fabric of your shirt to the side with his teeth, so he could have free access to your skin. He left a trail of lovebites down your shoulder, but, just as he’d slipped his hand under your shirt, the front door of the apartment slammed open.

“BROTHER! I DEMAND TO HAVE A DISCUSSION WITH YOU!”

Both of you cursed at the same time. “Can it wait?” Sans shouted back through the door. “I’m kinda in the middle of somethin’ here!” Papyrus’s only reply was to pound heavily on your door. Red was fully regretting his choice to give Papyrus a spare key. “Damn it, FINE! Don’t get your little black briefs in a twist, I’ll be out in a sec.” This was working out better than he could’ve hoped, so of course he should’ve expected to get shafted one way or the other.

You side-stepped Red with a displeased expression and yanked open your door. “Red’s busy. He’ll get to you after he’s done with me.” You pulled the door shut right in Boss’s face. Your display of
temper didn’t phase Boss, unfortunately, because he went right back to knocking and shouting.

The door continued to shake hard with the force of Boss’s incessant knocks. “He’s gonna break the door down, angel.” He planted a wistful kiss on your forehead. “I’ll be right back. Keep the bed warm for me, alright?” He hated to see the disappointment in your eyes, but he wasn’t about to let his brother bust up his apartment. It wasn’t just the vandalism he was worried about; Boss could fairly easily end up hurting you if he thought you were in the way of one of his schemes.

And that’s when Red had an epiphany; his brother was trash. You weren’t safe within a ten-mile radius of him. Boss had been skipping in and out of jail lately, too, and Red didn’t want to bring that type of shit around his girl. Sure, Boss was his brother, but it had been a fuckin’ lifetime since he’d acted like it. It was time to let go. He straightened his collar and stuck his hands in his pockets. He finally had something going for him; he had a chance at some kind of future. This had to be the last time. “Sorry, bro.” He muttered to himself before shoving the door open hard enough to knock Boss on his ass. “Hiya, Boss. How ’bout we take this outside for a sec?”
You laid there in bed waiting for nearly two hours. At first, there’d been a lot of incomprehensible yelling (mostly Boss), followed by what sounded like a temper tantrum (also, probably Boss) before there was complete silence, which let you know Red had forced his brother into a shortcut to finish the fight somewhere else. You wrinkled your nose in distaste; Boss was always acting like a petulant, destructive child.

You’d come down from your high for the most part, but your thoughts were still a tad fuzzy and confused around the edges like tattered pieces of old paper. You sat up when you heard the door open and shut. Worry gnawed at your gut as you waited for Red to come back to bed. You let out a gasp when he stumbled inside; he was covered in fractures and nicks. Bone marrow was oozing out of a few of the deeper gouges and he was still clutching a flickering ball of crimson magic in his left hand.

“Red, oh god, what happened between you and Boss?!” You sprinted across the room to hook his arm around your shoulders.

“He got his smart little ass kicked, that’s what happened.” Red snarled through the pain was plain in his eyes. “I let him get in a few shots just to make ‘im feel better about it, but he’s not gonna be comin’ around anymore, sweetheart.”

“You dusted him?” You whispered in a horrified voice.

“Nah, got pretty close, but we’d never actually kill each other. That’s the closest thing to ‘brotherly love’ that I’ll ever get from him.” He stated bitterly. He let you help him to the bed, which more than likely meant he was in more pain than he was ever going to admit. He collapsed on it with an agonized groan. “Spoiled little brat really did a number on me.” He opened his arms for her. “Gonna come kiss me better, angel?” He let out a quiet, darkly-humored chuckle.

“I can’t believe you have the nerve to flirt with me when you’re like this!” You pursed your lips into a stern line.

“Ah,” He granted her a teasing smirk, “C’mon, sugar, I’ll be fine in a couple hours once I regenerate enough magic to heal myself.” He snagged your hand and yanked you down on top of him. “So much better already.” He bit down on your earlobe with just enough pressure to make you squirm. As vengeance, you turned your head to kiss him with a passion. “Mm, fuck, babe.” He mumbled
against your lips.

You pulled back with a sigh. “We should move to your bed.” He immediately perked up and you rolled your eyes, but a smile tugged your lips. “Not for what you’ve got in mind, you perv. There’s not enough room in mine for us both to get any quality sleep, and I want to stick around just in case any of these become worse.”

“You’re welcome in my bed any time for any reason.”

“You’re such a sleaze, Red.” But you were laughing all the same.

“Shut up, you love it.” He accused with a haughty grin. He made sure to grab the pan of remaining brownies and shrugged off your anxious glances at it. “Gimme a break, doll. It’ll help with the pain…and that asshole killed my buzz.”

He took your hand and, with only a second of delay, your familiar surroundings had been exchanged for his. As was to be expected, his room was dim; the only light came from a blood-red lava lamp on his dresser. His room was a catastrophe of dirty clothes, energy drink cans, and an ashtray containing a small mountain of butts. A few weights were shoved into a corner near his bed, which was a befuddled mess of crumpled black sheets. The comforter was shoved half-way down the bed and partially embedded into the tight space between the wall and his mattress. A leather instrument case containing a saxophone was propped up against the wall. “I didn’t know you played anything.”

He shrugged. “It’s just a hobby. I’m best with a sax, but I’ve messed around with axes, too.” He eased into bed, wincing as he did so, and tucked his hands behind his head. You were cautious in climbing into bed with him because you were afraid of jarring his injuries. You nestled your head into the thick cotton of his sweater. With every breath you took, the heady perfume of ash and cherries teased your nose.

He offered you another small bite of brownie, which you gratefully accepted. You ate it right out of his fingers and dared to flick your tongue out to lick his fingertips. He, in turn, captured your chin and stole a slow, languid kiss as retaliation.

He didn’t talk for a long time after that, but chose to close his eyes and hold you. Despite the fact that he was playing it cool, his poorly concealed malcontent indicated a brewing storm of emotion. In an attempt to calm him, you lightly stroked his cheek with the back of your hand. “When he finally matures a little, you can let him back into your life.”

“Maybe.” He grunted, his frown deepening with every minute that passed by. “I just…I raised ‘im, y’know?”

“Red, it’s not your fault he’s a piece of shit. He’s old enough to know what won’t fly with you, but he loves to push buttons. He’s too immature to understand or appreciate anyone.” You let your hand drift down to massage his sternum. “Trust me, he’ll figure things out one of these days, but probably not ‘til everyone else is fed up with his shit, too.” He sighed heavily and nodded, so you prodded him to get his attention again. “I never gave you an answer.” He arched an inquisitive eyebrow at you. “Red,” You grazed his lower jaw with your lips. “Yes.”

Changing the subject didn’t seem to have exactly the desired effect, because he lifted you from your spot beside him up to straddle his pelvis and then pulled you down nose-to-nasal-passage. “I’m not a good guy, angel.” He stopped you from interrupting by placing his right thumb over your mouth. “Listen, okay? Hear me out first. I’ve done some shit. I’ve seen some even worse shit than I’ve done. I’ve got more enemies than you’ve got hairs on your head. I wasn’t always…” He struggled hard to explain like a fly caught in a sticky, paper trap. “I wasn’t always as decent as I am now. I’m still no
white knight, but I can protect ya if you’re careful.” He pulled the ring up to eye level. “I’m gonna store a bit of magic in this. No matter where you are, it’ll take you on a shortcut back to me. It’ll only have enough juice for one, maybe two, uses before I’ll have to recharge it. I hope you won’t have to use it at all, but it’ll make me feel better knowin’ ya got somethin’ in your corner.” He made a fist around the ring, his hand glowed blindingly bright for a few seconds, and then he let the ring fall from between his fingers. The stone gleamed and gave off a mild, radiating heat like it had been lying in the summer sun for a while.

You didn’t know what to say. Red had always been so sure of himself, but he was looking quite leery all of a sudden. Whatever had been said between him and Boss must’ve struck a cord. He wasn’t fearful, per se, but he was clenching his jaw hard and he had a bruising grip on your hips like he was afraid someone would spirit you away if he dared to let go. “It’ll be okay, Red.” You forced your lips into a tiny smile. “I’ll be okay.”

His eyes were wild, unseeing, as his fingers dug into your flesh. “If anyone lays a finger on ya, I swear I’ll kill ‘em.” A hint of bloodlust flashed in his red eyes. His face had warped into something darker, uglier…demonic. “First, I’d dislocate every joint in their body, then I’d break every bone…” His voice had gone deeper and magic flared to life in his left eye. “Fill them full of little holes, strap ‘em to a board and leave them in a swamp to let the worms and flies eat them alive. I’m creative, sugar.” He bared his teeth and, for a second, you felt your heart stutter in its beat. You shifted in his lap and that’s what caught his attention. He swiped a finger over the fabric between your legs and it came away damp. “No fuckin’ way.” His golden fang gleamed as a grin replaced his twisted snarl. “Darlin’, you are perfect.” He hissed and licked the tip of his finger with relish. His gaze had gone from lusting for blood to sinfully-pure lust in a matter of seconds. “Stars, sugar, are you this wet for me just because I promised to rain hellfire down on a few assholes?” He chuckled, a sound which promised imminent pain and suffering to any who crossed him. “Maybe I should let you watch, if we get the chance.”

Your chest was heaving as you tried to calm your galloping heart. Your thoughts and blood were heated by boiling passion. For once, you’d lost your cool. “Your fault.” You closed your eyes as his hands ground your hips down on his. “How the hell do you make something terrible like that sound so…” You couldn’t even finish your sentence because he bucked his hips up like the frightful tease he was.

“Wasn’t tryin’ to, darlin’. That kink’s all on you, but tibia honest,” He laughed heartily while you choked on a groan. “I like that thought, too.”

“You’re awful.”

He winked mischievously, his previous brooding mood completely replaced by the Red she knew and adored. “You’ve got no idea, angel, believe me.”

You tried to pull off, but he had you stuck fast and it didn’t seem like any of your wriggling was helping matters, judging from his cat-like smirk. "Sans, you're hurt. We are not doing this now. We're going to sleep and that's final."

"Like hell we are." He lunged forward and caught the skin of your shoulder in his wickedly sharp teeth. Blood welled up from the shallow cut, which he eagerly lapped up. The stinging pain barely registered through the haze of pleasure. When he pulled away, droplets of magic dripped from his mouth down to his sweater and fizzled away. "Take a look, angel." You peered down at your shoulder. The skin had knitted itself back together over a small patch of scarlet magic. It smoldered like an ember had been implanted into your body. He took his left hand from your hip and gave the gentlest of taps to the mark. A tidal wave of pleasure washed over you, making you gasp aloud and
instinctively lurch forward with the force of it all. "I see I've hit a nerve with you, angel. You still feel like sleepin'?"

You took in a shaky breath to calm yourself. "We'll see what happens after you've healed up." His victorious grin was irksome, yet enticing. You half-halfheartedly swatted at his hands. "Down, boy."

He eyed you hungrily. "Woof."
I've given up on estimating the number of chapters...so...I guess I'll just write until I feel like I've reached a good place to end it! That could be next chapter or twelve chapters in the future, I really don't know. As long as you all keep encouraging me, I suppose I could manage. Thanks, as always, to every new reviewer, granter of kudos, or even those who just clicked on the story for the lulz.

And, like I said in the previous chapter, feel free to link any fanart or inspired works in the comments. I really don't mind. :D

White smoke billowed between Red’s teeth as he exhaled and watched the smoke become captured by the wind and roll away in the current of the brisk zephyr. Raindrops pitter-pattered on the metal roof of the building across the alley. He’d been exiled to the fire escape while you took care of housework in the travesty that was his room. It was, in truth, a disaster, but he wasn’t the one who cared. You were still uptight about the wounds he’d received in his minor dust-up with Boss and concerned the mess would interfere with his healing process.

Boss. He rolled the thick head of ash out before lifting the cherry stogie back up to its customary place on the left side of his mouth. Boss wasn’t going to be a problem for the foreseeable future, but Red’s mind lingered on his brother at this moment; the rain always made him wax nostalgic. He remembered so vividly now the days spent watching over his brother as Papyrus grew, changed, and transformed into a person Red hardly recognized these days. He could see him toddling around as a baby-bones with an adorable, pouty scowl. He recalled years of changing diapers, then pull-ups, working three jobs while straining to find time to raise his baby brother, and the multitudinous afternoons spent scaring off the bullies.

Pap was the bully these days, but it must have come to pass for some reason Red had overlooked. He’d done his damnedest to provide a good home for his brother after…after what happened in the lab. He forcefully shoved those memories to the back of his mind and returned to ruminating on his estranged sibling. Pap’d always leaned toward narcissism and bossiness, and Red could admit it hadn’t helped that he’d spoiled his brother rotten to make up for the lack of parents, money, and stability in their lives. He always knew he’d make a shitty role model, but he didn’t think he was all that bad. Definitely not bad enough for Pap to be running with bangers, playing cat-and-mouse with the aboveground authorities, and cooking up get-rich-quick schemes in the basements belonging to his drug-addled accomplices, but so he was. And that was that.

He heard the screechy hum of the vacuum through the wall and that turned his thoughts to you. He couldn’t believe his luck in finding the picture that kick-started the events of the past couple of days. Even the fact that he was healing slower than he’d anticipated couldn’t dampen the swell of satisfaction and pride that rose from deep within his soul. He’d mellowed in his old age; he knew he’d have never let someone get this close to him before that kid broke the barrier. Besides, there wasn’t much to fight over on the surface beyond the rabid competition in obtaining/maintaining a job. And, considering employers tended to look down on hires that got into fist-fights on the reg, he’d not gotten into so much as a barfight since stepping foot into the sunlit, grungy paradise that was Ebott City.
You were, hands down, the best stars-be-damned thing to ever happen to him. He was so entirely convinced of it that he was fully prepared to lay his soul on the line if need be. His mind turned to his first impression of you and it made the edges of his mouth turn up in good humor. Still so young, wearing a pair of rose-tinted glasses gifted to you by your parents and professors, you’d stammered your way through his first meeting with you. He almost chose the biker guy over you, but the biker lost out because of one, seemingly insignificant thing.

You’d smiled at him; a genuine smile that lit up the entire room. He hadn’t remembered the last time someone had truly smiled at him; not smirked or just given a quick, polite twitch of the lips. He wondered if that’s when it all started, but found that he couldn’t place his finger on any particular moments. It had been a snowball effect, he ultimately decided, that began with a smile and ended with you in his bed. Between the smile and the pleasurable end result of that smile, he could pick out a few of his favorite times; you and the fiery potato of doom, when he’d quickly caught on that leaving you in the kitchen unsupervised was just asking for a bad time, a very stressful trip to the hospital for a broken finger, the point in time where he’d learned that leaving you alone with tools was a questionable decision. Plus, there was the time he’d accidentally walked in on you naked…*that* had been fun, maybe not so much for you, though, he thought with a snicker.

All in all, six months of learning how to both work around and with you had culminated into an equitably interesting experience for both himself and you. He’d done his best to educate you on monsters and which ones to avoid, namely Boss, in order to keep you warm and alive. You were a clumsy, adorable thing that necessitated protection. He’d been there, though you didn’t know it and he would never let a word of it slip that he had, until he’d bought that bowie knife that currently resided in your pocketbook.

He’d taken a shortcut to your office building every day for a solid three months back in those early days; following at a distance until you were within feet of his door and popping back in like he’d never left. He let you have your freedom, but he’d always been watching in case he was needed. He supposed he’d been acting the part of the bodyguard long after he stopped sneakily walking you to and from work, as well. Threatened a few guys here and there, when he caught them catcalling at you from a street corner or the ones from work he’d caught glimpses of whose eyes traveled too low for his liking. It never usually took more than a couple of minutes to convince them to leave you alone. Not that he’d isolated you, he’d merely…weeded out the undesirables to make your life that much easier.

He had a nose for troublemakers, being one himself and damn proud of it, but he’d looked specifically for the ones that made his non-existent stomach churn up a case of heartburn from the grease that coated every word they said. Heartburn was an irritation, and Red was not fond of or patient with sources of irritation. And, if a few sleazeballs went missing here or there, who’d notice or care? Certainly not you. That could have been what inspired the leap from roommate to bodyguard to…he glanced down at the necklace he’d slipped off your neck while you were asleep. He was going to have it fitted for you, eventually, for a very particular finger, but not yet. Maybe he’d wait for a year or so, but he’d already finalized that decision the moment he woke up next to you this morning and realized he wouldn’t want to wake up alone or next to anyone else for the rest of however long he had until he dusted.

He’d never considered himself the type to even hope for that kind of ending. He was a rough-and-tumble, devil-may-care sort; not exactly the type one searches out for anything more meaningful than a one night stand, and he’d have never given that up for anyone, but that was the thing, wasn’t it? You weren’t asking him to give it up. You loved his motorcycle, he could tell from the way you’d ceaselessly begged him for a ride since day one. You loved the good stuff; death metal, leather, and you hadn’t even complained about his penchant for waspish moodiness. A keeper, as they say.
He braced himself on the rickety metal railing and let the next puff of smoke trail through his teeth to
wreath his skull in an opaque cloud. He entertained himself with the idea that he looked like
Blackbeard; a devil clothed in thick ropes of sulfurous smoke that had stepped straight out of hell and
into your arms. The rain kept falling and the wind tempted this round of smoke out to play, too, so
that it was also lost in the storm.

He’d head inside soon, wrap his arms around your waist, and whisper a few endearments into your
ear. He’d mainly lapsed out of the others and had settled on a favorite. You were an angel, after all.
His angel. He tossed his cigar into the alley below and the ashes landed in a puddle.
I'm sorry, but I needed to write a chapter featuring Red's motorcycle the moment I decided he owned one. I've got a weakness for these things, I'm afraid.

You were perched on a guardrail that lined the second level of the parking garage. Red was hard at work, caught up in doing some cleaning and maintenance on his power cruiser in preparation for an event later on in the day. A drag race, to be exact, which you were giddy with excitement over. Just like so many other things you'd longed to do, yet never had the courage to, attending a race had been a hopeful dream. You'd absolutely not have gone on your own, however this provided the perfect opportunity. Red would be racing, not just showing off, his power cruiser today.

As you knew from several videos, there was often an hour or so long pre-sport bike show where racers, gamblers, and audience members could admire the goods. After that, the racers would like up, bets would be made, and the Christmas Tree would start its countdown. “What time is it, babe?” Red asked as he focused on brushing out the wheels.

“It’s only eleven twenty. Plenty of time for you to finish up.” You said after checking your phone and tucking it back into the oversized pocket of his jacket.

You were wearing his leather jacket for safe-keeping. He’d stripped down to a ratty, black tank-top to work on his bike, so that his duds weren’t ruined by grease, wax, or any of the detergents he was using. He took good care of his cruiser, so he really only needed to wash and wax it, and then condition the leather seat, but he hadn’t won so many races without being careful about thoroughly checking from the tread to the brake lines and everything between. He rinsed the suds off completely before holding out a hand and requesting the other microfiber towel to start the process of drying it.

You couldn’t help staring as he worked; his thick bones were barely concealed by the ragged tank he wore. A few beads of sweat ran down the back of his skull and dripped down his scapula to splash on the ground before evaporating into plumes of scarlet smoke. Your heart sped up to a rhythm accompanied by the dull, unalarming pain that comes with that type of exertion. You swallowed with difficulty around the lump that had formed in the back of your throat.

“I can see ya starin’, angel.” He must have spotted your reflection in the side mirrors. He turned his head to shoot you a lascivious wink over his shoulder. “Like what you see?”

A red-hot blush flared to life on your cheeks. “M-maybe…” You stammered and fought to remember how to breathe. In. Out. In. Out…and now your thoughts have gone somewhere even worse and you are probably going to explode with mortification under his scrutiny. Lovely.

A good-natured chortle rumbled through his chest as he watched you silently freak out. “You’re adorable.” He wiped his hands on a rag, and approached you only to trap you between his arms when he grabbed the edge of the guardrail. He crossed his left ankle over and held himself that way. “Look at you…” He purred. “I’ve already earned first prize without crossing any finish lines.”

“Red, it s-starts in an hour.” You reminded him without daring to look up.
“I know, I know.” He pushed himself back into a proper standing position before plunging a hand into his pocket. “But, first…look what I’ve got~” His smirk grew impish as he dangled a pair of panties in the air. Not just any pair of panties…your favorite, lacy pair in an audacious shade of ruby red! Your mouth hung open in surprise.

“RED!” You swiped at them, but he pulled them just out of reach. “Put those away before someone sees!”

“Everybody’s gonna see, that’s the point of a mirror warmer, angel.” He explained shamelessly. “I’m flyin’ my lady’s colors and that, my heart, is a tradition. I’m a traditional guy, ya dig?”

“You are precisely the opposite of traditional, you…you cad!” Your insult held no venom, but you still eyed the panties with chagrin.

“It’s your fault, angel. If you simply wore scarves, I wouldn’t have been reduced to nicking your panties.” He chuckled. “Well, actually I totally would have done that anyway, but I probably wouldn’t have put them on the bike…probably.” He proudly looped the lingerie around the left-hand mirror and stood back to admire his handiwork. “I’d say she’s done; just have to rub a dab of oil into the leather and then we can head on out.” He held out the bottle of leather conditioner. “Wanna do the honors?” You took the smallest amount on to your finger and massaged it into the leather. The material, which had previously been tight, grew lax and malleable under your attention. Red watched, sockets half-closed and a dopey smile playing over his face. “You’re gorgeous, y’know that?”

You glanced at him out of the corner of your eye. “You…you shouldn’t say things like that.”

“All I did was say you’re a dolly with a classy chassis, angel. You’ve got me on up on Cloud 9 all the time.” He rested his hands on your hips. “Can’t wait to get you back home and bend you over my bed.”

“Gotta win the race first.” You danced out of his grip, which made him grumble at you, but it served him right for stealing your underwear to decorate his bike. “All or nothing, baby.” You did your best imitation of a sexy hip wiggle you’d seen in some movie.

“Woman, I swear to Polaris, if you keep that up I’m going to take you back home, strap you to the bed, and fuck you raw.” His voice had gone husky with desire and you had a feeling he meant it. He wasn’t prone to promising things he had no intention of doing.

You smirked back, realizing that you now had the upper hand for once. “Well, I wouldn’t want to unleash the beast, so I’ll stop.”

A conflicting battle between lust and sense warred in his eyes. “Fuck, I’m gone.” He groaned and dragged his fingers down the side of his skull. Magic pulsed in his left eye like a heartbeat. “You are acting quite the minx today, angel.”

“I guess you’re rubbing off on me, Red.” You put a finger under his chin and stuck out your tongue at him.

“I’m gonna bite that if you don’t put it away.” He warned you solemnly. “Tease.” He swore under his breath when you stood on your tip-toes to give him a peck on his cheekbone.

Only an hour later, you were touring the giant lot packed full of classic cars and various other vehicles. Mainly, they were motorcycles, however, Red managed to find a space right next to a beautiful hardtop 1971 Hemi ‘Cuda with a rare In-Violet paint job that took your breath away. That
was your *dream car* and it seemed like fate had brought you both together. “Someday, my love.” You longingly fawned over it, nearly drooling, while Red stood off to the side with a broad, approving grin. “Someday…”

“Hey.” A voice behind you called out, which caused both of you to spin around. A lean guy with shaggy, ginger hair hanging to his shoulders had his hand up and was gesturing at Red. “Nice ride.”

Red patted his black cruiser and traced the brass accents fondly. “Thanks, she’s won me six so far.”

The guy tossed his head arrogantly and smirked. “I meant the girl.” He leered down at you and his eye caught the tag on Red’s handlebars that announced his place in the race. “You in the race, too, huh? Wanna make a deal on the down-low? How’s about we go for pinks…her pink, I mean.”

“Get bent, ya prick.” Red snapped back.

“Whoa, cool it.” The ginger cunt had the gall to laugh. “Guess that was a poor way of introducing myself. I’m Silas, but you, sugartits, can call me whatever you want.” He stuck his hand out and grabbed yours, ignoring Red’s intense glower. If looks could kill, Silas would be dead a million times over.

Red made a point of stepping between you and the other racer. “You’re cruisin’ for a bruisin’, pal. Step off or I’ll wipe that smirk right off your face.” He forcibly pried Silas’s fingers off your hand and tucked you safely between his back and the side of the Hemi.

Silas rolled his eyes. “Whatever, man. When I win, she’ll know who’s the top dog in town.”

Red grinned wildly, his eyes grew dark and his fingers emitted tiny, sanguine sparks. “Top dog, huh? We’ll see about that, kiddo.”

“I’m not a kid!” Silas’s eyes narrowed dangerously.

“You sure? ‘Cuz a real man doesn’t make a pass at a woman like that.” Red shrugged and made a shooing motion with the tips of his fingers. “See ya on the strip, kid. I’m gonna look forward to laying a patch on your ass.” He waited until Silas had stormed off to relax again. He turned and ran a finger down the side of your face. “You good, angel?” You nodded and let your head fall into his hand. He sighed and touched his forehead to yours. “Sorry, usually the crowd around here isn’t as crass as that nosebleed was. You wanna go home?”

“No, I’m fine. All he did was grab my hand, Red.”

“Eh, I’ve killed for less before.” He remarked in an off-hand manner. “Well, this is the part you were lookin’ forward to the most, wasn’t it? Let’s go eyeball a few hot-rods.” He tugged you away toward the classic model Fords.
You're Clutched, Fream

Chapter Notes

Seriously, I love cars, motorcycles, and racing. This chapter was a dream to write.

The air was heavy with the odor of motor oil and sweat. The speedway’s benches were aluminum and splotched with polka-dots of rust where the protective coating had been worn away under the stress of use and time. This, this was where Red felt the most alive and awake to the beauty of the world aboveground. He pressed a kiss to your knuckles before calling a few of his fellow racing buddies over.

Ducky, a short and buff Latino greaser with his hair molded into a duck butt style, caught Red in the shoulder with a friendly slap on the back. “Had some trouble on the way in, cuzzin.” Red explained. “You and Bucky mind sittin’ with my girl while I’m down on the track?”

Ducky shared a glance with Buck, who shrugged indifferently. “Sure, Red. No sweat.”

“Ditto, my man.” Bucky took the place next to you happily. “Nothin’ will get by us.”

“I’m countin’ on you guys.”

“We got this.” Ducky mussed your hair like an older brother would do. “Now, go burn some rubber.” Red left you with them, confident that the twins would take good care of you. He’d met those two at his first race and they’d been his closest compadres ever since then. The three of them had a cool thing going; he cheered them on, they cheered him, and they’d all have a bash at the bar down the way after every race. They weren’t usually participating, though, because they were mostly showboaters. They restored old cars to turn a profit at the shows that preceded the races, but they were still adrenaline junkies at heart. They were decent guys. Red wouldn’t have placed your care in hands he didn’t think were capable or loyal.

Today, it was a small crowd; mostly just the regulars and a few scrubs looking to earn street cred. He was one of twelve racers in the line-up. The track was a two-lane deal on a straight stretch of blacktop. It was a classic quarter originally made for Top Fuel dragsters, but Ebott City didn’t have a lot of those blow-outs, so it spent the majority of the year being haunted by the average racing enthusiast.

Red was, incidentally, picked by a computerized lot system to go first. His opponent was an OG from the track’s early days; a hard-core Hell’s Angels type with prison tatts who looked like he could have been Dog the Bounty Hunter’s burlier brother. “Nice t’ see ya again, Red. Been awhile.”

“You, too, Tiny. Good luck, brother.” He shook hands.

Tiny gave him a thumbs-up. “Saw yer chick in the stands. She’s a looker, pal.”

“I know, and she doesn’t even complain when I play video games.” He bragged. “Lets me do my own thing. She’s a peach, I’m tellin’ ya.”

Tiny whistled. “You’re lucky. Too bad she’s gonna see me leave you in the dust today.”
“Someday, maybe, but not today.” Red snapped his helmet into place and guided his bike up to make his burnout lap. A burnout was necessary to ‘season’ the drag strip for proper traction. “Catch ya on the flip-side.”

As promised, Red beat Tiny to the ribbon by an entire 2.6 seconds, which was a far sight better than the next three racers; Red socked it to them each time with differences ranging up to as great as 7.2 on the clock. As he ticked up the leaderboards everything was seemingly copacetic, until he was down to his final race. This was the race to win the relatively small, yet still tasty, cash pool that had been created by the collection of racers’ fees. Six hundred was on the line, but Red wasn’t as interested in that as he was in kicking gravel in the face of the racer who rolled up next.

Silas revved his engine loud and proud in his lane. Red snorted and flipped the visor on his helmet up. “Oh, but grandma, what a big dick you have.” He commented in a tone simply dripping with snark. He turned his head away and swept his eyes over the stands to search you out. He caught your eye, brought two fingers to his teeth and saluted. He watched you blow a kiss back, pretended to catch it mid-air and thumped his closed fist against his chest just as the shrill horn that signaled the countdown began.

The Christmas Tree’s lights faded down the pole, one by one and then, he was off. The wind blew into his body like it was trying to breathe for him. He felt a familiar buzz in his skull that came with hitting top speed as if a bee were zipping about in his cranium. Time was slow, but he was a speeding bullet and in the lead. In the lead, that is, until he started to feel a tell-tale give in his brake pedal. _Shit._ He could easily spin out at this speed if he couldn’t control the brake properly. He swore he checked the damned line and pads back at the parking garage, but he couldn’t think about that now. The finish line was closing in, he was ahead by a nose, but Silas still had a few yards to make a comeback.

A flash of red in his peripherals gained his attention. His boney lips drew back over his serrated smile, and he punched it to the metal without another moment’s hesitation. He was gonna win this, come Hell or high water, and grind this snobby upstart’s nose into the dirt. He hit the line before Silas with only 0.2 seconds to spare; a win earned by the skin of his teeth. The spectators went wild, but when he failed to stop a confused murmur rippled through the audience.

He kicked his bike around to the side, using all of his weight to lean to the right as smoke rose up from the road. The acrid stench of burnt rubber filled his nose, but he kept skidding until he had slowed down to the point where he dared to put his foot out, protected the heel with a thick coating of his magic, and let the resistance finally drag him to a halt.

There was a moment of silence before the crowd erupted into a deafening mix of applause, whoops, hollers, and cheers. He hopped off his cruiser, flipped his visor back up, and made to lead his bike back to the pit, however someone threw a wrench in his plans by throwing a literal wrench at his feet. Silas was standing there, chest puffed out and heaving with fury, having clearly thrown the tool Red’s way in a fit of temper.

Red ignored him because he had more important matters to attend to; like the fact that you were sprinting across the track with Bucky and Ducky in tow. You flung yourself at him, and he caught you up, then spun you around before dipping you down for a kiss. Another, weaker cheer ripped through the smoke and gasoline-scented smog. Red snagged the panties off his mirror to ball them up in his fist. He high-fived his crew with the other hand, while the hand that held your panties snaked around your waist. Before he walked off, he chanced a glance over his shoulder at Silas, and flipped him the bird with the lingerie swinging delicately from his middle finger while he ticked his wrist back and forth like a metronome. His tongue flicked up to the corner of his mouth in a cheeky grin that had Silas cussing up a blue streak. “Heheheh, ah..kids…” He chuckled under his breath.
“Huh?” You glanced up at him from under his arm.

“I said, wanna grab a burger on our way back? I know a great place just off the turnpike.”

Later, he was inspecting the bike back in the parking lot to figure out exactly what went wrong. He crouched down and ran his fingers down the line until he found a subtle kink in it. He was so caught off guard that he let out a barking laugh. Some little cuntbiscuit had tried to cut his line. His shark-toothed grin was terrifying to behold as he came to the conclusion that he knew *precisely* who that cuntbiscuit had been, but he wasn’t mad. Oh no, it was just such a laughably shitty job that he could only feel embarrassed for the kid. Plus, he could hardly hold a grudge considering that the vandalism had added a bit of spice to his exit and his pocket was more than half a grand richer than when he’d come in, so no hard feelings. Next time, though, there might be repercussions.
In the brisk fog of the evening, orange-tinted streetlights buzzed away under the stars. Having eaten your fill of grease-heavy steak fries and munching your way through a burger as thick as your two fists stacked together, you were sleepy and ready to head straight home to the comfort of your bed.

Red, on the other hand, apparently had a different plan. He rode with you tucked up tight in front, instead of in the back, just in case you nodded off. The wind whipped at your hair under the spare helmet you wore, and you speculated on the possibilities of where he intended to take you. He’d passed the city limits, forgone the suburbs, and now was driving along a seemingly deserted stretch girdled by a forest on either side.

He took a sharp, left turn and you spotted a sign that designated the area as a state park. Old leaves and other woodland detritus was swept up in his wake, so that it turned the road behind into a storm of crumbling leaves and dusty earth. The second full moon of spring peeped between the grasping, half-budded trees, while stars peppered the sky in the vast expanse beyond. He finally jerked to a stop.

He’d patched his bike up back at the bar, and had explained the nature of the brake failure that’d almost led to him crashing. You huddled back against him as the quiet sounds of nocturnal nature replaced the spitting of his engine. Somewhere in the darkness, a brook babbled nonsense to all who stopped to listen. Bluebells dangled on delicate stems, edging the entirety of the small area clearly meant for a camper or RV to park, and filled the air with a refreshing perfume. “Found this place specifically for tonight.” He told you in an abnormally quiet, reserved voice. “Ya like it?”

You nodded, awe-inspired despite the slight chill. “It’s amazing.”

“Good, ’cuz this is where I’m gonna take your virginity.” He informed you bluntly.

You froze, coughed, and stuttered. “H-how do you know I’m s-still…” You couldn’t bring yourself to finish your sentence.

“Oh, please.” He rolled his eyes. “You practically scream ‘virgin’, angel.” He helped you out of your helmet, and then pulled off his own. “Not a bad thing, by the way.” He paused and leaned over your shoulder. “You are still a virgin, right? That includes handjobs, blowjobs, anal, and everything else.”

You nodded, shamefaced and cheeks burning bright. “N-never had…you know…time for a
relationship.” You’d always been too dedicated to studying, to working your way through college, and to becoming a productive member of society. That, and you’d never found a guy who’d captivated you the way Red did.

“Awesome.” The points of his teeth left perfect indentations in the pale skin of your neck. “I have no mercy for thieves.” He clearly implied his intentions with a soft nip at the ember he’d left on your shoulder only a few days prior. He blew lightly on your damp skin and chuckled when it made you shiver in his arms. “Stars, sugarwing, I am going to destroy you.” He smirked and added as an afterthought. “In a good way. In the ‘you-won’t-be-able-to-walk-tomorrow’ way.”

“So, where’s the tent? We should probably get to work on setting it up if we’re going to-“ He was looking at you with such incredulous amusement that you cut yourself off. “Sleeping bags? A quilt? What are we going to…you know…lay on?” He had on a Cheshire Cat grin as he pointed down at the bike. Your eyes widened in realization. “Sans…no…”

“Sans, yes.”

“Doesn’t sex usually require a bed?” You squeaked, although you didn’t know why you were protesting so vehemently. You wanted him for sure, but you just felt like you should deny it for the sake of your dignity…whatever was left of it, anyway.

“Or a table, or a wall, or a particularly sturdy door, but that’s not the point.” He lifted you up and spun you around so that you were facing him. “Point is, sure…there’s a bed back in the apartment, but that came with the place. It’ll be there long after I pick up and move. This, though,” He took off his jacket, wadded it up, and situated it to cushion your back against the handlebars. “This bike is a permanent fixture in my day-to-day. I keep up with it and it’ll last a lifetime. Ya feel me?”

“I think so.” You fiddled nervously with the ends of your hair; a bad habit you’d yet been unable to break.

“So, darlin’, ya ready for another ride?” He pulled your legs around his hips without warning, causing you to slip your back into the makeshift pillow between the handlebars.


“Love you, too.” And that was when time seemed to suddenly stop because Red’s groping ceased, your breath hiccuped in your chest, and even the sounds of nature had gone mute in anticipatory silence. Your eyes met his and he was blushing like someone had lit a fire under his ass. He turned his head away to stare absently at the ground. “Sorry, slipped up. Too early to be sayin’ heavy shit like that.”

Just as it appeared to him that the mood had been ruined, you were undergoing an avalanche of emotions; fear, excitement, desire, anxiety…and…something else. “N-no…it’s okay…I-I love you, too, Red.” You confessed.

His hands flew to grip your elbows tightly, eyes burning bright as stars in the ebony sky. “You…you gotta mean that, if you say it, angel.” His voice was shaky, broken, and punctuated by heaving breaths like an animal caught up in the rage of a rut. “Tell me you fuckin’ meant it.” Magic simmered in his body and seeped out of his sockets and jaws to form an ethereal smoke that hovered around him like a demonic parody of a halo.

“I…uh…” You closed your eyes to settle your nerves, and then opened them again with renewed certainty. “Yes.”
You barely had a second to breathe before Red was on you, attacking your lips like a man starved. “I’m gonna make you scream it.” He growled in an animalistic baritone steeped in carnal fervor. “Say it again.”

“I…love you?” He plunged his tongue so far into your mouth as to nearly choke you. You heard a rip, followed by a metallic ping. He’d ripped open the front of your jeans. He hooked his fingers into your belt loops and yanked your pants down. They caught on your shoes and he groaned in frustration before grabbing those, prying them off, and carelessly chucking them into the bushes. Pants off, shoes lost, and flesh covered in goosebumps because of exposure to the late evening chill, you were a sight to see, but you honestly couldn’t find it in yourself to care any longer.

Not when Red was looking at you like that. Your current panties went flying in the opposite direction of your shoes, but he was sliding another pair up your legs. “These stay on.” He snapped the weak elastic on your inner thigh. He was apparently becoming a big fan of the red lace pair he’d used as a mirror warmer. He was more careful with removing his older jacket and pushed it down your arms, before sliding a finger down your chest to the top of your shirt and ripping it (and your bra underneath) straight down the middle. You wiggled out of the destroyed clothing, but were surprised when he offered the jacket back. “Been thinkin’ about fuckin’ you in this for ages.” He said by way of heated explanation.

He leaned back in the seat and slipped his basketball shorts down his legs. He wasn’t so much long as he was girthy, however, that made this entire affair no less intimidating. He pulled you forward to capture your mouth in a harsh, bruising kiss. His teeth caught your lower lip; kneaded it until it was swollen and sensitive, and then pulled you back by your hair. “You’ve got a pretty pair of lips, angel. Now, wrap ‘em around my cock.”

His order sent a shockwave of hedonistic pleasure up and then back down your spine to settle between your legs as a needy ache. You gave the tip an experimental lick; he tasted musky like leather, tobacco, and sweat, in addition to something that was sweet-spicy like a maraschino cherry dipped in hot pepper juice. He pushed your open mouth down with a snarling moan until he was almost touching the back of your throat. The feeling took a bit of getting used to, and your jaw was definitely going to be sore after, but you discovered something new about yourself at that moment.

You had a thing for blowjobs. The heavy weight of his cock resting on your tongue alone caused a twitch of your inner muscles that served only to agitate your blossoming desire. You sucked in your cheeks and paid his body back for doing such an evil thing to you by bobbing up and down as fast as you could, as deep as you were able without triggering your gag reflex. Red’s fingertips scrabbled for purchase on your scalp, so you took a gamble and glanced up.

He sucked in a desperate breath as he stared wantonly down at you, his magic was so thick in the air that it could have been mistaken for oddly-colored, low-hanging cloud cover. Static crackled and sparked along his bones, and he was wearing a grin so wide you could see every single tooth in his mouth. “Good girl. Up you get.” You, frowning in disappointment, let his erection fall from your mouth and straightened up. He helped you get comfortable on his lap, then slipped a hand between you both to push aside the lace and teasingly slide his dick over you a few times to make you moan. “Fast or slow, babe.” He held you with one hand, hovering over his sex as he let you debate it for a minute.

“Slow.” You looked him in the eye. “I want to feel you break me in.”

He gaped at you for a split second before throwing back his head and letting out a guttural howl of mirth. “Can do, sugar.” He lowered you down, applying just enough force to stretch your silken walls around him until you felt a sharp stab of pain and a snap. “Pop goes the cherry.” He crooned
into your ear. Soon after, he set a breakneck pace that, while painful, did something to a twisted part of you that had you convulsing around him with only the lightest flick to your clit. “Say it, damn it.” He chomped down on the hotspot he’d created on your shoulder.

“I love you, Red!” You had to force your leaden tongue to work around the words and get them out. White spots danced in your field of vision as you came hard.

“Fuck. Yes.” He panted and bucked his hips off the seat of the bike to bottom out. “Love you, too.” He held himself there, spasming, drooling, and snarling like a rabid wolf as he followed you up on his own ladder of climax. His cum was scalding hot, but you were too far gone to feel it.

Seconds later, you went limp in his arms. He was equally wrecked, but held you up all the same for the sake of having an excuse to hold you tight. Your thoughts were sluggish with afterglow and you laid there with your face tucked into his neck. As always, though, the cruel world brought you crashing back to reality when you felt a cold breeze tickle your ass. “Red…you owe me a new pair of pants.”
In The Arms Of A Monster

Chapter Notes

So, a little heads up for everyone, this chapter is SUPER sweet....and also another 18+ NSFW chapter. I didn't intend it to turn out that way, but it just kind of quickly fed into that and I just....*shrugs* Anyway, please, enjoy the fluff while it lasts.

Also, more songs for this story; Sharp Dressed Man by ZZ Top, Underfell Megalovania 2 by SpookyDove, and Bad To The Bone by ZZ Top.

Red had been up for a few hours now. He’d never been the type to sleep easily or deeply. Besides his tendency toward insomnia, he’d always found the night to be his favorite time of day. Boss’s yelling and nagging had always waned toward the later evening and he’d conditioned himself to savor the small hours. Peace and quiet was a rare commodity in the Underground, but had remained a singular peculiarity under the roof he’d shared with his unstable sibling. He shook off the worst of the memories that came with that thought and returned his attention to the object of his greatest affection.

His world was asleep in his arms; his entire universe encapsulated in the tender smile gracing your face as you lay deep in reverie. He brushed your hair out of your face and allowed himself a tick of time to enjoy the comfortable warmth which bloomed under his ribs. You’d fallen asleep on his chest last night; now he held you securely with both arms and had crossed his legs over yours, all in an effort to keep you there.

For him, you were like a warm bed in winter; a comfort and a pleasure. Your mind was an enigma for him to unravel, and your body a plush toy meant for him alone. He was not merely wrapped around your pinky finger, he was leashed to it with a golden chain and leather collar. His soul didn’t simply sing for you, it throat-screamed love songs like some depressed, emo teenager. He was Cerberus being willingly paraded around by a wood nymph and he adored it. At your order, he would march through fire and brimstone to fight Lucifer himself.

Now, here he was, composing pseudo-poetry in his head as if he were some kind of ninny. You wouldn’t ever ask anything grand of him, but that made him all the more willing to do it. Everyone, every single stars-be-damned one, had been forever ordering him this way and that. You expected nothing, you inquired after nothing, and you desired nothing from him except for his heart. That made him long to gift unto you the world on a silver platter.

Truthfully, he was not, and never would be, a knight in shining armor. He was more of a demon bedecked in leather, bone, and the blood of his enemies. The hands that had rent and scored flesh were the same that held you as gently as a newborn. The mouth that kissed, praised, and worshiped your body had also been a maw of deceit and always ready to envenomate those who risked challenging him.

In years past, he’d have laughed in the face of any who told him he’d have an angel in his bed. Even now, he could scarcely believe it. Red was lucky, he knew it, and there would never come a day he wouldn’t say your name like a prayer to a god he didn’t believe in. The cartilaginous plate that served as his mouth curled up at the edges the way paper does as it is slowly burned over a candle. Not a single part of his body or mind was soft, and he used to believe the same to be true of his heart.
However, as he snuck a hand under your waistband with the intent to wake you with the throws of orgasm, he found that to be a lie. A lie, perhaps, to protect himself from going insane with pain as those who were supposed to care for him had only ever spurned him. No need for that now, he supposed as he circled his finger and heard your steady breathing hitch. And, when you twitched, sighed, and opened your eyes to regard him with sleepy adoration, he could only say one thing. “G’mornin’ beautiful.”

“Red,” You yawned, shivered, and gasped under his touch. “W-why are you-“

“Wanted t’ see whatchya looked like if I did that.” He felt an electric buzz fly up his back and through his head like someone had hooked up a bug zapper to his tailbone at the dusky sound of lust in your voice. “Precious, as always.” He licked behind your ear, which he’d learned through trial and error to be terribly sensitive. “So, first one’s free, but ya gotta ask me nicely if you want seconds.”

You flushed an utterly delectable shade of rose-pink. Your fingers, which always became fidgety whenever he pulled out all the charming stops, became occupied with creating shapeless doodles on his collarbone. “Please…” He couldn’t help grinning because this was all too cute. “Please make me cum again…daddy.” Hold the effing phone. His entire body went rigid as he processed what you’d said. “Oh my god, was that too weird?? I was trying to be…you know…you’re always calling me ‘angel’ and stuff like that, so I thought-“

He zoned out, re-examining why the hell that turned him on so much. He eventually gave up, and like hell was he about to kink shame himself, so he just laughed and rolled over to put you on your back. “Think that might be the sexiest thing I’ve ever heard come outta yer mouth, sweetness.”

“You’re not mad?” You asked worriedly.

“Does it feel like I’m mad?” He ground himself against the junction of your thighs. “Hands and knees. Now.”

Sliding into you felt like coming home. Of all the women he’d had, monsters as well as humans, nothing could compare to your body writhing under his own. He’d learned a lot about pleasing a woman over the course of gaining age and experience; for instance, women tended to be more attracted to vocal stimulation. Once he’d figured that out, he’d started using his voice to his advantage. He owned a raspy baritone that, when combined with a calculated percentage of dirty talk, he could make a pair of panties drop like a sick beat. You were no different, although you were a far classier broad than he’d have gone for back in the day.

You pushed your ass back with every thrust. He couldn’t wait for the day when he’d loved you thoroughly enough to fight back those pesky, unwarranted insecurities to become the succubus he could see lurking beneath the constant blushing. Still, it was endlessly adorable to see you squirm. His hand came down on the plumpest part of your butt. Your little yelps got him going a bit faster and his breathing turned to lustful panting. He glanced down with a smirk, one hand grabbing your ass and the other caressing your lower stomach. In his mind’s eye, he saw a vision of the skin there taut and ripe with his baby. He had no idea if that was even possible, but it sent him over the edge nonetheless. Just as he came, so, too, did the call…
A Storm Approaches

“I need to get goin’.” Red groaned and rubbed his eye sockets ruefully. “Fuckin’ Hell.”

“What’s wrong?” You hadn’t been able to glean much from his conversation, but he’d grown more and more visibly upset with every word he’d exchanged with the caller.

“Pap’s been...” He growled and threw the phone at the wall. The screen shattered upon impact and slid to the floor with a soft, defeated thunk. “That stupid, motherfucker...ugh, damn it. He was shot! A gang war or some shit and he’s in a hospital somewhere on the east side.” He catapulted from the bed, nearly tripping over himself in his haste.

“That’s awful!” You sat up immediately and set to work cleaning yourself up. “I’m coming with you. Was that him on the phone?”

“Nah, it was some nurse or whatever.” The seams of his clothing protested as he tugged them mercilessly on without a heed to his own strength. “Maybe this will teach that screw-up to behave. Can’t believe he had the nerve to put me as his emergency contact, I oughta slap the shit outta him for gettin’ involved with -FUCK!” He snarled at the shoelace that had snapped when he tried to pull it tight.

“Red, look at me.” You reached up and put your hands on his shoulders. “Getting mad isn’t going to help your brother. He’s an asshole, but I can tell you still want him to be part of your life again someday. If anything, getting mad at him will make it worse. So, we’re going to go see him, make sure he’s fine, talk to him calmly, and see where it goes from there, okay?” You pulled him down for a hug and rubbed his back comfortingly. “I didn’t know bullets could harm monsters.”

“Musta blindsided him or it was a ricochet, he coulda stopped it if he knew it was comin’. Probably just got too caught up in the ‘heat of battle’ and wasn’t payin’ enough attention, the cocky little shit.” His voice had quieted from a thunderous roar to a milder rumble, but he was vibrating with energy. His eye was lit up like a spotlight and charmed smoke glittered with tiny zaps of static electricity. “But, no. You ain’t comin’. He’s not allowed around you and that ain’t gonna change until he changes.” He searched through his closet. “Now, where’s my damn jacket?”

“I…er…I think you threw it over there after we got in last night.” You went over to the corner and snatched it off the floor. You helped him put it on, since the state he was in made it difficult for him to control himself. You rather liked this jacket and would prefer not to see it accidentally shredded.

“Please, Red, don’t say anything to him you don’t mean. Everyone deserves a second chance, so maybe this is his. He needs you right now. If anyone could convince him to give up the bullshit, it’s you.”

“Angels shouldn’t cuss.” He reprimanded you softly. “But, a’right, I getchya. I won’t chew ‘im out too badly over it. I’ll try t’ be back before eight tonight. You want me to pick up dinner on my way back?”

You shook your head. “No, I’ll just pop some frozen chicken and fries into the oven.” He lifted his browbone doubtfully at you and you pouted. “I’ll be careful! Humph.”

He snorted. “Uh-huh. Well, just in case, you know where the fire extinguisher is. Love you, try not to burn down the place while I’m gone.”

With a final kiss goodbye, he left and you sat down on the couch feeling rather contrite about
Papyrus’s incident. It clearly affected Red, although he wouldn’t ever confess to anything beyond contempt for Boss’s admittedly deplorable behavior. You had neutral feelings regarding Boss, perhaps leaning toward disdain because of the obvious abuse he’d directed at Red. Yet, that didn’t mean you wanted him to turn to dust. He could still turn himself around and be a good person, you were sure of it. He was all pomp and grating ego, but you’d once read that superiority complexes were essentially developed to hide inferiority complexes. He was, most definitely, stomping around and making a fuss because he didn’t want people to know he was deeply insecure.

Not that you were an authority on the matter, of course, but that’s how Boss came off to you. You flipped on the tv. Today was your day off, thank whatever gods existed for that, so you wouldn’t have to go to the office with this particular albatross around your neck. Instead, you could drown your worries in snacks and Netflix original movies.

The day passed slowly due to Red’s absence. You two typically worked the same hours and were usually home at the same times, so it was only once in a blue moon that you were alone in the apartment. His energy, even if he was locked away in his room while you were crafting or searching for cat videos online, was ever a hefty, pleasant presence. The whole apartment felt colder without him. You shivered, got up, and nabbed his blanket from his room.

You’d suffered severe anxiety issues your entire life. No amount of pills, change of diet, or meditative techniques could quell it, but Red could. Even just the smell of him embedded in the blanket was a small relief. For some reason, today was especially bad. Your mind reeled and spiraled in an ouroboros of nerves. Each anxious thought fed into another until you couldn’t even focus on the movie you had going in the background. You had no idea why this attack had struck today, of all days, but perhaps it was just you being your usual paranoid self. So, you cuddled further into the blanket and tried hard to shut out your worries.

So, when seven o’clock rolled around and you heard heavy footsteps approaching the door, you were greatly relieved. The footsteps sounded off, but who else could it be except for Red? Then the pounding started and your stomach lurched with panic because that was definitely not Red. Your hearing, sharpened by fear, could pick out two distinct sets of footfalls now. No one in the complex would help you, you knew that for a fact. A lady on the second floor had been robbed at gunpoint last month in broad daylight, and no one had done so much as pick up the phone to dial 911. People were too concerned for their own hides to worry themselves over someone else’s.

That was when you remembered and you could have kicked yourself for being so thick. You tiptoed over to your purse, which was secured on a hook by the rattling door, and withdrew the massive knife Red had given you. “Back off! I’m armed!” You did your best to keep the quake of terror out of your voice and put every ounce of authority you could muster into it.

The assault on your door paused for a second before it resumed with renewed vigor. The flimsy deadbolt was slowly breaking its way free under the strain. You scrambled back just in time for it to give way and the door smashed open in a blizzard of splinters. Two men you didn’t recognize stepped gleefully inside. “She the one?” The guy on the left jerked his head in your direction. “Think so. Silas was kinda vague ‘bout what she looked like.”

Silas sent these guys? Your head was teeming with questions, but your throat didn’t want to work properly. You brandished the knife awkwardly in front of you. “You come any closer and I’ll… I’ll…”

The one closest to you strode confidently up to you and caught your wrist in a painfully strong grip. “You’ll what?”
Without word or warning, the half-destroyed door slammed hard enough into the wall to leave a small dent. “Hello, hello, hello.” The heavy thuds of Red’s thickly-soled workboots were heaven to your ears. He kicked the door shut behind him, crossed his arms, and eyed the situation occurring in his living room. “Darlin’, you didn’t tell me we were having guests for dinner. I’d have picked up a few things on my way home.” He clicked his fingers to create scarlet bonds that strapped the men’s hands at their sides, and magic puddled at their feet as they tried to step back, but it stuck them fast to the floor. “Guess they’ll have to settle for a couple of knuckle sandwiches.”

You tore past the pair of intruders and fled to your lover. “Red…they’re with Silas…they just…they broke in and I-I tried, but-“

He silenced you with a cocky smile. “Cool your jets. Here, you come outside and catch yer breath with me, alright?” You nodded and pressed yourself closer to his side. You weren’t exactly a ferocious fighter, therefore, your altercation with Silas’s buddies had left you weak-kneed and dizzy after the surge of adrenaline. “Don’t move, boys.” He called mockingly over his shoulder as he herded you outside to the landing at the end of the hallway. “Are ya okay?” He lovingly cradled your face in his hands. “Nothing hurts?”

You shook your head, but he didn’t seem satisfied by that and insisted he should, at the very least, check your wrist and arm for bruising. He pressed a kiss to the back of your hand when his fears proved unfounded. You, in the meantime, were dancing on the edge of a knife blade. He was deadly calm, whereas he normally was a bit of a grouch when he returned home after a stressful day. It was unnerving and you had only a small inkling of what thoughts were circling like a cyclone behind that unaffected facade. “Red, whatever you’re thinking of doing, don’t.” You tugged at his jacket cuff earnestly.

He didn’t answer right away, but stood there rubbing his chin thoughtfully. Finally, he reached into his pocket and withdrew a wad of cash, counted it out, and pressed it into the hand he held. “You’re too tense, baby girl. Go treat yourself to some shopping or whatever.”

You stared at the money in your hand in disbelief. “W-what?”

“You’re gotta take out the trash, sweetheart. So,” He patted your butt playfully. “Go on. Scoot yer boot.”

“Red, no. Please, don’t.” You pleaded with him to see reason. “They didn’t hurt me and you’re here now, so we should just call the cops-“

He leaned casually on the wall. “Sorry, angel, but my hands are tied. Man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do, an’ what-not.”

He leaned casually on the wall. “Sorry, angel, but my hands are tied. Man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do, an’ what-not.”

You fisted your hands in his jacket. “Fine, beat them up. Knock them around, I don’t care about that, but please don’t kill them. You could go to prison and…and then what would happen to me? Neither of us can afford this place on our own, so I’d have to move out of the city and then I’d probably lose my job. You’d have a record and it’ll be even harder for you…please.” He remained unmoved, yet an unbidden idea had come into your head. “I’ll…I’ll make a deal with you. If you promise not to murder them…I’ll…I promise I’ll suck you off.”

Interest and heat overtook his cool demeanor, and now he was beaming like the cat who got the cream. “Oh, that is tempting, angel. Lemme think,” He cast his gaze in the direction of the open door. “Deal.”

You heaved a sigh of relief. “Wonderful.” You tried to return the money, but he was having none of it, so you folded it up and put it in your purse. You fully intended to sneak it back into his wallet
once this was done. “Be careful, love. Those guys are bad news.”

“I’m worse news.” He rolled his eyes and gently pushed you in the direction of the stairwell. “They’re a game that got rained out, but I’m a fuckin’ natural disaster.”

“Well, your room does, more often than not, look like a hurricane blew through it.” You deadpanned, discontent with this whole exchange, but happy you’d managed to talk him down from homicide. You planted a chaste kiss on his mouth. “I love you.”

His eye lights flickered softly. “Love you, too, my beautiful angel.” Your heart lodged itself in your throat, and you became lost in his atypical display of genteel affection. Sometimes, between the gruffness and endless innuendos, he would have snatches of moments like this where he let you see how deeply he cared and it never failed to send you falling ass over teakettle in love all over again.
Whew...so, um...Red's kinda pissed and that means this chapter is going to be kinda graphic, violence-wise. If you enjoy VENGEFUL!Red, here he is. If not, you can smoothly pass over this chapter.

As he watched you leave, Red’s chest burned with a profound yearning to follow. He was more than relieved he’d gotten home before those bastards had gone through with whatever they’d been planning. But, after tonight, he suspected Silas wouldn’t be capable of persuading more of his goons to come a-knockin’. He paused in the doorway and smiled menacingly at the two clydes who’d messed with his dame.

He spoke not a word, but strode to his humidor, whose home was the upper shelf of the tv stand, and plucked a cigar from within. Out of habit, he threw open the windows before taking a load off on the couch. His feet hurt, his nerves were bitten down to the quick from dealing with arrogant doctors, and to say he was pissed would be an understatement. “So, gentlemen…” He began between puffs. “You come into my home, you put your mitts on my woman, and you didn’t even wipe your goddamned feet on your way in. How am I supposed to feel about this?”

“You’re gonna regret this, puck.” The taller asshole told him with a sneer. He was a stick-thin man with a rat-like nose and a chin sharp enough to cut glass.

“Oooh, slurs.” Red put a hand to his chest in faux distress. “Look out, we’ve got a badass over here.” He blew smoke up at the ceiling. “Anyone ever tell ya that your voice sounds like nails on a chalkboard? I think I’ll do my ears a favor and…” He twitched his hand like he was slapping the air. A slab of magic clamped over both men’s mouths. “That’s better.” He pushed himself back off the couch, finding that keeping still with his current level of aggravation wasn’t conducive to his end goal of controlling his temper. “Now, down to the nasty business, eh?”

The flavor of cherries kissed his tongue with all the gentleness of a lover now that the cigar’s freshly lit end had commenced the experience by smoldering properly. He rolled it around in his mouth, savoring it as a way to ease the bubbling lava beneath the blackened crust of his chill attitude.

“These kinds of trespasses can’t go unpunished, ya understand?” He sucked in a mouthful of smoke, opened his jaw, and allowed it to drift leisurely out again like a dragon blowing smoke rings. He noticed that their eyes had gone wide with terror and he let out a deep chuckle that rattled his ribs. “I’m not gonna kill ya.” He tucked his hands behind his back as he paced the room. “And I’m gonna tell ya why.” He pointed at the door. “My love an’ I had a chat, ya see, and she says to me,” He pulled the cigar from his mouth to rub the ashes out. “She says ‘Red, please don’t kill ‘em. I’ll blow you if ya promise not to.’” He pointed the end of the cigar at each of them. “But, as ya can imagine I’m rather disinclined to allow shits like you to roam the streets. Still, as much as I’d love to pound ya into paste…” He took a moment to let that sink in and then stepped back. “I want that blowjob just a smidgen more than I wanna murderize ya. So, hey…” He lifted his hands in a ‘congratulations’ type of gesture. “It’s your lucky day!”

He blew smoke in their faces as he drew closer. “There’s still a problem, though, because I can’t let ya think I’m actually a nice guy. I’m as far from nice as can be, make no bones about it. I’m
reasonable, sure, but I’m hell in a fight. I don’t think your buddy Silas knows what he’s getting into here.” He propped himself up on the thinner goon and took a pull from his cigar. “So, what to do… what to do…”

He highly doubted his captives were going to go along with most of the stuff he had in mind, at least not quietly. He had neighbors to take into consideration and he hated passive-aggressive notes more than he hated vegetables and hot yoga. He honestly wanted to make them spill the beans on the location of Silas’s pad, so that he could set him straight in-person, but taking the gags off was a gamble. “Hm, I know. You can take a message to him from me.”

Panicked brown eyes met his as he turned his head to look at the rat-nosed guy. “Mmppghmem.”

“Hold on, pal. I’m gonna take off the gag, but if ya scream there’ll be hell t’ pay.” He warned in a tone as serious as the grave.

The gag evaporated with a snap of his fingers. “Silas will beat the shit outta you for this, Jack.” But the goon’s voice cracked fearfully and the threat lost the intended effect.

“The day your pal beats me will be the day I swear off ass and titties.” He assured him.

“If he doesn’t, I’ll kill you myself.” He strained in vain to break the thick cords of magic that prevented him from lashing out.

“You should really learn to watch yer tongue, kid.” And, when his target opened his mouth to reply, Red made his move. The hand holding his cigar darted out and crushed the tip right on the flat of the guy’s tongue. A scream ripped itself from the asshole’s throat. “Whassamatter, Bucco? Can’t take the heat?” Red gripped his captive’s bottom jaw and held his mouth open while he rolled the remains of his smoke between his fingertips deeper into the wound. “Or do ya just not like the flavor? Kids these days,” He griped. “They have such poor taste.”

He yanked the younger man forward by his collar. “You tell Silas if he puts another toe into my territory, I will find him, and I will beat him within an inch of his worthless life. I will fillet his dick, hang him up by his ankles, and slit his throat like a fuckin’ pig, capiche?” His only answer was a whimper. He gagged him again for good measure.

He then turned to the second minion and pointed at him. “As for you, hoss…nice boots.” The guy let out a confused, muffled sound. “Steel-toed, right?” Red raised an eyebrow at him. “Didya know lots of jobs don’t let people wear those around the site? Too dangerous.” He prowled around to stand before his next victim. “Cuz if somethin’ heavy enough drops on ‘em…bye-bye little piggies.” He smirked and stomped down hard. The metal bent down under the immense force and continued to bend until snaps of bone and the squish of flesh gave way to the gentle flex of the rubber sole.

Now, with both men screaming behind their gags, Red smiled to himself before drawing his phone from his pocket. “Wish this could’ve gone a bit more quietly, but ya know, these things happen. If anyone asks, I’ll just say it was a sex thing. People tend t’ shut up quick when ya tell ‘em that.” He laughed aloud at the pathetic sounds of pain leaking from their lips. “Time for a photo op, everyone. Gotta let my woman know you’re still kickin’. Pics or it didn’t happen, am I right?” He put an arm around both of them and held the screen out for a selfie. He gave the camera a cheery thumbs-up and a wink. The flash went off with a click and he lowered his arm to inspect it. “Fuck, ya blinked. Now we gotta do this again!”
In The Belly Of The Beast

Chapter Notes

So, a side note; just so we're clear I've made mention of the word 'puck', which I've made up to be a racist slur used against monsters. It's not a typo of 'punk'. It's used typically to refer to a folk-lore demon, fairy, or sprite and I thought it was kind of clever. Forgive me my Shakespearean references, please.

Also, the Fangs (the name of the fictional MC mentioned here) has a motto as part of their back patch, which says 'Ride low, Ride fast' in reference to the way experienced bikers ride with their bodies forward and tucked low to reduce the drag. Also, a bottom rocker is the bottom, curved patch on the back under the logo and is usually one of the first ones earned by a prospect. A 'cut' is the patch-covered (traditionally denim) biker vest.

My grandad was an biker (he never mentioned who he ran with) who rode one of the early-model hogs, so I kinda got a lot of my info from him. He was a good dude (and still is!). He's still got his colors framed above his bed, in case you're all wondering, even if he doesn't have the juice to ride the Harley anymore.

Finally, this is NOT meant to support gang activity. This is literally just a good-hearted biker club standing up for a friend, so please don't take it that way. Bikers and Greasers are some of the best, sweetest, (and forever tsundere) people ever.

You’d decided to chill out on a park bench just down the street within sight of your apartment building. The night was on the colder side of things, spring was still building up power to gas it into summer, but it was pleasant regardless. You bought an Otaku mag from a newspaper vendor just before he closed up and sat there squinting at the pages under the parchment-yellow shine of the street lamps. A mere hour or so had passed since Red had encouraged you to ‘scoot’. You had no idea, except for a terrible hunch, what he was doing to them at this very moment.

You assumed you were safe. The street wasn’t exactly full of people, but there were decent-looking ones passing frequently enough to make you feel secure. Plus, you still had that knife on you, although it was currently tucked into the front of your bra (rather uncomfortably, too). On a side note, you had noticed that a car had pulled up to the side of the street only a few feet away. You didn’t pay it any mind because this entire stretch of road was lined with parking meters and spaces meant for patrons of the multiple convenience stores, diners, bars, and other businesses lining the block.

You didn’t look up from your magazine when the car door opened, and then shut. In fact, you were trying so hard to focus on your reading material and not about whatever your lover was doing to those poor, stupid lackeys, that you completely missed the fact that someone was approaching. You missed it right up until their shadow passed into your reading light and you glanced up out of confusion.

Your mouth went dry as the Sahara, while the air around you felt like it had dropped a good ten degrees. “Hello, sugartits.” Silas stared down at you with a grinchy grin. “Whatchya readin’?" He snagged the magazine out of your hands, flipped through it swiftly enough that you heard one of the edges of the pages rip like a gunshot going off. He tossed it over his shoulder when he was done and invited himself to sit down beside you like Miss Muffet and the spider.
You went to get up and leave; if you spoke to him, he might get the wrong idea. Plus, given how Red had reacted earlier, you honestly felt like you were preserving a life, however undeserved that life may be. Your escape was cut dramatically short by a cold, dry hand wrapping tightly around your upper forearm. “Hey!”

“Not so fast, baby. Why so cold? I just wanted to talk.” The cruel gleam in his eye said otherwise. Every drop of blood drained from your face and trickled into your feet. Your feet were cement blocks holding you to the sidewalk with a dreadful weight, dreadful in this instance because you were paralyzed by the poison in Silas’s words. All the while, he was spinning a web around you. “C’mon, it won’t hurt. Sit down.” The last was more of an order as he jerked you backward, causing you to stumble and fall back on the metal seat.


“Oh, and if I don’t, are you gonna go tell your puck biker boyfriend? He doesn’t scare me.” His breath was sour with alcohol, so bad that you could practically feel your own head spinning. Had he driven here in that state? You didn’t know if you should beat him upside the head with the butt of your knife or call him a taxi to save his poor ass from getting thrashed.

“He really, really should.” You whipped your head around at the sound of another, somewhat familiar voice. “Actually, you should be scared of everyone in the MC around here. We take care of our own, bub.” Bucky was leaning casually on a parking meter.

“I’d listen to my brother, if I were you.” Ducky stepped into the light in line with his brother.

“What…how…? Huh?” Your eyes flitted back and forth between the two of them. “What are you guys doing here?”

Bucky shared a look with his twin. “Didn’t you know Red’s one of the Fangs? Our MC owns the club at the bottom of the hill.” He spun on his heel and jerked a thumb at the patch on his back. “Ride low, Ride fast.” He quoted. “And you, Jack,” He pointed to Silas. “Are messin’ with our little sister.”

“You wanna go?” Silas glared at them with slightly unfocused eyes. He sure was three sheets to the wind, alright, and that was probably giving him an unhealthy amount of courage. “Cuz we can go.”

Bucky gestured behind him. “Them’s fightin’ words, Jack. You ready to take on all of us?” You counted seven others, five men and two women, as they filed up to the plate. The larger of the two women smirked and cracked her knuckles loudly. “We were on our way to see if Red wanted to come down for a few rounds and some poker. Asshole never answers his phone, you know.” He winked at you conspiratorially.

“C’mon, pal. It isn’t worth it. You don’t even have a bottom rocker on that fake-ass cut, so we know you don’t exactly have real back-up.” Ducky frowned and crossed his arms. “We’ll let you off and we won’t tell Red about any of this. Cross my little, black heart.” He made an ‘X’ over his left pectoral.

Silas stood up and you were completely prepared to put yourself between him and the rest to stop this madness, when a commotion garnered everyone’s attention. Two figures, one limping and the other clawing at his mouth, were scrambling for the car. The limper, who you now recognized as one of Silas’s buddies, yanked the passenger side door open. “What the hell are you two doing? You were supposed to take care of the puck!”

“That guy’s sick, man! You’re on your own!”
“Wait, what the hell happened?!” Silas tried to demand, but he’d foolishly left his keys in the car, and his former friends were speeding out faster than you could say ‘Sunny Barger’. Silas, now completely alone, backed up a few steps.

Right into Red, who must’ve stalked Silas’s buddies down to the car. “Sorry, Jack.” Ducky sighed and shook his head sadly. “Tried to warn ya. Big Red’s got a temper.”

“Red, baby, please…remember you said you wouldn’t kill anyone.” You pleaded, wide-eyed and frightened of the look in his eyes. You’d used to believe it was a hyperbole when people said they could see murder in someone’s eyes, but you now knew you’d been wrong. You knew he’d never hurt you, but you were seriously concerned for Silas. “It’s been a bad day for everyone. We should all go home for some rest.”

“Boys…” He settled his hands ever-so-gently on Silas’s shoulders. “Take ‘er back t’ the bar.”

Bucky took your hand and tried to guide you away, but you resisted. “Red, no killing. You promised!”

His laugh could have turned a bottle of anti-freeze into a block of ice. “He’s gonna wish I had, though, sugar.”

The last thing you saw and heard, before Bucky firmly spun you around and marched you down the hill, was a striking blaze of bloody red magic accompanied by a short, shrill scream. Bucky made you plug your ears the rest of the way, so whatever was going on must have been exceedingly awful. Judging by the wincing, and the uneasy expressions shared by the surrounding bikers, you could tell they could hear every terrible thing Red was doing. Bucky smiled down at you apologetically and shrugged. His meaning was clear; there was nothing to be done. They might as well ride out the storm back at the bar until Red came to retrieve you. Thus, you went along with them, though your thoughts remained on Red and his hapless, very foolish victim.
Shout out to MsMk, because I never would have discovered my love for Red without you. XD
Also, if anyone is interested I have a tumbler (same username meldaburke) and my blog is called The Sword and Pen. There is where I will post blurbs for upcoming stories, excerpts from current projects, and other such things. I don't want to sound pretentious, but I've wanted to start a Youtube channel for a LONG time, so I was wondering if anyone would be interested in seeing some writing workshop, writing advice, and what-not? It's cool if no one's interested, but I've had a few of you ask me how I do what I do and I just thought going through it in a series of videos would be easier.

Red was feeling cheery, much better than he had earlier, and he could say with every bit of certainty that it was because of a prick named Silas. His ears were still ringing a bit from all the screaming, pleading, and helpless whimpers, but that’s the price he had to pay for vengeance. He’d left him where someone would most likely find him and bring him to a hospital. And, although this had put Red in a more amicable mood, he was more than ready to blow off the rest of his steam at his favorite bar with his favorite crowd.

Introductions and niceties had already been exchanged during his absence, and he was glad to find that you were seated comfortably between his closest pals. “Red, what is this?” You held up the phone, your face a mix of horror, dismay, and astonishment.

“You made me promise to keep ‘em breathin’, so that’s proof. Oh, I snapped one of Silas, too, before I dropped him off in the alley.” He patted his pockets to find his half-broken phone

“Red, you know I adore your…chivalric violence…” You lowered the phone and pinched the bridge of your nose. “But, that is only in theory and not in practice. Next time, I don’t want to have to bargain with you to-OH MY GOD, WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIM?!” You jumped back from the gross image that, even with a shattered screen, could have made Jigsaw vomit. “Are those his teeth?” Tiny, white, partially powdered pieces littered the ground in the picture. “I didn’t know you could bleed from your ears and still be alive!” The rivulets of blood running down what remained of Silas’s face were the most visually alarming. Yet, despite your disgust, you couldn’t tear your eyes away. “You said you weren’t going to kill anyone, but he looks pretty darn dead to me!” You narrowed your eyes and lowered your voice so that only he could hear. “You are so not getting that blowjob.”

“He was breathin’ when I left him.” Red protested.

“You left him in an alley, Red. He probably won’t be found for…I don’t know if he’d be found at all until he starts to stink.” You huffed indignantley. “We are going straight back there, and we are going to leave him in front of the hospital like good, though slightly morally questionable, people!”

“You are so sweet when you’re like this.” He reached out and petted your hair with an adoring smile. “Carin’ about assholes like they’re actually people…”

“I don’t care about assholes.” You grabbed the front of his red turtleneck. “I care about you, Red.
And if that means I have to keep your skeletal posterior out of prison this way, then so be it. Now, come on.”

He threw his arm over your shoulder, took time to wave his thanks to his pals, and then walked you out. “Y’know, I think I like your dominant side, sugar.” He couldn’t stop himself from teasing by reaching out to pinch your chipmunk cheeks. “So adorable.”

Fortunately, Silas was alive when the pair of you arrived. Red noticed how you attempted to conceal your reaction to his broken body. You winced as pieces of molar and incisors crunched under your feet, hesitated before touching the congealed blood that had pooled around his collar to check his pulse, and your mouth scrunched up when you realized Silas’s left arm had been broken so badly that the bone had punched through the skin. “He was in an accident. We found him on the road. He was in an accident, I think. We found him on the road.” You repeated the lie under your breath, trying out different ways of saying it to make it believable.

“While we’re at the hospital, I’m gonna stop back in to see if Boss needs anything before we head back home.” Red interrupted. He was worried now. He knew your anxious habits like the back of his hand, and you were exhibiting quite a few just at the idea of dropping Silas off. Maybe, it would have been better if he’d done this on his own. He was accustomed to this sort of thing, plus he could take a shortcut away before anyone saw him deposit Silas in front of the ER. He wanted to save you further distress. You’d had a fairly rough night; there were bags under your eyes and you were walking in that twitchy, self-conscious gait he recognized from your pacing during the worst of your anxiety attacks. “Hey, you know I could just drop him off. You can wait in the parking lot.”

“Okay. Don’t forget to short out the cameras.” The skin of your lip was looking ragged and chapped; the result of another one of your multiple nervous habits. Red frowned, dropped Silas, and used his thumb to pull your trapped bottom lip from your teeth.

“You’re making yerself bleed, angel.” He daubed a touch of magic over the torn skin to heal it. “I’ll be fine. No one will see me, promise.”

All three of you arrived at the hospital via shortcut. While you stationed yourself as a lookout in the parking lot, Red flicked a couple of fingers at the cameras lining the tin awning above the doors to the ER. He zapped himself there for long enough to let Silas fall in a disgraceful heap on the concrete sidewalk, and then blinked back to your position. “Are you going to go straight into Papyrus’s room, too?” He’d have to since visiting hours were over, and he wasn’t feeling up to running into more brown-nosed medical school snobs.

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“Yep. Won’t be long.” He started to turn away, but you had the mien of a lost, abandoned puppy that melted his heart into a puddle. He spun on his boot heel, and grabbed you up for a thorough smooch. He peppered your jawline with minute pecks so full of sugar, it was a wonder you didn’t develop a cavity. He made it all the way down to the ever-burning coal on your shoulder and bit down hard, chuckling as you desperately gulped in air. “Placeholder.” He elucidated upon your wordless question. “For when I get back.”

Boss was sitting up when Red popped in. He’d never seen his brother looking so defeated and put-out. Even the edges of his teeth were looking worn and dull. Boss glanced up from listlessly flipping through a puzzle book and tried to glare. “What are you doin’ back here? Thought ya were on your way back to that human.” His hateful, bitter tone cut a bit deeper than Red expected.

“Ya don’t like ‘er.” He stated plainly.

“Of course, I don’t! She’s wrong for you. I hate her.” He tried to cross his arms, hissed in pain, and was reduced to slamming his head back on the pillow. “I hate her, I hate her, I HATE HER!”
“Will ya shut up?” Red growled. “I don’t care whatchya think, bro. I’m gonna make ‘er part of the family.”

Boss’s skull now looked as if someone had bleached it out. “No,” He slammed his fists into the bed. “NO! That is not happening! You’re my brother.” His eye sockets narrowed. “I won’t let her kill you.” His voice had lowered exponentially. Red knew what his brother was implying; if you got pregnant…well, monsters could only age and die once they had a kid.

“Immortality’s for losers, anyway.” Red laughed and plopped down on the end of Boss’s bed. “’Sides, we don’t know that’ll happen. Stop being a jealous asshole.”

“I AM NOT JEALOUS!”

“Riiight. Whaddever ya say, bro. So, ya gonna quit the gang shit or what?” Red poked his brother in the shin. “Ya didn’t answer me earlier.”

Boss glowered down at Red, a fearsome air surrounding him which would have cowed anyone else. Red had exposure immunity to his brother’s haughtiness and wrathful moods. “It’s not…it isn’t what I thought it would be.” Boss admitted after Red won the stare-down. “I thought…I thought we were protecting people like the kid would want.”

“The kid wouldn’t want ya brewin’ up drugs to make money. Ya ain’t helpin’ nobody by passin’ out dirty greenbacks in the ‘hood. Ya wanna help people? Do it the right way.” Boss gave him a look full of trepidation. “It ain’t gonna ruin yer ‘tough guy’ rep, a’ight? I know ya want people to like ya an’ all, but ya gotta like yourself b’fore anyone else is drawn to you. Respect yourself an’ people will learn to respect you.” Red cut Boss off before he could protest. “Don’t give me any of that ‘Great Papyrus’ b.s. We both know it’s an act, so cut it out. Ya got issues an’ that’s probably my fault. I’m sorry I wasn’t the older brother I shoulda been, okay? I wasn’t there when ya needed me.”

“Don’t.” Boss ground his teeth together and turned his head up to the ceiling. “Don’t fuckin’ start that sappy shit. I’ll make a deal with you, brother. If you give up on that girl, I’ll go legit.”

Red sighed. “No. Sorry, bro. She’s my life.”

“Yes, she’ll be your death, too!” Boss spat his reply back, but Red was already gone.
So, I have a treat for you guys! Do you want to hear Red sing his heart out to Reader? Of course, you do! Well, tomorrow you can, if you head on over to my Tumblr (username is meldaburke, and my blog is The Sword And Pen)! I highly recommend doing so, because the song is how Red comforts Reader at the end of this chapter, plus it's super heart-warming stuff, even if it's a bit rough around the edges. I might even have it up sometime this evening, if I can manage that.

Red wasn’t his usual self for several days after his visit with his brother. It was worse than when they’d come to blows. It was worse than you’d ever been privy to during your months at his side. He was quieter, and you caught him staring hard at you more than usual. His libido, which was often nearly overwhelming, had all but died. He denied it whenever you asked, but you could tell. This had something to do with his brother, and you were filled with determination to find out.

So, that was how you found yourself with your hand on the knob of Boss’s door. Your palms were clammy and you weren’t entirely sure you were ready for this. You’d never been alone with him. You didn’t trust him not to outright throttle you for an unspecified crime targeting his fragile ego. A free diver couldn’t have taken a bigger breath of air than you did at that moment.

Boss snapped to attention as soon as you entered the room. “Leave.” His single word command was laced with enough poison to overcome the hardiest of honey badgers. “Or I shall make you, human.”

“I came here to talk.” You leaned back against the door, not daring to risk putting another foot in the room. “Red hasn’t been acting right since he last came here. He won’t tell me a word about it, but I know something’s wrong. You’re going to tell me.”

“Why should I? I despise you.” He sniffed haughtily and pretended to ignore her for several minutes. He glanced up from making marks in his puzzle book and sneered. “Shoo!”

“You’re going to tell me because, like it or not, we both love Red. You have a bad way showing it, but I know you care for him. Please, just tell me what happened so I know how to help him.” You were on the verge of begging.

Boss growled, threw his book on the bed, and eyed you with great contempt. “You are what’s wrong!” He puffed orange smoke out of his nose, and sweat broke out on your forehead. You couldn’t fight him if he used magic on you. “Look at ya; weak and so pathetic. I don’t see why he’s obsessed with you! There’s clearly nothing to fawn over! You’re nothing, except an inconvenient infatuation. You weren’t meant to mix! It’s disgusting how he falls all over himself at the mention of you! You’re infecting him with weakness, human.”

You averted your eyes to the ground. “I get that you hate me, but you’re dancing around the question.”

“You’re killing him, did ya know?” He was absolutely seething with fury. “Maybe we’re still on the surface, but it’s kill or be killed up here, too. Nothing about that has changed. You’re gonna end up destroying my brother. You prance around like everything is fine, but you have no idea what
happened to us. You can’t possibly understand my brother, but you ‘love’ him.” He put finger quotes around the word. “You’re naïve. You know nothing about our world, nothing about monsters, and I’d be hesitant to say you were worthy of doing so much as licking his boots.”

All of your insecurities boiled beneath your skin like a bunsen burner set on its highest flame had been placed under your feet. Old wounds resurfaced like cracked eggs in a bubbling pot of water, and exploded behind your eyes in a rush of memories that had tears mercilessly prickling your eyes. Your fists clenched at your side so tightly that blood dripped down your curled fingers to the bleach-white hospital tiles. “How dare you?” You wanted to leave the room, but the words ripped themselves from your lips; words that had been sitting on the edge of your tongue for months in preparation. “Have you ever, in your self-absorbed, selfish, little world, ever stopped to consider that I’m a person, too?” You hissed like a snake poised for a strike. He’d stepped on you and now he was going to feel the sting of your bite. “I’ve had to work my ass off to make it to this fucking city. Do you know what it’s like to grow up being pressured into every single club, to make the best grades, to go to college and ‘oh, honey, we don’t want a failure in the family, so don’t screw up’! Have you ever had to go to a mental hospital because you had a break-down in front of hundreds of people? Have you ever felt like you were suffocating because you barely had enough time to yourself to sleep or eat, much less any time to yourself? Have you ever had to watch your mother die, like I had to?” Your breathing quickened as you unloaded every single burden on to Boss’s selfish head. “No, you haven’t, because Sans has given you everything and protected you from everything. So, don’t you fucking presume a goddamn thing about me, asshole. I know what it’s like to struggle! I know what it’s like to beat your way to the fucking top! And I don’t give a shit about your opinion, because I love your brother more than I’ve ever loved anyone. So…so you can just FUCK OFF!”

Boss’s mouth had dropped open, completely gobsmacked by your outburst. You were, too, honestly, in a small amount of shock. You stumbled back and gripped the bed curtain for support, your bloody hands left streaks on the thin, patterned plastic. It seemed like you’d lost all of your steam in a single, heart-stopping moment, as you realized that…holy shit, you’d just done that and now he’s going to kill you. However, he made no move to stop your retreat. He just lay there, staring at you with sockets as big as pool balls, and his jaw moving up and down with an effort to speak words he couldn’t seem to force out. “Human, I—”

You bolted from the room without another word, so panicked that you didn’t hear him shouting back. You blew through the entire hospital, not caring about the disgruntled staff shaming you for sprinting down the hallways. You took the stairs because waiting for the elevator was too slow, and ended up slipping on the second-to-last step of the last set of stairs, and then tumbled down the rest of the way. You pushed yourself to your feet, heedless of the countless bruises that would surely be forming on the morrow, and sped out the door into the visitor parking lot. Only once you were there, did you finally allow yourself a breather, but not for long. You dashed down sidewalks, skidded around corners, and played a real-life version of Frogger with the lines of vehicles. Half-blinded by tears, you didn’t care what happened. You needed to go home. You couldn’t let anyone else see you in this state. You’d always done your best to be calm, cool, and collected; big girls get things done, and then go sob in the corner. Only Red had ever witnessed your late-night pacing, your frantic checking, and the insane amounts of time spent rocking yourself in a half-aware stupor like some kind of lunatic.

But Red wasn’t going to be home for another three hours, and you were shorn into pieces trying to make up your mind about what to do. You weren’t going to call him up; he was ever and anon worrying himself over you. You could handle this. You’d been in more dire straights before, though that thought wasn’t much of a comfort.

Your heart felt like it was a prisoner frantic in its efforts to escape your chest. Your stomach was pitching about like a boat caught in a typhoon, and you made it into your bathroom just in time to be
sick in the toilet. Your shaky, uneven breaths slowly turned to sobs in your throat because, no matter what you’d blurted out to him in the heat of the moment, Boss was right.

You were nothing; no, actually, scratch that you were something. You were a lamprey; a parasite sucking the life and light from the people you purported to love. Red had been better off before you’d staggered haphazardly all over his life. He wouldn’t have felt the need to hurt anyone, his relationship with his brother would have remained more or less stable, and he’d have free choice of all the prettier women who flocked to him like ants to a sugar bowl. Before you’d dug your teeth in for a feed, he’d been healthier. Now...now, he was a slave. He didn’t deserve that, but he was too sweet for his own good.

This was all your fault, if you were prettier...if you were smarter, if you were more functional...you were a failure. You weren’t ever good enough for your parents, you weren’t ever good enough for yourself, and you would never, ever be good enough for him. You wiped your mouth, ran to your room, and dragged out your suitcases. You’d filled two already before a hand caught your wrist.

How had Red come in without you noticing? He wasn’t supposed to be home! You twisted around, trying to free yourself like a wolf with its paw in a beartrap. “Why’re ya cryin’, sugar?” He easily twirled you around to face him, but you couldn’t look at him.

“It's nothing!” Your denial broke you like a fist through glass, your heart shattered into tinkling pieces on the floor below. “Lemme go.” You sniffed quietly and tried to rub away the drying tear tracks on your cheeks.

He frowned, stubbornly refusing your request. “C’mere.” He clamped his arms around your body and held you until you stopped trying to fight him. “Whatever it is, I’ll make it okay.” He whispered into your hair. He took a single step forward and you both landed in his bed. You curled up into yourself, facing the wall, while pitiful whimpers and heaving sobs wracked your body.

He snagged you around the waist with one arm to pull you back in again, pressing kisses down your throat, and holding you tight while you broke apart. At first, you didn’t notice, but then your ears perked up at a familiar tune. Your breathing steadied, your shuddering cries ebbed, and you let yourself drift along with his voice. His voice was both harsh and gentle, rising and falling like the tides of the ocean. It wasn’t perfect, but it was his own way of letting you know he was here. And, when he was done, you turned over and buried your face in his shoulder. “I love you so, so much.” Your voice came out choked by weeds of emotion, but he didn’t seem to care.

“Love you, too, angel. Always.”
Hello, again, beauties and gentle-beauties! The audio recording of Red crooning away to Reader will be up this evening, probably between 4 and 9 pm EST (editing is a terribly difficult, time-consuming business, I'm afraid). Remember, you'll need to go over to my Tumblr (meldaburke under my blog The Sword And Pen) to have a listen!

CORRECTION: I am so sorry, we are having some tech problems, but I am confident we can have the recording up by tomorrow evening.

Red filled the silence afterward with an elaboration on his premature homecoming. “Boss kept the phone ringin’ off the hook ‘till I picked up.” Papyrus hadn’t told him any specifics, only screaming profanity-laced orders into the receiver to go home immediately. He wasn’t going to follow his brother’s secondary request; to bring you back. “You shouldn’t have gone over there.”

A nearly inaudible sniffle escaped you. “You were avoiding my questions, Red. Even if he would phrase it in an awful way, going to him was my only choice.”

“Look, there’s nothin’ wrong. I’ve just…been thinkin’.”

“Obviously, but what have you been thinking about? You’ve been dodging my questions, you stayed away from the apartment for hours without telling me where you’d gone, and you have this pensive expression every time you look my way.” Your face was a mess of tears, hair stuck to your forehead, and your breath frankly smelled like orangutan ass, but none of that bothered him more than the helpless worry in your eyes. “And you took your ring back! I was terrified you were working your way around breaking everything off.”

“Uh…heh…fuck. I was hopin’ ya wouldn’t notice.” He scratched the back of his skull, suddenly rendered into a wordless, blushing mess.

“I wear that ring to bed every night, Red. How did you think I wouldn’t?”

“Y’know, maybe this isn’t the best time to talk about this. You go on an’ clean yerself up, while I go have a talk with my bro about respecting his sis—..I mean, respecting you. Yeah. Respecting you.”

Your frown was sharp enough to make a razor jealous. “Gods, Red! Please tell me you’re not going to go pounding on your brother when he’s in the hospital!”

“What? Nah, I’m just gonna bend the brat over my knee.” He snickered when you let out a long-suffering sigh. “Just fuckin’ with ya, sugar. He’d like that too much, anyway.” Your head shot up, wide-eyed and aghast. “Oh, you didn’t guess he was into whips an’ chains, the whole BDSM shebang? Huh, woudla thought it was obvious.”

“You two are alike in more ways than I needed or wanted to know about, and on that stomach-churning note, I am off to the shower.” You muttered before sliding off the bed and heading in.

He stayed until he heard the hushed deluge start in the bathroom, jerked open the top drawer of his dresser, and felt around until his hand closed around a small, black velvet box. He pocketed it before
meandering through the void straight into his brother’s hospital room. His random appearance startled a poor nurse, whose face was red as a tomato from anger. It seemed that this was the last straw for her camel, because she threw her hands up in disgust and stormed out of the room grumbling about stupid monsters. “What wazzat about?”

Boss seemed perturbed, but refused to tell him. “Nevermind that, where is the human?” He craned his neck around his brother’s broad frame, as if he expected you to be hiding behind Red’s back.

“She’s at home. What the fuck didya say t’ her? She was bawlin’ ‘er eyes out when I got there. You can’t go talkin’ shit to ‘er, Boss. She’s sensitive, ya ass.”

Boss twisted the blanket between his fingers, clearly uncomfortable. “She okay?” He mumbled and Red could have sworn, if he didn’t know any better, than his brother was actually a little ashamed of himself.

“She’s calmed down a lot, yeah. Why do you care? You hate ‘er.”

“I might have said…some unwarranted things.” Red felt a bit faint. Could it be?! Boss admitting a fault? Red might have to sit down, if things got any stranger. If Barney the mother-effing Dinosaur walked in carrying a tray full of severed heads, he wouldn’t have been more surprised. “But my opinion on you leaving her still stands!”

“Oh, it does? Guess I shouldn’t have held out any hope.” Red made himself at home at the foot of the bed, his head resting on one arm. “I gotta make things clear here, bro. You can hate ‘er ‘til yer dyin’ day, but you’re gonna starting givin’ her some respect or we’re done for good.”

“There is no need for that!” Boss leaned forward and pointed a finger at his brother’s face. “Because you are gonna give her up this very day!”


“Because I want her!”

Red blinked, and then rubbed the sides of his head vigorously. “Sorry, too many metal concerts, I thought I heard ya say you wanted her. Gotta get my earholes checked, heh.”

“You heard me correctly.” Papyrus growled. “I want her.”

“Yesterday, you were ready t’ rip ‘er head off. What happened to that?”

“I’ve changed my mind! Besides,” He crossed his legs under the covers and sat a little straighter, acting as if he were king of the castle even though his torso was wrapped up like a mummy. “You allow her to dress like Nancy Drew meets Velma Dinkly. You obviously don’t love her enough.”

“Hey, those pleated skirts are convenient.”

“Do not speak of my woman in such a crude manner!” Papyrus held up a hand to pantomime disallowing his brother’s words, and turned his head away.

“She ain’t yours! And I’m not the one talkin’ about ‘er like an object!” Red smirked, and pulled his trump card out of his pocket. “And I’ve got a headstart.”

Papyrus gawked at the ring. “Sans, don’t you dare!”

“Sorry, bro. She likes her men like she likes her dogs; big and selectively vicious.” He grinned.
“You, you’re just too boney and yappy, sorta like a half-dead toy poodle.” He wasn’t swayed by the sight of his brother’s magic threateningly leaking from his body. Papyrus huffed, his magic sizzled wherever it happened to touch in a manner reminiscent of hot grease in a pan. Red knew he’d pissed him off because his brother didn’t bother commenting on his pun, he just continued to puff himself up an imposing stormcloud of magic.

“I am going to woo her, you uncultured, lazy bag of bones!”

“You can try, bro. But, ya haven’t exactly endeared yerself to ‘er, y’know. She hates yer guts!” He nearly fell off his stool laughing.

“GODDAMNIT, SANS, I WILL END YOU!” Papyrus flailed about wildly as he fumed. His fuse would seem to be at an end, but Red knew his brother was all bark and no bite.

“Bring it. How many times have I laid ya out, bro? Oh, yeah, every single time.” He rolled his eyes. “So, what the hell made ya change your mind?”

“She’s not entirely spineless, as I had previously believed. Under my tutelage, she could become great!”

“She’s already great.” Red snapped back, his patience was starting to grow threadbare. “You tryna say she ain’t? ‘Cuz I’ll deck ya one, brudder or not.”

“This is not negotiable, Sans. I shall win her over with my legendary romance skills-“

“Sure, sure, you’re a real Cassanova, alright.” Red yawned into his hand. It was almost time for his customary nap, but it didn’t seem like Papyrus was going to end this ridiculous debate any time soon. How irritating.

“As if you’re some kind of Romeo? Your idea of a date is probably to drag her around those filth-encrusted bars at all hours of the night!”

“You honestly don’t know her, do ya? I wouldn’t want a woman who couldn’t drink me under the table, and she drinks like fish when she feels like it.” Red sighed through his nose at his brother’s impetuous, impulsive disregard for details. “This is gettin’ old an’ I’m beat like the dead horse ya keep shakin’ under my nose. I’ll come back around t’morra, ‘kay?”

“This discussion is not over, Sans!” Boss shook his fist at his brother as Red hopped off his stool right into a shortcut. He fumbled around for several minutes, searching in vain for something to ease his fit of temper. His finger jammed the buzzer. “NURSE! I DEMAND MORE TEA! WITH HONEY! STAPH! OR SAPLING! OR WHAT THE FUCK EVER THE MEDICAL WORD IS FOR ‘NOW’!”
Hello, again everyone! So, yes, I have confirmation that we will have Red's video up and running by this evening on my Tumblr. I haven't exactly figured out how to link the file on here because I'm a AO3 N00B, but I shall try! As always, I hope you enjoy this chapter, and please direct your squee's into the comments, thank you!

Also, MsMk is currently working on a companion piece to this, so if you love my version of UF!Papyrus, you should slide on over and give her some love. Her story's called Fight Me! 10 out of 10 can't wait to read again. XD

You were fairly sure you were going to go deaf. Soulful regret washed over you as Pap continued to screech over the phone. You’d made the mistake of picking up Red’s phone when he’d gotten home from the hospital, realizing too late who the caller was, and now you were being subjected to… whatever this was supposed to be. You thought it was some kind of love song, but, you couldn’t be sure if it was, since it sounded like somebody had thrown nails into a blender set on puree. Granted, no one would call Red the next Frank Sinatra, but at least he had a small ability. Meanwhile, Boss couldn’t have carried a tune in a bucket.

“HELL OOOOOOO FROM THE OTHER SIIIIIIIIIIIDE, I MUST HAVE CALLLLLLELD A THOUSAND TIIIIIIIIIMES!” You held the phone away from your ear, flinching with each violently disturbing note.

“Boss, uh…that’s enough…I get it! I get it already! You’re sorry, and I accept your apology. Now, please, please for the love of all that is peaceful and silent, shut up!” You put the phone on the dresser, but you could still clearly hear him. It was a wonder Red wasn’t half-deaf after spending so much time in the same household as his spasmatic, screamo-squirrel of a brother.

“Who’s on the phone?” Red came out of the bathroom with a towel in hand, and scrubbing at his damp skull.

“It’s Boss.” You told him miserably. “He’s apologizing in song.”

Red slapped a hand over his mouth as he snorted and snickered. “That gutsy bozo sure is givin’ it a hundred percent, I’ll give ‘im that.” He didn’t explain any further, or rather, he didn’t get the chance to because Boss had somehow heard him come into the room over his own singing.

“SANS! I’M WARNING YOU!”

“Whaddya gonna do, bro? You’re stuck in bed, and as for me…well, I’m here with my angel.” Red put gentle pressure on your chest to encourage you to sit down. “I’m sorry about sneakin’ off. I was tryna surprise you.”

“SANS! SANS! ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME, YOU HALF-WITTED APE?!” One could practically see the phone quaking due to the force of Boss’s assinine, cantankerous screaming.

Your eyes shot daggers at the phone before returning your attention to your lover, who was clearing his throat. Sweat dotted his skull, and he kept turning something over in his pocket. “A surprise? If
that was it, why did you need the ring?”

“Well, uh…”

“SANS! IF YOU SAY ONE MORE WORD I WILL-“

Red shut the phone off with a click of a button. “As I was sayin’, it’s a surprise. We’re goin’ out tonight.”

You glanced down at yourself with a critical eye. “Give me fifteen minutes and we can head out, then.” When you were finally dressed well enough to satisfy yourself, you offered your arm to him like a Victorian lady. “Shall we dance, m’lord?”

He hooked his arm through yours. “I suggest the two-step.” He led you two steps forward, the second leading into one of his space-time shortcuts. Shortcuts for you were an unpleasant affair; your breath halted, your heart stopped, and you felt as though you were a single hair away from the scythe of Death himself. When solid ground re-materialized under your feet, you let out a sigh of relief that was choked in your throat when your eyes were inevitably drawn to the expanse of scenery ahead of you.

A cityscape sprawled out beyond the windows, which were so clear and clean that they were seemingly non-existent. The skyscrapers touched the sky with metal-tipped claws stretching upward from their concrete fingertips. Below that, pulsing like heartbeats, were electronic billboards advertising products endorsed by giggling, female, teen idols. Every inch was a rainbow of color, not an assault on the eyes, but gentle and warm like the caress of the summer sun over closed eyelids. “Where are we?” Your breath was stolen by the view, so that your words came out as a breathless whisper.

“Tokyo Tower on the main deck.” He touched the shimmering, cyan walls reverently. “It’s the City Light Fantasia. This year’s theme is Sakura In The Moonlight, I think.” He gripped the bar of the railing that separated you both from the last few inches of room and the massive windows. “Show’s about to start.” He grinned and tugged you under his arm.

The first signal was the soft whisper of a cool breeze that blew tufts of your hair back. Then, the floors and walls pulsed blue three times, and finally, they burst to life in a shower of pink buds. Petals, so life-like and delicate, spun and waltzed beneath your feet, in the air, and over the walls. Projected clouds parted along the ceiling to make way for the silver-gray moon to peek in on the goings-on below. Ever so quietly, someone’s fingers ghosted over the ivory keys of a piano to pull music speaking of the gift of renewal that was spring out of the air itself. Petals fell in rosy showers over the windows, as if the city skyline was caught in a flurry of blossoms.

No one else in the room spoke. She could have sworn everyone held their breath as the crescendo of the music swayed along with the gentle swish of the branches that danced along the far, left wall. The moon, like a spotlight in a cave, caused a central pool of light in the middle of the floor. Red tapped your hand and led you into it. It was so bright that every curve of his skull was contoured and every shadow seemed harsher, but also more welcoming. No one else paid you two any mind, lost in their own fascination with the sakura dreams that floated through their own heads.

He was kneeling now. “I…uh…jeez…this is harder than I thought it’d be.” He mumbled, his head turned to the side as he turned something over and over in his pocket. “I know this…this is stupidly early, but…uh…well, we’ve known each other for almost a year, even though we’ve only really hit it off in just the past month. I’ve kinda had a thing, y’know, for ya almost since the beginning. I…fuckin’ stars, I sound like an idiot…” He dug the fingers of his right hand into the bone of his temple, gritting his teeth, and blushing like he’d had one too many drinks. “Things have been happenin’
faster than I thought I was ready for, angel, and I don’t wanna scare ya off, but…” He pulled a box from the depths of his pocket, and you thought you’d died and gone to heaven because this…

This was what happiness was. “Red, is that…?” You let your question trail off your tongue, not daring to believe it.

“Heh. Yeah, it is.” He flipped it open with his thumb. Nestled there was his ring, still burning and alive with his magic set in the stone, but the size had clearly been reduced. “I figured I’d like this on your finger more than I like it around your neck, so…ah…yeah…that’s where I was for all that time.” He hesitated for a beat, but realized that the faux moonlight was beginning to fade. His time was nearly up. “I’m not good with words, more of an engine and tools kinda guy, ya understand? But I need to try to say this right. You’re a light in my life, even when I get lost in the darkest parts of myself. Would ya consider bein’ my angel forever?”

“I’ve never considered being anything else.” You flung your arms around his neck, ignoring the slightly disturbed stares you’d garnered from the small grouping of Japanese people in the room. Public displays of affection were rude in Japanese culture, and you knew this from the embarrassing amount of manga you’d read, but also mostly because you’d graduated with a minor in Japanese language, history, and culture. So…sorry, not sorry.

Wait, this meant you had to start planning a wedding. Weddings mean relatives, relatives meant –“Boss!”

“What.”

“Boss isn’t going to be very happy with this. I’m not entirely sure where I stand with him right now, but I know he’s not going to take this news well.” You both stepped out of the waning moonlight and headed to the exit. “But then there’s also my dad…oh my god, my dad. You’re going to have to meet him.” You fretted until your hair started to frizz.

He silenced your concerns with a kiss. “We’ve got all the time in the world to worry ‘bout that. Let’s just enjoy the moment, a’right?”

“Oh my god, we are having a moment, aren’t we?!”
Okay, for everyone who was curious, my emergency was because of my father-in-law’s drinking habits. Unfortunately, his alcoholism has finally caught up with him. We had to drive my mother-in-law to/from the hospital, which was a two hour drive, and then also stay with her to provide a bit of comfort until he was stabilized at the hospital. So, lots of stuff to deal with over the weekend, but everything has been handled as well as could be done, and now I'm back!

Everything was, or had been up until this moment, perfect. Three weeks of domestic bliss, hours of love-making, and he honestly felt somewhat spoiled. Spring was nearly at an end; birds were singing, flowers were blooming, and he couldn’t remember a happier time in his life. By some miracle, even Boss’s ardor for you had dissipated over the past weeks after multiple rejections. He suspected it also had something to do with the numerous times he’d caught Pap making goo-goo eyes at that maginurse. The lady was quite a firecracker, not exactly Red’s preferred type, but Pap was of the sort who required a firm hand. Still, Boss was always in a better mood whenever she came around, so that strangeness had finally been cleared up like putting Pro-Active on an annoyingly persistent case of acne. Therefore, he’d had no complaints with life as of late.

Well, he’d had no complaints until you went missing. Now, he had a metric fuck-tonne of complaints. Today, three weeks into his engagement, he’d come home relishing the comforting idea of a snifter of whiskey, a romp in the sheets, and then sleep; only to find the door wide open. You were nowhere to be found, to his greatest terror. Your residual soul energy was still strong within the apartment, and with a sharp, slashing motion of his hand, the room lit up like semen under a black-light in a sketchy motel room. An amethyst ghost of you, the soul color of compassion, glowed strong and pure. An outline of your body was blurred from the bedroom, to the kitchen, and then to the living room, where your outline halted and became bolder. You must have stood there for a long time, he reasoned to himself, but why?

He didn’t have a good feeling about this, but he had to keep his cool. He could follow your residue for miles. Whoever had taken you probably hadn’t known this fact about monsters, or…maybe they wanted him to follow. Either this was a trap, or you’d been kidnapped for a less obvious reason. (perhaps a more sinister one) Whatever this might be about, he intended to find you.

And he did find you, too, when you happened to pop into the doorway behind him as he turned around. “Fuck!” He shouted, and stumbled back in surprise. “What the hell happened?”

You gripped the doorframe, your eyes were wide as serving platters, and you were as white as liquid paper. A bruise was forming over half your face, your eye was swollen shut, and there was a deep slash down the side of your upper left arm. “Boss,” You lurch forward like a puppet whose strings had been cut. “They thought…agh…” You hissed in agony as your jerky movements re-opened the wound on your arm. Blood flowed like a sanguine river down your skin. “They thought I was…that Boss and I were…” You gasped and panted like every word was a trial in itself. “I-I need to sit…down.” You flopped like a fish onto the couch. “My head…god, I think I’m going to be sick…”

Terror gripped his soul with icy fingers. He wasn’t well-versed in healing magic; shallow cuts,
scrapes, and small bruises, sure, but a head injury was beyond him. “We’re going to the hospital.”
He scooped you up from the couch. “Try to stay awake, okay, angel? Gotta tell the doc what
happened.” In an instant, he was standing amidst the bustle and hustle that was the midday ER.
“Somebody help! Hey! Over here!” He tried hard to grab the attention of the various people in the
suffocating crowd. “Fuckin’ Hell, who the fuck do I gotta kill ‘round here to-“ He swung about and
nearly hit a young woman. Bells of recognition were set off in his head when he laid eyes on the
green square pinned to her right lapel denoting her to be a maginurse. “You,” He couldn’t for the life
of him remember her name. “Nurse what’s-yer-face, you gotta help! It’s my girl, she’s hurt.” He
presented you to her like an offering at a shrine. “Please, I’m beggin’ ya.”

“I’m sorry, someone should have responded earlier, but we were swamped.” She called for a gurney
from the male RNA behind her. “What happened?”

“I dunno! She just…” He gestured at you wildly, feeling as helpless as he could ever recall in his
entire life. “I think somebody broke into our apartment again. She says her head is killin’ her, an’ her
face is all fucked up, so maybe she got hit in the head.”

“Ma’am? Can you hear me?” The nurse frantically checked your airway, and tilted your head chin up
to maintain unobstructed breathing. The RNA held you in that position while the nurse continued her
assessment. She pressed two fingers to your forehead for a couple of seconds to check your
circulation. “All good, but multiple contusions to the face, and a single, deep laceration to the upper
arm…” The nurse mumbled to herself, pulled her penlight from her breast pocket, and shone it
quickly in each of your eyes. “Ma’am, where are you? What is your name?”

“Her name is-“ Red was cut off by an exasperated glare from the nurse.

“It’s first aid protocol, sir.” Was her curt explanation. “To check for responsiveness.” She leaned
back down. “I believe she may have a concussion. Kevin, I’ll need a neck brace just in case.”

That was the moment that an IV stand chose to go hurtling down the hallway and landed upright
only a foot from the check-in desk. “What the hell wazzat?!”

The nurse rubbed regretfully at her temple. “That would be your brother. Who is out of bed. Again.”
Her terse tone gave Red the idea that it was not the first time Boss had disobeyed doctor’s orders.

“NURSE! I HAVE BEEN BUZZING FOR NEARLY FIFTEEN MINUTES! WHERE HAVE
YOU-“ Boss appeared around the corner, bandages all a-flutter in his wake, and pausing to pointedly
shove a cleaning trolly out of his way. “Been?” His eyes landed on you lying prone on the gurney as
Kevin prepared to take you away. “What happened to the human?! His demanding question hung
in the air, but no one could answer him.

“She’s going to need a few stitches, and a tetanus booster.” Kevin told the nurse in a quiet voice. “I’ll
take care of that while you deal with the family.” The nurse nodded her head in thanks.

The air between the brothers was so thick, it could have been cut with a cake knife. Red was
glowering up at his brother, while Boss seemed more than a little shocked. He backed up a step or
two on instinct. “Why did my angel say you had somethin’ to do with this?”

“W-what? Surely, brother you do not believe I’d-“

“And why would she lie, huh?” Red’s sockets narrowed as his left eye burst to life like a firecracker
had been set off inside his skull.

The nurse, sensing an impending brawl, stepped between the brothers with her hands extended.
“There will absolutely be NO fighting in my hospital!” She put on her best no-nonsense face and pointed to Red. “If it will shut you up, I can heal her to the point of making her lucid enough to properly explain herself to everyone. Then, if you both insist on fighting…well, I won’t stop you, but you’d better take it out of my ER, damn it, or I’ll have the cops in here before you can blink!”

“You can do that?” Red asked incredulously.

“Typically, only in extreme emergencies, but yes.” She let her hands fall back to her sides. “Come with me.” She led them through a set of double doors, down the corridor, and into the second room on the left. The door was open, so everyone could clearly see Kevin expertly knotting off the final stitch. She rubbed her hands together to gather a handful of staticky, green energy, and laid her hands flat against both sides of your head. Her magic stimulated your soul energy, and a dark shadow of purple seemed up from beneath your skin to coat every inch of your body. “Ma’am, can you hear me now?”

“Mmmh…yeah.” Your answer may have been weak, but Red was ecstatic just to hear your voice again.

“Can you tell me what happened to you?”

“Exterminators…they said they were exterminators, so I let them in. They jumped me.” You shuddered. “Knocked me out for…for I don’t know how long I was out, but I came to just as they were starting to tie me up. I-I fought back, a-and then…I don’t feel so well…” You were starting to slur your words, and your responses had slowed down again.

“Stay with us, ma’am. How did you escape? How many were there?”

“The ring…” You lifted your hand, where a thick ring resided on your third finger. It no longer pulsed with magic. The stone was dull and lifeless, now that its power had been drained. “And four… I think. Could’ve been seeing double…”

“Ring? Do you know what she’s talking about?” The nurse asked, puzzled over the seemingly cryptic answer.

“Don’t worry about that.” Red was quick to reply. The rape kit, to his eternal gratitude, came back negative. You, thankfully, hadn’t been violated. You were then moved into another, less temporary situation. Once you were safe, comfortable, and the copious amounts of forms had been signed, Red took point in the chair beside the bed in the room you’d been moved to.

The maginurse would return every now and again, although she didn’t have to, to check in. She’d
given up, or perhaps simply given in considering the circumstances, on trying to make Boss go back to his room. Instead, she allowed Red and Boss to hold a vigil in your room as long as they remained unobtrusive.

“Brother…”

“Pap, shuddup. I don’t feel like talkin’ to ya right now.” Red snapped at his brother; both literally and figuratively. His jaw had snapped shut only inches from Papyrus’s face.

“I am…sorry. I did not mean for this to happen-“

“Sorry doesn’t mean diddly to me.” Red shoved a finger into his brother’s shoulder. “She coulda been raped, Boss. Because of you.”

Boss appeared to wrangle with his emotions, his initial reaction in the past would have been to yell back, but he’d been oddly well-behaved today. “I did not want-“

“Oh, ‘you didn’t want’, well that’s a fuckin’ first, ain’t it?” Red snarled in reply. “There is no fixin’ this, Boss. No amount of ‘sorry’ is gonna change the fact that I’ve always had to take the backlash from your crappy choices. After today, you’re completely on your own, buddy.”

They both shut up when they heard the knob start to jiggle. The maginurse stepped inside, on what must have been her third visit of the day, and methodically went over your vitals. “How you two feeling?” She asked while she was bent over the bed.

“Stabby.” Red grumbled.

“What?” She whipped her head around like she couldn’t believe what she’d heard.

“I said ‘fine’. Isn’t it about time for this idiot to go back to his room?” He jerked his thumb at his brother.

“Well, he’s just going to come back, so…” She shrugged. “But visiting hours are almost up, so I thought I’d stop in to let you know.”

Red’s mouth dropped from a displeased frown, and settled into a sneer. “I ain’t movin’. You wanna try t’ make me?”

She rolled her eyes. “Oh, puh-lease. I don’t care what you do, just so long as I’m not blamed for it. I happen to like working here, thank you.” She sighed and patted your hand. “I’m relieved whoever did this to your…erm…girlfriend-“

“Fiancée.” He corrected gruffly.

“Your fiancée. I’m relieved that whoever did this had no chance to make it worse. People who do this type of stuff too often go unpunished.” She wiped a hand over her weary face. “I wish the law could just round them all up and…” She shook her head defeatedly. “But that’s unrealistic. Anyway, I’m sorry you all had to go through this.”

Red let a sinister grin take root, and then grow upon his visage like a poisonous weed. Her words gave him an idea…a way that Boss could atone for his stupidity. He left his chair, snatched his brother up by the collar, and yanked him forward. “Y’know what, nurse? I think my bro’s good to go, wouldn’t ya say?”

She tapped the tip of her shoe against the tile irritably. “He may be your brother, but he is my patient,
sir. He still needs a few more days before he’s at his full strength.”

“T’ll drop ‘im off after we’re done, then.” He replied carelessly. “Don’t tell anyone I borrowed ‘im for a few hours.”

“Why? What are you doing, Mr. Sans?!” She reached out to try to grab ahold of Boss’s flailing arms.

“Not me. Him. And what he’ll be doing is learning how to clean up after himself.” With that said, he let himself fall through a space-time rift, and left behind the frazzled nurse.
Thank you so, so much for everyone who expressed their concerns, wished me well, and just generally showed their support! It would be nearly impossible to get discouraged with such a lovely crowd backing me, and I’m thankful that you’ve all been so kind.

So, also a warning...there are graphic depictions of violence in this chapter because VENGEFUL! Red has made an bloody, fiery encore.

Red let Boss go free as soon as they’d reached the hallway right outside his apartment. He forced the soul residue lingering there into the visible spectrum, and then turned to his brother with an impatient growl. “Do ya recognize any of the residues out here?”

Boss took a moment, got down into a crouch, and studied two outlines in particular; one was the smokey brown of beef jerky, while the other was piss-yellow. He poked at them to read their main traits; greed and arrogance. The residues, as they slunk like brown and yellow snakes around his fingers, felt chillingly familiar. “Hellhounds.” His voice was as grim as a reaper. “I have met them a handful of times in disputes over territory. These two are the ones typically dispatched to deal with those types of situations. Problem-solvers, as one could say.”

Red knew of the hounds. There wasn’t a single person alive in Ebott City who hadn’t heard of them. They were Ebott City’s third largest street gang, and, as rumors had whispered, had their bloodied hands deep in the city-wide arms/drug-dealing trade. If the criminal underground had any structural support at all, one could consider the hounds to be a load-bearing wall. “Why do they got it out for ya, Boss?” He’d had no idea his brother had gotten in this deep.

“I…may or may not have taken out their human trafficking ring.” Boss pushed himself back into a standing position. “I don’t like the way you are looking at me, brother.”

Red looked him up and down critically. “Thought ya were a banger, not a goddamned vigilante.”

“No one deserves to be a slave, Sans. Not even humans!” Boss flushed so hard that his face looked like the rusty bumper on an old car.

“Is that how ya got shot? I thought it was just some run of the mill gang war bullshit.” Boss’s prideful expression was all Red needed for an answer. “Welp, looks like I got a new reason to bash in some fuckin’ heads. Whatchya say, bro? You wanna go all Boondock Saints on their little organization? Cuz, I know I’m ready to rip out a few throats.” He slapped Boss on the back. Maybe, just maybe, he’d misjudged his brother.

Boss suddenly stiffened, and then sniffed the air. “Sans, our mission shall have to wait.” He waved a hand in front of his face and stepped back. “You are starting to go into heat.” He put his hand over his nose to avoid breathing in his brother’s pheromones. To another male monster, the smell was repulsive. Evolutionarily-speaking, the function was meant to deter males from encroaching on each other’s territory, although it was processed in female brains as an aphrodisiac. “Blegh, you smell like spoiled bacon!”
Fuck, he was two weeks early, but stress must have triggered him into an early cycle. Now that Pap had mentioned it, he was feeling uncomfortably warm. He tugged at the collar of his sweater and a puff of magic escaped. “Yeah, an’ you stink like burnin’ hair when you’re in heat, so fuck off.” He shrugged out of his jacket, took a shortcut to drop it off in his room, and then reappeared next to his brother. “We’re still gonna hunt these asswipes down, bro.”

“You will not be in your right mind, Sans!” Boss reminded him as a warning. “Things could turn… ugly.”

“Maybe I don’t wanna be.” Red replied darkly. “I swear, if we catch ‘em, I’m gonna do a zippo raid on their HQ…after I royally fuck up their shit. They’re gonna regret their daddies didn’t use fuckin’ condoms.” He cleared the soul residue away with a violent swipe. “So, yer gang ran into the Hellhounds a few times, huh?”

Boss nodded. “My friends…erm…” He caught Red’s narrow-eyed glower and corrected himself. “My ex-colleagues and I caught some heat from them for selling in their neck of town. This was before I was aware they were heading a small prostitution outfit. After I found out, of course, I knew the great Papyr- ahem…I mean, I knew I had to do something!”

He was pretty glad Papyrus was taking this seriously, instead of throwing a temper tantrum as per usual. In the past three weeks, he’d enjoyed watching his brother grow up a little. It was a refreshing change, to say the least. That nurse was absolutely a positive influence; impressive, considering he’d spent the better part of two centuries trying to curb his brother’s attitude, but she’d managed it in a span of weeks. “Do ya know where the hounds do most of their business? Might be able to catch most of ‘em at a place like that, instead of huntin’ ‘em down individually.”

Boss had to take a minute to think. “Well, I can’t be sure if it is their main base, but I know of only one place for certain. Several cliques within the main gang run drugs there, and I believe Black Shuck has been known to stop by on occasion.”

Black Shuck was infamous, even amongst the Hellhounds, as the hardest banger in the city. Reportedly, he didn’t look like much; a skinny, white guy with dreads, who was often only half-dressed. However, if one ever took a closer look at the collection of mugshots he’d earned over the past four years, the scars told a different story. He owned knotted, mottled skin that spoke of cauterized bullet wounds, thick and ropey lines from knife fights snaked down his arms, and one cheek had been sliced from the inner corner of his eye down to the back of his jaw. If his rough life in the Underground had taught Red anything, it was to always be wary of the man with the most scars.

They chose not to take any traditional method of transportation; rather, Boss rattled off street names and landmarks, all while Red did his best to focus on picturing his destinations before taking them on intermittent shortcuts through Ebott City. They arrived at their destination within the hour. It was a three-story construction made of brick, mortar, and poor life choices. It could have posed as a slummy apartment building, if it weren’t for the not-so-subtle guard outfitted in gang regalia, whose hand immediately went to the gun tucked into the back of his saggy pants as soon as he spotted them. Red, however, possessed better reflexes. Before the guard’s finger was on the trigger, he had stolen the weapon away by blasting it out of his hand with sharp, controlled burst of magic, and then snapped it up as it skittered across the gravel-paved lot.

As it turned out, the guard was nothing more than a kid; he looked like he was barely older than thirteen. On days like this, kids like him should be doing paper routes for pocket money, not hanging around flophouses. Irritation at the wanna-be gangster kid flooded Red, and he grabbed him off the ground with his free hand. “What the hell is a kid your age doing pointing a fuckin’ gun at people?”
Red easily crushed the weapon in hand like it was made of aluminum foil, and then tossed it aside. The teen didn’t respond; he continued tugging at the boney hand that had trapped him. “You think this is some kinda game? You think this is some cops an’ robbers shit?! Your buddies, the ones that gave ya that shiny, grown-up toy, NEWSFLASH- they ain’t yer pals and they sure as hell ain’t yer family. They’d throw ya under the bus first chance they get.”

“I’m gonna kick your ass!”

“Fat chance. I’ve eaten shit that weighs more than your punk ass does soakin’ wet. You’re cannon fodder to them, pal, and you’ve got no idea who the fuck your ‘friends’ pissed off, do ya? Lemme save you the story an’ just say they fucked with the wrong motherfucker.” Red stared into the kid’s eyes. “Now, I’m gonna kill ‘em. It ain’t gonna be pretty or dignified; I’ll be pickin’ pieces of your friends outta my fuckin’ teeth for weeks. BUT…I’ll not be killin’ you. Welcome to this season’s episode of Scared Straight, shitbit.” He shoved the kid in Papyrus’s direction. “You hold onto the kid. I’m goin’ in there. You can have any yellow sonsa bitches that come runnin’ out.”

Boss held the struggling teen by the back of his pants and hoodie. “Human child, I will use your bones for sandwich bread if you do not cease your struggling! I mean it! Did…DID YOU JUST SPIT AT ME?! That is incredibly unsanitary! Ack! WILL YOU STOP IT ALREADY WITH THE LAUNCHING OF BODY FLUID PROJECTILES?!”

Boss’s shouting was dampened by the door as it swung shut behind Red. There, waiting in the middle of the lion’s den on the first floor, was a group of about ten men. A few seedy couches had been shoved up against the walls. In the middle of the room was a coffee table that had seen better days; days when its finish had been glossy and new, instead of the current time where it was covered in water rings, needles, used napkins, and other crap. The men had been lolling on the couches before he’d graced them with his presence, but now they were on their feet with hostility in their eyes.

They, like most gangs, were of mostly uniform race and ethnicity. A few were shirtless, exposing the commonality between them to be a tattoo of a slavering, black dog’s head on their chests. “Hey there, homie. Whatchyoo doin’ in this side a’ the ‘hood?” Those words parted the group like the Red Sea. A man stepped into the dim light from behind a beaded curtain; his blonde dreadlocks swung down his back as he walked, and he observed Red with eyes as cold and blue as a salt-water lake in the dead of winter.

Black Shuck, the self-proclaimed president of one of the biggest thorns in the mayor’s ass, strode forward as though he had not a care in the world. “I don’t think it’s very friendly of youse to come bargin’ in without so much as a ‘how do you do’.”

“Not here to make friends.” Red bared his teeth in a grin. “I don’t tend t’ get friendly with low-life rapists and murderers.”

Shuck laid his hand on his chest. “Ooohh, you wound me, brutha. For your information, I pay, house, and feed the whores. I’ll own up to the murderin’ bit, though. Gotta keep the sheep in line with an example every now an’ again, ya na whud I’m sayin’?” Shuck stepped so close to Red he could smell the weed on his breath. “But I respect you, homie. That’s why I dinnit light yo ass up the second I sees you step inside my place of bidnis. See, it takes a basket-ball-sized pair of nuts to waltz in here like ya did…or a head thicker than an in-ground pool full of concrete. The least I can do for a ballys gennelman such as yoself is ask ‘how may I be of service’, my man?”

“A few of your goons roughed up my girl.” Red did his best to keep his bubbling fury under wraps as he spoke. “I’ve got it on good authority that you had it out for my brother Boss, not me. So, what gives? Why’re you stirrin’ the wrong pot?”
Shuck frowned. “Aw, shit, that was yo hoe, man? My bad, my bad, I thought she was sleepin’ with yo two-bit, bitch-ass brutha. Damn, don’t ya just hate fake news?” He tapped his index finger against his jaw. “Here, lemme make it up to you. I’ll letchya in a room with the guys what did it for an hour or so. That what ya after?”

Red’s smile was ferocious as he summoned a spear of bone to his hand and shoved it right into Shuck’s exposed gut. “I’m afraid that’s not good enough, ‘homie.’” Fire and lightning pierced the silence as the bullet storm blew in from all sides. When it was over not a single bullet had hit him, but hung in the air like silver pellets decorating an invisible Christmas tree. “Oh, you’ll have t’ try harder than that!” He threw Shuck aside carelessly. He allowed the discharged bullets to drop to the floor in a metallic rain. “Only a few handguns? An’ here I thought you assholes were somethin’ big.” He gave Shuck a kick for shits and giggles. “And. I. Told. Ya. I. Don’t. Deal. With. Murderin’. Rapin’. Drugged-out. Fuckwits!” He punctuated each word with a solid kick. Blood burbled from Shuck’s mouth, choking him and forcing him to curl up on the floor. The gut wound wasn’t deep enough or positioned to hit any vital organs. Red wasn’t here to make these deaths quick. “What I just did to him was the tip of the motherfuckin iceberg, you shits! I’m not after just one, or two, or even three of you fuckers. I’M CLEANIN’ THE WHOLE FUCKIN’ HOUSE!” He swept his arms up and out, causing two waves of magic to blow the group into the walls.

His heat was upon him now, he knew, even as primal bloodlust took him over and blacked out every sane thought he had conjured upon arrival. These deadmen walking were for responsible his mate’s pain, and he planned to dish that same agony out to them a thousand-fold. Skulls cracked, joints popped, and skin tore with wretched sounds he savored like a fine wine. Viscera splashed on the floor, spattering him with gore, and re-painting the walls the same scarlet hue as his magic. This was not mere murder; no, this was a massacre.

More gang members tried to flee the flophouse, but Red blocked the only exit, so some took alternative routes. He could hear the muffled thumps of bodies dropping out of upper story windows, hoping all the while that Boss got his hands on the ones that survived their fall. That was the only cohesive thought he had during the event, for his mind was so mangled with rage that he was now the backseat driver in his own body. Lava seemed to flow through his very bones, scorching every single thing he touched, so that he might have wondered how it was that his magic hadn’t simply ignited the second he’d snapped.

It was only once the futile gunfire, and the last death rattle had been silenced, that he came back to himself. His clothes were drenched in blood, and his face felt sticky with it, too. His hands, as well, were coated. At this moment, he looked every bit like a blood-thirsty monster. Such an exertion would have normally exhausted him, but his heat had extended his stamina. He balled up a wad of magazine papers, and held them under his butane lighter before tossing them amidst the bodies. He poured the remnants of a bottle of vodka about the room, and then set himself to the task of lighting everything remotely flammable aflame. When he was finally done, he left the room with a final growl at Shuck’s body. “You’ve been burned, asshole.”
You were awake; finally able to make sense of your surroundings enough to understand you were in the hospital. An unpleasant, somewhat nauseating and slimy sensation coiled in your gut, as if you’d eaten a living squid and it was squirming around inside your stomach. Forcing whatever food, if there was any, back down with a hard gulp, you slowly tried to sit up. Your head was…buzzy…akin to how it feels when one is coming back from a bar after a few drinks. Your nose felt like it was stuffed with cotton balls because of congestion, which, considering your mouth tasted like old pennies, was probably the result of congealed blood. “Ah, you’re awake!” Someone announced in triumph beside you.

“What…why am I here?” You squinted against the overtly bright, mildly irritating fluorescent lights in an attempt to make out the features of the person bent over you.

“Hm. I don’t suppose you remember anything? Well, that can happen with concussions, although it isn’t so common as they portray it to be in movies. Give it a moment, I’m sure it’ll come back to you.” The voice sounded female, and she appeared to be wearing a set of mauve scrubs, but your vision was still so fuzzy that you couldn’t quite make out her facial features. Given the scrubs and the stethoscope hanging from her neck, she was probably a doctor, RN, or RNA.

You were still trying to focus on her, when everything hit you all at once like you were the hockey puck at a semi-pro game. Your mind spun; opening your door to the knock and call of ‘Exterminator!’ and then being bum-rushed by four men. The memory, now crisp as if it had only happened a second ago, of being elbowed in the face during the resulting struggle, and then the foggier moment of waking up face-down somewhere outside your apartment as your feet were being bound. You recalled kicking out, a loud curse, and then a searing pain in your arm just before you mentally willed the ring around your finger to please, for the love of all that is Ozzy, take you to Red. Red, and the brief, panicky conversation afterward, was a blur. Beyond that, you truly could remember nothing. “Where’s Red? Where is he?!”

“Hey, now, settle down. He was here about four hours ago.” The nurse pressed gently, yet firmly, on your chest to get you to lie back down. “He left.” She then gave a displeased huff. “And took his brother with him! Of all the nerve! I swear, defiance must be a genetic trait in that family.”

“Did he say where he was going? Like if he was headed home, or anything like that?” Fear crept
into your voice.

“No, nothing like that. All he said was some nonsense about Papyrus learning to clean up after himself.” She paused, seemingly taking note of the apprehension that must have clearly shown on your face, and then furrowed her brow curiously. “Does that mean anything to you?”

Her words made goosebumps form on your arms as they chilled you to the bone. To you, his sentence made terrifying sense. In both of scraps Red had gotten into on your behalf, not once had you been harmed. His responses to those incidents had bordered on insanity, and a masochistic part of you dared to taunt you with the idea of what he planned on doing now that you had gotten hurt. “I need to call him! Is there a phone I can use?”

“You’re still clearly unwell. I’ll call him for you.” This was not the ideal situation, but you needed to get Red on the phone and talk some sense into him before he had the chance to do something both romantic, and incredibly stupid. You could hear the dial tone all the way from the bed, since she’d graciously put it on speaker-phone, and heard the exact moment he picked up.

“Whaddya want?” Oddly enough, he sounded calm, which was a bad sign right off the bat.

“Mr. Sans? This is the maginurse from Ebott Mercy. Your fiancee is awake, and she asked to speak with you.” The nurse placed the body of the landline as near to the bed as it could go, and then stepped back to let you have the conversational floor.

“Red? Are you alright?” You eyed the nurse as you tried to figure out a clandestine way to ask him if his LoVe had increased while you were gone.

“Why you askin’ ‘bout me? You’re the one in the hospital. But, yeah, I’m good. You okay t’ go home?”

The nurse gave you a thumbs-up, so you guessed that meant you were free to go. “Yeah, um... so, where are you?”

“’bout to head home mahself, actually. Took Boss out on a... heh... walk for a bit of bro-time.” Red never exercised for any reason. Inside, you were freaking out because this was very, very bad.

“We’ve still got a bit of... walking... to do, so I’ll just go ahead an’ call ya a cab.” In the background, someone moaned pitifully.

“What was that?!” Your voice climbing a whole octave higher than usual.

“That was... uh... Boss! Yeah, Boss had some bad sushi.” Red was a truly atrocious liar sometimes, but he couldn’t exactly tell you what he’d done in front of the nurse; at best, she’d faint and at worst, she’d contact the authorities. “Shoulda knew that restaurant was bad news; the owner was acting pretty fishy.”

“Oh, wonderful. You’ve had my patient for a grand total of four hours, and you’ve already given him food poisoning!” Groaned the maginurse.

“He’ll be fine, sister. In fact, I’ll have him back, right as rain, as soon he can speak without-“ Another, louder groan. “Aaaand, there he goes again! I told ya not t’ get the sea urchin, Pap! Jeez, when is this kid gonna learn t’ listen to me, am I right? Heheheh.”

You weren’t overly concerned with anything other than his safety. The lack of police sirens had been a boon to your mood as well, but you wouldn’t feel right about this until you were sure he’d taken care not to be seen or heard. You realized that he was an expert at covering his tracks; you were simply the type to agonize, and overthink these things. Once you’d finished the call, you began the
tedious discharge process. “Now, you’re sure he’ll be home within a few minutes of your arrival?” The maginurse asked because she was hesitant to leave you without a carer for longer than a few minutes.

“Positive.” You nodded as you thumbed through the head injury after-care leaflet she’d presented you. “I’m not allowed to be by myself for 24 hours?”

“20 hours, at this point, but yes. Also, I suggest you call off work tomorrow. I’m sure they’ll understand. I’ll have the paperwork sent to your primary care physician before tomorrow morning, so you may pick up a doctor’s note if they require it.” She smiled. “One more thing…please, tell your fiance to return my patient!” Her eye twitched in a slightly frightening way.

“Um…will do.” You backed away slowly, cowed beneath her aura of irritation. “H-have a nice day, thanks for all of your help!” You scurried away like the petrified mouse that you believed yourself to be, and slid into the back of the taxi. The ride was pleasant, even though the whole car reeked of ancient fast food, and the driver was mercifully quiet. You didn’t feel much like talking; your mouth still tasted of old blood, and your head throbbed.

Suffice to say, your day had been a considerably bad one, and you were not at all prepared for it to get worse, but it definitely did. Sure, you got home, whipped out your toothbrush to finally get that icky, metallic tang out of your mouth, and had created a comfy divot in the couch with Red’s blanket tucked around you. You’d even made yourself a lovely cup of hot cocoa, but your peace was about to become very disturbed.

A mere half an hour, that was all you’d had to sip your drink, and try to enjoy the fact that you’d survived your brush with a group of hardened criminals. Then, Red stepped in, covered in freaking blood. If he’d have told you he was cosplaying as a tampon, you would’ve believed him. You almost dropped your mug out of sheer amazement and revulsion. “Did you bathe in their blood, Mr. Tepes? Jesus!”

“Now, I know what yer thinkin’-“

“That you need a shower, ASAP? Before someone sees you and calls the goddamn police? BECAUSE THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT I AM THINKING!”

“Human, temper your volume!” Boss stepped around his brother. “We have taken all of the necessary precautions; magical memory wipes for the survivors, sound barriers for the neighbors, and a very big fire! It makes me wonder how you inferior humans got away with murder without magic.” He slammed the door behind him and laughed triumphantly. “There is no possible way that the police shall know it was us! Nyeheheh!”

“You!” You pointed an accusatory finger in his direction. “You are going right back to the hospital, mister! I don’t want our apartment broken into a third time, much less by that scary maginurse.”

Red kicked off his shoes. “I’ll take ‘im back after I have that shower.” He disappeared into the bathroom, abandoning you to the company of his brother.

“Would you…uh…like a cup of cocoa, Papyrus?” You held up your own cup in invitation.

“I prefer tea.” He crossed his arms, and glared down at the mug like it had called him a bad name.

“Oh.” You searched your mind for topics to fill the awkward silence. “Are you feeling any better?”

“Obviously.” He smirked at your fumbling. His hospital gown, which was embarrassingly short, was also splattered with blood, although he was far cleaner than his brother.
“Um, you’ve got a few spots…there…and there, too.” You pointed out the brownish, drying spatters. What was your life, anymore? Two months ago, your main goal was to sleep with your sexy roommate, and now you were seated here pointing out bloodstains on his brother’s ill-fitting attire …whilst said roommate-turned-fiance washed the blood of his enemies down the drain. If you were amongst the more sane people in the world, you probably would have run away screaming a long time ago.

Unfortunately, you happened to be somewhat off your rocker, in your own opinion. You could’ve blamed several things for that; witnessing your mother’s life being cut short, years of bullying and emotional torment, growing up with a workaholic father, or even being put through the riotous rigmarole that was attending college at the nation’s number one party school. Honestly, though, you figured you’d been born to water dance to the beat of your own tambourine. Insanity came in handy at times like this because you could let this whole situation go…until the next time you had a panic attack from the stress of reiterating to yourself that your lover was a low-key magical being with a penchant for vigilantism.

“I feel it is my duty to warn you, human.” Papyrus broke the silence, though he seemed to be making a considerate effort to maintain an inside-voice. “My brother has started his heat. He lost himself in a blood-rage earlier. Monsters are often more violent during our heats.”

“Why are you warning me?”

Boss hesitated for a split second. “Because I do not believe he’d wish to accidentally harm you. I’m not sure what he is like during his heat. Whenever either of us went through it, we would usually pay for a hotel room for the week. The main reason is that we are particularly volatile, but also because the stench of another male monster in heat is horribly unpleasant. It only happens once a year, thankfully! It causes a huge amount of wasted time. I despise wasting time.”

“Can males in heat be around other males?” You asked, curious because this was something Red had never mentioned.

“That depends. Red and I are both alphas, so our scents are particularly repugnant to most others. Betas, as I understand, are mostly nose-blind to it, although it does seem to affect their irritability. And, of course, if two males are mated their bodies produce hormones that are more attractive to the other.”

“What about female monsters?” This conversation was getting to be fairly interesting. You’d always loved learning new things, and this was also the first time that you’d ever seen Boss be calm. Was it your imagination, or had he changed a great deal over the past few weeks?

“Females have two heats per year, and are only fertile during those times. Knowing what I do from my mandatory course on human anatomy, it works similarly to the human biological female’s menstrual cycle. Monster females do not, however, shed their uterine lining as humans do, which is ABSOLUTELY GROSS, by the way! Ugh.” The mandatory course he’d spoken of was a part of the immigration process monsters had been required to go through to become aboveground citizens. Red had mentioned the ‘shitload of paperwork, tests, and stupid classes’ a couple of times before.

“And what did you mean before? About monsters being mated?”

Pap rudely reached over and pulled your shirt over to expose the glowing, scarlet ember on your shoulder. “Mated.” He said, matter-of-factly. “The dominant party marks the submissive with their magic. The magic in a mating mark stimulates the pleasure centers of the brain. It is meant to make the act more…” Boss was shifting uncomfortably, seemingly squicked out by talking about the intricacies of monster sex. “Well, it makes it easier. Take from that what you may.”
“Is it permanent?” You inquired.

Boss scowled. “Why? Is my brother no longer good enough for you?!”

“No, I was just wondering because I’m sure not all relationships work out, even when it comes to magical beings.” You felt more at ease. Boss, while he was being comparatively polite to most other times you’d spoken with him, had remained himself. His waspish reply to your question had made that much crystal-clear.

Boss relaxed a little, but retained his severe frown. “It isn’t permanent. It can be removed by the maker at any point, or removed by a sufficiently powerful third party if the dominant refuses. It will also fade when the creator has dusted.”

Well, thank goodness for that. You had a direct tie to Red’s lifeline, and you’d had no idea. You knew you’d constantly be checking the thing every time he went on one of his rampages. “Thanks for clearing things up, Boss.” You smiled gratefully. “Red never got around to telling me any of that.”

Boss sniffed haughtily. “Of course, he didn’t! He’s a lazy, forgetful good-for-nothing!”

“First, fuck you.” Red called from the bathroom doorway. Steam from his shower filtered slowly into the living room. “Second, what the hell did I do this time?”

“It seems you can’t even be trusted with informing your mate about monster anatomy and customs! I don’t even know why she’s not upset at the fact that you marked her without her even knowing what it means!” Boss grumbled, averting his eyes upon realizing that his brother had opened the door without bothering to get dressed. “Put some clothes on, you imbecile!”

“My house, Boss. I can walk around in my birthday suit if I wanna. An’ I asked ‘er first! I wouldn’t mark ‘er if she didn’t wanna be my girl in the first place, dumbass.” Red retorted testily.

“You can’t take him back to the hospital if you’re naked.” You decided to take the stance of mediator. If Red’s temper was truly worsened by his heat, you didn’t want to simply stand there while the brothers duked it out over something so insignificant. “And, Boss, please, try not to insult your brother. He’s been terribly patient with you.”

“Hmph, fine! But only because the sooner he gets dressed, the sooner I can get away from that horrid, rotten-meat smell he’s letting off. Disgusting!”

“Rotten meat?” You leaned over and sniffed Red’s neck. He didn’t smell bad at all to you; the smell of his heat was just a stronger, somewhat musky variation of his typical scent. The acrid bite of ash had softened, and the sweetness of the notes of cherry had been amplified. A hint of spice, which you’d previously only associated with him as a taste, underlined the perfume in the air. If you had to put a name to it, you would have said he smelled like freshly-baked cherry pie dusted with cinnamon sugar. A silly grin spread your lips wide. “Red, you smell amazing.”

“OH, HELL NO! BROTHER, YOU WILL GET ME OUT OF HERE BEFORE YOUR PHEROMONES SET HER OFF!” His cheekbones were stained with dark orange. “My eyes do not deserve to be sacrificed upon the altar of your ardor!”
Thank you once again to the lovely MsMk! Go check out her companion piece to this story, which is called *Fight Me*!

Also, thank you to my reviewers and everyone else who likes my writing!

Finally, I hope you enjoy this chapter, there is a good amount of fluff before the erotic part, so if you're not into the sexual stuff you may skip that. I still recommend reading the fluff, though. ;D

Red was glomped upon his arrival back home; you gazed up at him with such affection in your eyes that he nearly forgot you were only being so bold because of his pheromones. This wouldn’t do at all, of course. So, he turned his head to the side just as you went in for a heated kiss, and let your lips meet his cheekbone instead. You whined a little in the back of your throat, but he shook his head.

“You’re doped up on hormones.” He reminded you softly.

“But, Red ~….” You stuck your bottom lip out in a pout.

“I’d never refuse ya if you were in yer right mind, but it doesn’t…” He did his best to hide his discomfiture. “It doesn’t feel right.”

You blinked owlishly at him; your pupils were blown wide with desire. The testosterone and bremelanotide, both chemicals produced naturally by male alphas, were having their way with your head. “I’m horny, not drunk.”

“Let’s just cuddle, a’right?” He forced himself away. He was a monster who prided himself on control; even when he was in the throes of a heat he’d never take advantage of anyone that way. He wanted you, by Polaris, he did, but it wasn’t right. He wanted it to happen naturally, not because of the stupid pheromones. Heat aside, you were beaned in the head! That had to have temporarily knocked a couple of screws loose. He’d always been the one to make the moves, to do the flirting, and crack the dirty jokes, and he was all for you taking some initiative, but this was different.

But, deep down, it wasn’t just that. He was afraid, no, goddamn terrified, he’d go ham and thoughtlessly fuck this all up. He thought back to the earlier events of the day, and shuddered to think he could lose himself in a similar way around you. Truth be told, he’d been dreading his heat. He was a double-A, for stars’ sake! If he let his control slip for a second… “Red?” He shook his head clear of that incredibly troubling idea. “Red, look at me, okay?” You tugged gently on his hand, leading him into the bedroom for cuddle-time. “I don’t just want you because of the pheromones, or whatever.” You laid your head in its customary place on his chest. “We’ve established that I’m absolutely down to bone you any time.”

“Hey! I wear the pun-pants in this relationship, toots.” He joked, though his heart wasn’t in it. He could tell you knew it, too, by the way the smile dropped from your lips. “Look, I wanna. You dunno how much I want to, but you’re already hurt, and I…well, you’re a double-B, sweetheart. I can read it in your soul.”

“Double…what?” You pushed your head up to lean on your fists.
“Fuck, guess I forgot t’ tell ya ‘bout that stuff, too, eh?” He mentally kicked himself. At least Boss wouldn’t have to explain this part…thank the stars for small miracles. “You know…um…it’s like the LGBTQ+ crowd. Monsters are similar. We just have different names for it. There’s alphas, betas, and kappas, who are all physical types. Alphas do the sex pheromone and knotting thing. They’re more prone to goin’ aggro when they’re pissed. Betas have considerably less power than alphas, but they can win fights with more powerful monsters if they’re smart about it. Kappas…there’s an aboveground word for it…lemme think…oh, yeah!” He snapped his fingers. “Intersex. Some kappas experience heats like alphas do, and some don’t; everybody is different.”

“So…what is a double-B?”

“I’m gettin’ to that, hold yer horses.” He chuckled. “So, yeah, anyway, those are the base types. Next, we have the sexualities, and the genders; lesbians call themselves gammas, gay monsters go by deltas, and epsilons usually identify as bisexual or pansexual.” He watched your face cloud over with confusion. “It’s a bit complicated, I know, but stick with me on this. Then ya’ve got zetas; asexual romantics. After that, there are the thetas, who are both asexual and aromantic. Mu are genderless or genderfluid monsters, while transsexual monsters prefer to be called sigmas. Finally, you’ve got the upsilons who can switch between male and female junk on a whim because of ~magic~.” He emphasized ‘magic’ with jazz hands. “To shorten it all up an’ be polite, we refer to it as an A/B/K-Multi designation. Boss an’ I are AAU. I just prefer rockin’ a cock because I’ve tried the vag thing, but magical STIs are Hell on earth with that equipment, and it also wasn’t exactly my cuppa tea.”

“Red…double-B, remember?” You let out an exaggerated sigh. He had a tendency to ramble, and he knew it, but it never truly bothered you, so he’d never tried to curb it.

“Right, right. So, you already know how I’m, like, the third most BEAST monster alive right now?” He grinned when you rolled your eyes at that. “Well, when an alpha has an especially high LoVe and degree of aggression, they’re called a double-A. Asgore, Boss, an’ me are the only double-As for the last…I dunno…few hundred years, I guess.” He stroked your head thoughtfully. “Double-B monsters are rarer than a pay raise at Walmart. Mostly because they were hit with the double whammy of bein’ born as a Beta with a low HP an’ never got skilled enough with what little magic they did have to be able to earn any LoVe. A double-B can claw their way to the top, but…it almost never happens.”

“What’s my HP?” You’d never hurt a thing in your life, so your LoVe was a big, fat zero.

“0.5. You’re a 2, most of the time. Oh, don’t look so terrified, sugar, you’re hurt. You’ll go back to your usual number when you’ve healed up.” He squeezed you tighter for a moment.

“What’s your HP?” You asked tentatively.

“I’ve gone up a lot. I used t’ be at 1 when I was a kid, but I had to fight a lotta battles for Papyrus, Undyne, and then it kept climbin’ when I got to the surface ‘cuz reasons t’ fight are even more plentiful up here. Racism…bigotry…rape…psychopaths…people who touch my girl…” You shoved indignantly at his shoulder, and he winked roguishly back. “I’m at 2787 right now. 40 AT and 40 DF.”

You paused. “So, does that mean I’m weak?”

“No…uh…yes? Physically, sweetheart, you’re delicate, but I think you’ve got a mind like a steel trap, and you’ve got a strong personality. That’s all I need, anyway. Most alphas want other alphas, y’know, but you’re strong in your own, quiet way, and I like that. Did I ever tell ya what yer soul traits were?” He didn’t think he had, so he wasn’t surprised to see you shaking your head. He stimulated your energy to make it blossom into being. “This shade of purple indicates compassion,
but your sub-traits are forgiveness and loyalty.” He saw your expression change to worry. “I know that face, and don’t be an idiot about this. You’re strong enough for me, so fuhgeddaboudit. Takes a stronger person than me t’ actually forgive someone.”

“That’s…I think that’s the sweetest thing anyone’s ever said to me.” You twirled the ends of your hair absently, shyly, around your fingers. “You mean it?”

“I don’t make a habit of sayin’ crap I don’t mean.” As soon as the words left him, you launched yourself forward like you’d jumped off a springboard at the Olympics. He hadn’t expected you were going to kiss him, but he gave in with a low, rumbling moan. When you had to stop for breath, his grin expanded exponentially. “Hot damn, woman! Gotta warn a man before ya go doin’ that shit.” You dipped your head down again, your lips moving hungrily against his mouth. He lapped at your tongue to lure you in, and then gently nibbled at it. You, not to be outdone, sucked his between your warm lips and bobbed your head slightly, as if you were pretending his tongue was his cock.

“Fuck me.” You pleaded, panting and skin glowing red with the most adorable blush.

Wait. What? He would’ve done a double-take if he were in the proper position for it. “Say what, now?”

“I want you to strip me, hold me down, and fuck me until I can’t form a proper sentence.” You said it as casually as if you were making small talk about the weather.

“That…is not a good idea.” His voice came out as strained as the magic that now bulged in his pants. “I’ll hurt ya.”

You sat up, grinding your pelvis into his, and he couldn’t wrangle back the urge to buck his hips. “You’re always so sweet, daddy.” Oh shit. “But I wanna be fucked!”

Well, fine, if you honestly thought you could handle it. “Goddamnit.” He growled through clenched teeth. He quickly reversed your positions, and straddled you with his teeth inches from your nose. “Here I am, tryin’ t’ be a fuckin’ gentleman, and you go an’ say shit like that.” He gave a gentle lovebite to your shoulder, and hit his mark hard enough to have you gasping and begging under him. “You’ll be sore.”

“Don’t care.” You whimpered as he went for the button on your jeans. “I’m…gah…already sore.”

“I’ll mark you up.” He tried once more to dissuade you, searching hard for any signs of uncertainty. “Good!”

And that’s what did it for him; that was the moment he went flying off of that cliff. He ended up actually yanking the zipper pull completely off your jeans, not really caring that he now owed you a second pair, and ripped through the lacy barrier that dared keep him from his prize. He drew letters around your clit, although it took you a minute to feel them through your lusty haze. M. I. N. E. You let your head fall back onto the pillow as he continued spelling until he felt you start to tighten, and then he abandoned you. He ignored your groan of complaint, and flipped you over. “Yer not gonna cum ‘less it's around my cock.” He reached up with one hand, teased his fingers through your hair to ask an unspoken question. You pushed your head back against his hand as an invitation, so he wrapped your locks around his hand, and yanked your head back. He licked up the back of your neck, relishing your quiet, pleased sighs, and nipped devilishly at your earlobe. “Say mah name, angel.” His accent grew thicker as his self-control pirouetted over thin ice.

“Red!” You choked on his name as he thrust forward without warning to hilt himself deep inside.
“Red, please…” He teased you relentlessly, going slow, and not even bottoming out. He loved seeing you squirm and writhe, desperate to fuck yourself on his dick, and begging for him to ravish you. He’d never seen you this worked up. He wished he’d set up a camera, just in case he ever needed jerk-off material, because this was a million times more satisfying than some shitty porno mag or a half-assed, amateur, online recording from some cam-girl.

He felt himself start to swell, and changed positions for the third time. You were back on top, and looking so surprised that he had to laugh a little. “You’re gonna take my knot, an’ I’m gonna watch.” His breath hitched in his throat, and he thrust deeper to steal yet another pleasured noise from your throat. “You’re leakin’ all over me, angel.” He said this as he felt a trickle of wetness drip down his hipbone to be sopped up by the sheets. “Ya feel so fuckin’ good, like warm, wet silk sliding over the head of my cock.” He shot out a hand, yanked you back down by your hair for a deep, tongue-tangling make-out session while his body slowly locked you into place.

He nudged your hips into a lazy, circular movement, which was the only friction he could get now that he’d stretched you so tightly. He thumbed your clit mercilessly, drawing a couple of orgasms, which helped to loosen you up for the main event. His own release was building, like a crescendo at an orchestra. His soul was a bass drum behind his ribs, and his magic hummed to the beat. Your wrecked moans were the lyrics to this song, and the slap of his hips into yours was the dance. He came with a bellowing, thunderous roar, and noted with the greatest, most deep-seated satisfaction that your abdomen was dimly lit from within by the magic of his release.

“So…was that fuckin’ hot or what?”
Thanks to reviewers, givers of kudos, and those who just gave my story a chance. Thank you to MsMk, who is still working hard on her companion fic Fight Me!. I hope some of you remember to go give her some support, too. Also, fanart is always welcome!

“Are you sure you want to do this?” You stood just off to the side of the door leading into the Ebott Animal Sanctuary. Red was sucking on a cigarette, blowing the smoke high into the air; he’d asked for a smoke break before both of you went in. You’d never witnessed him smoke cigarettes before, but you were certain he was internally freaking out, therefore settling for any source of nicotine he could buy in a hurry. “You seem…reluctant.”

“Hey, I said we’d do this, so I’m a do it, ‘kay? Already budgeted out the pet fee and supplies t’ take care of the mutt.” He took a deep drag and sucking the burn all the way to the filter. He dropped it into the sand-filled ashtray that served as the shelter’s door-stop. He dusted his hands off, took a deep breath, and let it out slowly. “’A’right. Let’s go.”

The lobby, consisting of a tiny, boxy area lined with scuffed, pine-wood chairs. The whole place was squeaky-clean; the windows were spotless, and even the smallest corner appeared to have been recently swept out. The walls were covered in posters of feel-good rescue stories, and papered with children’s drawings that had been given to the office after some fundraiser. The person at the desk glanced up beaming, and took off their reading glasses. “Hello, you may call me Patricia or Miss Patty. How may I help you?”

“Lookin’ for a dog.” Red informed her in a tight voice. “One that doesn’t shed much. Housebroken. Nothin’ younger than a year or so.”

“Well, sir, we only have puppies right now…” She happened to glance at the time on her computer, and her hand flew to her mouth. “Oh, hold on. Actually, we do have a mixed breed male. He was brought in from the street a week ago. I almost forgot about him.”

“We’ll take a look.”

She tapped a pen against her mouth. “He was about to be euthanized. We’re at max capacity for pit-bull-type dogs, and he seems to be a fearful fellow. So, don’t be disappointed if he doesn’t come up to you straight away. It took him a couple of days to warm up to me.” She said in a somewhat dejected way, as if she feared Red would go back on his request after hearing it.

“Whatsoever.” Red muttered, and stepped toward the door that led to the kennels. He noticed that the middle-aged woman hadn’t moved from her seat. “Uh…aren’t ya gonna show us the dog?”

She stood up so fast, hope gleaming her almond-shaped eyes, that her office chair went rolling into the wall behind her. “Yes! He’s at the very end.” She walked quickly, the heels of her black stilettos made excited clicks on the tile.

This half of the pound was massive; honeycombed structures of kennels to the left were intended for
feline homes. On the opposite sides, the first, widest level was dedicated to the bigger dogs, while the upper stories were temporary lodging for medium, and finally puppies or smaller breeds at the top. Your eyes traced over these, and their whimpering, cheerful inhabitants. A virtual rainbow of brown, white, black, and auburn furs pressed its collective self against the gates. You wished you could take every single one home, but that was, sadly, impossible.

She stopped outside the last row at the very end. “Here he is! We’ve been calling him King, but you could call him whatever you want, of course.”

King was curled up in the corner, his head barely lifted to acknowledge that he had visitors, and glared up with his single, russet eye. The other eye was missing; it had been gouged out, if the massive amount of scar tissue covering the upper, right side of his face was any hint. The ear on that same side was gone, and had been apparently taken recently because there were bandages looped around the wound. His black-furred face was covered in bald streaks where fur had never re-grown over old injuries. The lady pulled a small, dry treat from her hands and whistled. “Here, King. Here, sweetie.”

The dog’s ear twitched with interest, although he refused to get up. “He looks like a fucked-up gorilla.” Red grumbled out of the side of his mouth.

It wasn’t an untrue observation; King was massive. His face was black, but it faded into short, creamy white fur down the rest of his body right down to his crooked, curlicue tail. “He’s a Kangal/Pitbull mix, we’re reasonably certain. He’s got the Kangal size, the Pitbull muscle tone, Kangal markings, and his face is shaped closer to a Pitbull’s.”

“Don’t care about breeds.” Red stated plainly.

“Can you let him out?” You pressed your fingers through the metal bars, and made a few encouraging sounds with your mouth.

“I don’t usually do it, but I’ll make an exception since…well, if I’m honest I’d love if you brought him home. He’s not aggressive, just a bit scared and lazy. No one who’s come in to adopt has wanted him because of his size and looks. I know he looks rough, but he’s a sweetheart on the inside.” She was really trying to sell you on this dog, you smiled amusedly, but you could understand. If you were in her position, you’d do everything you could to save a healthy dog from an unnecessary demise.

She unlocked the gate for you, and clipped a leash to the collar. The dog almost seemed to glare at her before getting up, stretching to his full size, and trotting out. He stuck close to her legs, staring you with his single, piercing eye. You picked up the treat, moved it closer to his nose by a few inches, and held out your cupped hand. He inched forward, and the treat was gone with the wipe of a wet, pink tongue. He cracked it in twain with a single snap of his jaws as if to say ‘this is what I can do, stay back if you know what’s good.’. As he munched, you remained still and watched him lick crumbs out of his ebony whiskers.

You loved him already, now if only he’d stop giving you that mistrustful, evil eye. An idea, born out of late nights watching Discovery channel animal documentaries, bounced around in your head for a few moments. “Do you have another treat?” You were handed one, and you grimaced a little at what you were about to do before biting into a corner of the dog biscuit.

“Ah, babe, really? Gross.”

“Sharing food is how animals bond!” You said around your mouthful of dog bone, before offering the rest to King…and he took it right out of your hand! “See? Progress!” You swallowed your bite
with no small difficulty; it wasn’t that it tasted bad, it actually tasted no worse than a hunk of stale bread, but it left a greasy, gritty aftertaste in your mouth.

“Still fuckin’ gross. You’re brushin’ your teeth before you get any more kisses today.” He vowed.

All doubts were silenced when King did the unthinkable and rolled onto his belly for you. The volunteer secretary’s mouth dropped open in wonder. “I don’t believe it.” You grinned as you vigorously rubbed his stomach. He pushed his head into your hand for a pat. “He’s never done that before!”

“Should’ve expected it.” Red stared down at you as the giant mutt gave your face an affectionate nuzzle. “She’s got a way with broken things.” He turned to her. “Okay, how much and where do I sign?”

Later, Red warped the three of you to the local supermarket to buy the necessary supplies; dog bed, food, treats, a few heavy-duty toys because that mouth looked like it could snap bones like twigs, shampoo, a leash, and a collar. He’d insisted upon getting the metal-spiked, black leather one that was thick as a Texas-style belt. “I’ll duck into the courthouse t’morra to get King Kong there a license.”

You grinned giddily because you’d always wanted a puppy. “Isn’t he adorable?”

“He’s fugly.”

“He’s got character.” You cooed down at the dog, who had spent the time lounging across your lap on a bench outside.

“They had Magilla Gorilla for sale, no wonder no one else wanted ‘im.” His arms are full of items, but his face was full of mild contempt. “He better do his fuckin’ job or I’m throwin’ these treats in the dog park. That’s all I’m sayin’.”

“Red, give him a break. I’m sure just the sight or sound of him will have any future unwanted visitors running for the hills!” You scratched behind King’s intact ear, and he seemed to grin up at Red with a smartass twinkle in his eye.

Your fiance was trying his best to act surly, but you caught him feeding King under the table at dinner that night. You pretended not to notice at all, but were forced to hide a giggle with a coughing fit. You stayed up for a few hours, but you’d had an early start to the day and were fully ready for Hypnos’s sweet embrace. You gave Red a chaste kiss on his skull, gave doggo a final pat-pat, and went to bed.

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Once he was sure you were asleep, Red hopped off the couch to claim a cigar from his humidor, and popped out the open window that led to the fire escape. He lit up, and relaxed against the aluminum siding. The cigar hissed with every mouthful of smoke he sucked in. He choked on his next pull, however, because a battered, furry face was poking out of the window.

King’s eye zeroed in on the cigar gripped between Red’s teeth, and then whined. “Sorry, pooch. Much too good for doggos.” King let out a grumbly growl. “Oh, shuddup. You got yer own treats. Buzz off.” The dog didn’t relent in his begging for a moment, instead he scuttled farther out the window. His whole neck was now through the opening, and he gave a short, demanding bark. “Get back in there, mutt!” He pushed him in, but then King maneuvered himself so that his butt was hanging out of the window instead. Red pushed that in, and out popped King’s head. “Fuck it, I give
up.” He offered the last draw to King, who delicately trapped it between his teeth, and thereafter acted pleased as punch that his crafty tricks had paid off. “But you’re still a fugly bastard.”
As his heat progressed, Red became more irritable, horny, and territorial. As soon as he came home from both of his jobs, he’d jump in the shower to wash off the oil from the shop and the dust from the construction site, and then pull you into bed with a greedy kiss. These kisses, more often than not, led to impassioned ruts in the shower, bed, and sometimes the couch. He barely talked, and ate less, but his magic still thrived around him in a near-constant cloud. If the magic were fire, he would have been a dead-ringer for Ghost Rider—minus the flaming whip, of course. However, when you suggested a day out for some fresh air, he readily complied because he’d been getting antsy lately from cooping himself up at work and home.

Humans reacted curiously to his heated state; strangers, especially males, averted their eyes and gave him a wide berth. He noticed it occurred more frequently as you both maneuvered into the heavily populated area of the street markets in the part of town known as 'Subterra Parva', where most of the monsters lived in slummy complexes; selling magical services to earn enough to survive. Despite the minor gloom that hung over it, the colorful street markets were pretty awesome; they were filled with performers, both human and monster alike, wonderful food, and trinket vendors. Some monsters’ hands would fly to cover their mouths, often gagging, because his scent had become so strong. Humans, as it turned out, didn’t react to the smell as directly. Instead, he earned disconcerted glares, although mostly they ignored both it and him.

He’d had to take great pains to control himself during the outing, but there were certain incidents that particularly irked him; a few racist remarks said in passing as the two of you strolled through leisurely through the city, but the ones directed at him weren’t a bother. It was the passing glares you received that pissed him off more than anything else. Anti-monster/mage sentiments were bubbling close to the surface and spilling over in the form of distaste for human/monster relationships, especially after Asgore had delivered himself into the custody of the authorities. It made him fearful for any hate crimes that may be directed at you and him; he could handle himself, but you weren’t a fighter. At least, there was the dog, though, and if he’d had any doubts about the sanity of adopting King, they left him that day. “It’s a nice day. Why don’t we pop back home an’ grab the mutt? Fatass needs the exercise.”

In no time at all, King was leashed up, and Red warped you both to the park. It was rather comical to see you leading the massive hound. On his hind legs, he stood at a whopping six feet, which utterly dwarfed you, but he was letting you lead without so much as the lightest tug. He pranced around, lifting his leg occasionally, but mostly meandering along obediently at your side. Part of the way through the walk, your shoe came untied, so you handed the leash over to him.

So, obviously, the shithead immediately jerked forward with all his weight. He succeeded in nearly dragging Red to the ground with his stunt, but Red managed to dig his heels in and stayed on his feet. “You cheeky motherfucker, ya did that on purpose!” He snarled down at the dog, who let loose
a series of wheezes that might have been a doggy-version of a snicker.

“I’m sure he just saw a squirrel, Red.” You held out your hand for the leash, which he begrudgingly returned.

“Right, an’ I’ve suddenly developed a passion for kale and pt cruisers.”

You were at the dog park with him and King for less than forty-five minutes, when a meathead approached with an offer to buy the mutt. Before he’d come up to you, Red had noticed him hanging around eyeing the owner of every single Rottweiler, German Shepard, Bulldog, and Pitbull in the park, both pure and mixed. He'd heard of people who did this; scouting parks or shelters searching not-so-subtly for bait, fighters, and even some who did it to gather guard dogs for gang leaders. Some went to great lengths to get the dogs, and dog-napping, usually of unleashed pets, was on a steady, rising trend.

Many of the lesser gangs were at war in the streets, scrambling to fill the opening the Hellhounds had left behind. Word on the street was that, while he’d only been intending to make a statement, his actions had unintentionally sparked an avalanche of territory disputes and other violence. Despite the fact that it had merely been three days since the gang’s fall, the reaction had been nearly instantaneous. Therefore he was, understandably, put on edge the moment the guy spotted King. “Sturdy lookin’ animal, you got there, man.”

“He’s just a mutt.” He sharpened his words upon the whetstone of a growl. “You wouldn’t want ‘im. He’s a pain in the ass.”

“Actually, I’m lookin’ to buy if you’re up for it.” The guy couldn’t take a hint. He’d been harassing other owners for the entire day, and one would’ve thought someone should’ve called the police, but the cops in Ebott city were beyond useless. Half were crooked, and the other half were too afraid of losing their jobs to stand up to, or report, the bad ones. They’d have never deigned themselves to chasing after someone who wasn’t doing anything undeniably illegal, especially if the responding officers had any dealings with whatever gang this shmuck was involved in. “I’ve got some clients who’d pay big money for security dog like him.”

To top everything off, the asshole did the dumbest thing Red had ever seen and tried to pet King. King casually took a dignified step back, his mouth twitching and his ear laid back in warning. He didn’t even have to growl to make his distaste clear. “Don’t touch my dog!” Red’s brow furrowed in confusion, and then he broke into a grin to see you standing up and glaring at the man. “We’re not interested, okay? Back off.”

Fuck, you were hot when you did shit like this. Your natural inclination was to allow people to walk all over you, but when you were particularly incensed…Red let his eyes wander over you appreciatively. The guy was twice your size in width and height, but you didn’t seem to care as you continued to tell him off. Arousal curled like a snake through his mind, and spaced him out to the point that he lost all contact with reality.

And then, the douche decided it was a good move to push you out of his face; bringing Red crashing back to earth, but he’d been beaten to the punch before he even called the magic to his hand. King, all 130-some-odd pounds of him, was on it. You’d had to jump away to avoid being crushed as King tackled him from behind. King had the element of surprise, so he had him on the ground in a blink, with a paw pushing heavily down on the back of the guy’s neck. “I hope ya like steak, mutt.” Red chuckled, and put a boot in the small of the guy’s back. “‘Cuz yer gettin’ T-bones for the rest of the week.” Many people, curiosity burning in their eyes, tried to watch from afar. “You all saw it, right? He pushed ‘er. The mutt did nothin’ wrong.”
“I saw nothing.” A man said, whose leash was attached to gorgeous St.Bernard’s collar. “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“It’s a shame that poor man tripped.” An elderly lady with a Shih Tzu agreed, her wrinkled face lit up with a wide grin. “I do believe he bruised his ego on the way down.” She must have been a gun owner, he concluded, because shots had been fired.

King hopped off the man’s back with a distinctively royal air, and then kicked a few sprays of dirt into his face before calmly trotting back to your side. He wagged his tail, nudging gently at your stomach with his nose, before settling down for a nap in the noon-day sun. “Lemme give ya some advice.” Red ground his boot heel into the man’s spine. “If I see ya ‘round here again, I’m gonna borrow that old bird’s nail file and grind your teeth down t’ nothin’ like your type does to bait dogs.”

“You can have it now, if you like.” She offered it with a serene smile.

He grinned at her. “You,” He pointed her out with a flourish of his metacarpals. “I like you. You ever need anythin’, just lemme know.” King plodded over as he spoke, and gave the Shih Tzu’s muzzle a friendly, slobbery kiss. “But, back to you.” He lifted his foot and pulled him up to eye-level. “You gonna git? Or am I gonna have t’ put a little hitch in yer giddy-up?”

“Nah…nah, it’s…um…it’s cool, man. We’re all cool here, right?” He glanced fervently around him, taking in the uncaring, cold glares of the park-goers. “I’ve got somewhere I need to be anyway.”

Red dropped him, and backed off, which was a task of grander difficulty for him than one might imagine. “Great! I suggest ya get goin’, then. You wouldn’t wanna be late, trust me.” He let his body drop back onto the bench, and folded his arms behind his head. “My park now, ya wuss.” He hissed quietly, once the guy had taken his leave. “Damn, gettin’ into it at the dog park…I feel so fuckin’ domestic.”

“There is nothing domestic about you, Red.” You argued. “You’re a wild animal.”

He winked suggestively back. “Only in the sheets these days, angel.” He reached over to scratch under King’s chin. “You’ve earned yerself a cut, dog. I’m a have Melody make you one. You’ve got the honor of first pooch ever patched in.”

“You’re seriously going to commission a battle jacket for him?” You asked incredulously.

“There’s no excuse for a lack of style on the road, even if you’re a dog.”
Chapter Summary

This chapter was uploaded as a treat for my fam HibernalBeast! She drew this gorgeous masterpiece for the story.
---https://hibernalbeast.tumblr.com/post/173095859375/big-red
This is her Tumblr --->https://hibernalbeast.tumblr.com/
Flock to her, my glorious swans of fan-spiration! She is gold.

You stared in the mirror with the edge of your shirt lifted up to your breasts. The glow hadn’t gone away. You’d been lit up since the start of Red’s heat, and, at first, you’d thought it was just because of residual magic. After all, he possessed a monstrous libido. Oh, hell, now you were the one making the puns!

You put a hand over the burgundy glow. It wasn’t particularly noticeable, which is what led you to believe Red hadn’t paid any mind to it yet. You wondered if this was some kind of side effect from being with him intimately; perhaps you’d absorbed some of his magic? It wasn’t impossible. Mages seemed to be able to transfer their energy for healing, and it usually stimulated the patient’s soul energy. The only problem was the color. It wasn’t exactly the bright hue of Red’s magic, but it wasn’t your dark violet, either. It was something in-between; the exact shade of a high-quality Sangria. And you were convinced that the glow was growing stronger by the day.

You allowed the fabric to fall back down at the sound of the door opening, and then closing. Red was home from his construction contract. You’d made supper tonight as a treat to let him relax; it wasn’t anything special or complicated, just a few sandwiches with chips, but you were confident he’d appreciate the gesture. Then, you’d ask him about the faint firefly of magic.

He had voraciously torn into dinner, and was about to start stripping down for his daily shower when you caught him by the arm and guided him back down to the couch. “Red, I need your opinion on something…” You pushed your oversized, band-tee up. “Is this something we should worry about? It’s been like this for a week now.”

Confusion, and then elated surprise showed up close behind that. “We need t’ go to a clinic.”


He didn’t answer you all the way through teleporting into the walk-in clinic, the sign-in process, and even up to the moment you were called into the back. He’d shut down, closed up like a clam, and you were almost out of your mind angisting over why. He followed you in, a zombified expression on his face as you spoke with the doctor. “So, are you experiencing any other symptoms, miss?”

“No, it’s just the fact that I’m lit up like a Christmas decoration from the inside.” You guarded your belly with crossed arms. Cancer. You probably, definitely had magical, ovarian cancer. This was it for you. Goodbye, cruel world!

The doctor glanced over at Red, smiled mysteriously, before holding out a urine sample cup. “I have an idea about what this could be, but we’ll need this first. Just fill it to the line, and we’ll have the results in half an hour to forty-five minutes.”
It was the longest forty-five minutes of your life; stuck with your dazed, mute fiancé in a waiting room full of ancient copies of Time magazine, and you were sure you were going to die an early death from whatever this could be. Admittedly, you were always one to jump to the worst conclusion, but this was an unknown, and unknowns were the most terrifying of boogeymen to the human mind. Minutes dragged their feet. Seconds crawled by in your ears with every tic of the wall clock’s pendulum. Time was mocking you with every minute movement of the hour hand. On top of that, your butt was getting sore from the hard chairs, although that wasn’t at the forefront of your thoughts.

Your name was called, and you settled into a minuscule, office-esque space for a tete-a-tete with a different doctor. “Your results came back positive.” Why was she beaming? You were going to die a miserable death glowing like Marie Curie. “You’re pregnant! Congratulations!”

“Pregnant..? How is that even… I thought…” The floor dropped out from under you, opening into a bottomless pit. You were nowhere near ready for a child. What kind of mother could you be? How does one even be a mother? You didn’t have your life figured out, yet! How could you provide for another life? These were only samples of the questions that ran a marathon through your mind. You peeked over at Red, and he was off his chair with a manic grin.

“I’m a dad?!?” He crowed, and then he appeared to realize the gravity of saying that aloud. “Oh, fuck… I’m a dad!” He grabbed your shoulders joyously. “You’re gonna be a mom! We’re gonna-“

He took in your disheartened expression. “You’re not happy.”

“I’m in shock, I think.” You ran a hand through your hair. “I wasn’t aware we could have children. Aren’t monsters a different species?”

“Well, it’s hard to say, ma’am.” The doctor interjected. “This pregnancy, if it doesn’t end in a miscarriage, could be the first half-human in existence. In all likelihood, this could be an indicator that humans and monsters share a common ancestor. You’re a miracle of science, and well, magic, too, of course. I suggest you make an appointment with your regular doctor immediately because this is a gravely serious event! You will need extra care, perhaps a combination of monster and human medical knowledge. I don’t think this is a child that will thrive only on pre-natal vitamins.” As an afterthought, she added. “Not that those aren’t important! I expect you to start a regimen as soon as possible.”

“What about the baby…er…fetus…” You weren’t sure you were comfortable calling it a ‘baby’ right then. “Why is it glowing?”

“Monster souls form before the body.” Red replied before the doctor had the chance to answer. “The kid’ll be just a wisp of soul magic for ‘bout a month.” He was clearly excited, and, in spite of your doubts, you couldn’t say you didn’t want this. You loved all of him, and this baby would be part of him. It was impossible not to love it; whatever happened, this was not a mistake. Love created this life inside you, and you would do everything in your power to protect it. Nothing had ever needed you or depended on you before. For once in your life, you were feeling like you were necessary and it was both scary as well as liberating. This was not a hindrance; this was empowerment, and this was an opportunity for your growth as a person.

“What are the soul traits?” Your voice wobbled and warbled in your throat because you… oh, god, you might actually cry. This was completely overwhelming. You felt you’d gone through the terror of being washed out to sea, and ducked under the frigid salt water, only to see the thriving beauty of a reef below the surface. The possibility and resilience of life; it hit you with choppy waves of emotion.

“Dunno. It’s still too early. The magic hasn’t settled yet.” He sounded concerned. “You… you’re
gonna keep it, right? I mean, your body your choice, but please…I’ll pick up another job.” His laugh was broken by nerves. “I’ll work my fingers to the bone. I’ll get us the picket fence, and a house in the suburbs; hell, we’ve already got the dog to go with it. I’ll give us the goddamned American dream if ya want. Just… please, angel? Gimme a chance t’ be a dad, wontcha?”

This wouldn’t be easy; you already had to dodge Alphys every time she visited. Apparently, your blood was needed for ‘science and reasons’, as a direct quote. “Alphys isn’t allowed to do the doctoring. I want Boss’s maginurse. At least, she won’t chase me around with needles or try to steal hair and skin samples.” You sighed. “And we’re going to need lots of stuff if the baby makes it.”

“Of course, it’ll fuckin’ make it. That’s my kid in there! No way it’ll be anything less than tough as nails. I’m a survivor, you’re a virtual well of nurturing; that kid is us. No, it’s our duty as future parents, socially and genetically-speakin’, to make it better than us. That little slayer is the best of both of us.” In his speech, you finally saw a hint of Papyrus in there; it kind of made sense because Boss had to have gotten his monologue habit from somewhere. “I’ma teach it everything I know, includin’ how to bust some chops. An’ I’m gonna teach it how to ride…I’M GONNA BE A DAD!”

“And I’m glad I don’t have cancer.” You shook your head, the dread of months-worth of sore feet, back pain, upset stomach, and hormonal changes now hung over you like a baby-shaped Sword of Damocles. “This is infinitely better news than cancer.”

Red stopped his celebration and booped you in the nose. “Yer not allowed on WebMD anymore.”
A Blood-Spattered Teddy Bear

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry I had to skip yesterday's update. My husband took me on a surprise date to go see A Quiet Place (I loved it, totally a 7/10 imho) Oh, and I was gifted more fanart from HibernalBeast, so lots of love to her! Go check her out! She's awesome.
Here it is--->https://hibernalbeast.tumblr.com/image/173204885040
And, as always, thanks to MsMk, whose fic Fight Me! is quite hilarious as a companion piece to this angst party. You should check her out, too!

“Red, I’m fully capable of walking.” Currently, you were being carried bridal-style back to bed. He chortled, and ignored you completely; instead, he opted to swing you about in a wide circle before depositing you on his bed.

He kissed your head, slipped under the covers with you, and cuddled up behind you with one hand resting on your lower stomach. “Didn’t think it was possible to love ya more.” Having taken you home directly from the clinic, he’d had only a small amount of time to digest the news. Still, he was bursting with excitement, although a hint of trepidation lingered in his mind.

To say he’d experienced a troubled childhood was like gilding a ball of dung; he’d gone through worse than just ‘troubled’ or ‘difficult’. He’d been his own father’s live-in experiment, being forced into battles with monsters with LoVe and HP multiple times his own, and never treated as anything more than that. When his old man had died in an accident involving that stars-forsaken cross-dimensional teleporter, he’d been overjoyed. The accident had happened not long after Gaster created Paps, so Boss never knew or remembered any of it. What Boss did remember, to Red’s ever-lasting regret, were the years of homelessness and near-starvation. Once it became clear that the amalgamations Alphys had created made the lab uninhabitable, he’d spent his formative, teenage years backpacking his baby bro through the wilderness of Snowdin.

He’d tried his hardest to find someone, anyone, who would employ a kid for a pittance in gold, or at least for some food. No one had. He’d resorted to stealing, to burglary, and he could still remember the face of the first monster he’d killed; a bear-type who’d seen nine-year-old Boss as easy EXP. He’d become a killer at 15 and found himself a natural at it, so bounty-hunting became his thing. Grudges and revenge killings were common in the Underground, less common were those who were willing to risk their necks to handle that shit themselves. So, Red sold his services to the highest bidder, and he’d been so used to it that he hadn’t seen much of a change when Boss started advertising Red’s skills, too. Sometimes, he’d been sold before he’d known it. That was the reason he hadn’t felt much attachment to the house he’d bought back in Snowdin; it had been bought with blood money.

With a life that fucked up, he’d never expected to own anything nice. After he’d saved up for the house, and the fortifications that were necessary, he’d spent every last coin on Boss; an actual education, clothes, and healthy food. Red always ate the cheaper junk food, but he’d covertly instilled a preference in Boss for the real nourishing stuff; vegetables, fruit, lean meats, and anything with very little sugar or carbs. Boss needed it more than Red did because, while Boss might have been created with a higher HP, he was nowhere near as skilled as Red nor as mentally/emotionally
tough.

The single thing he’d bought himself after finally earning a permanent home was the golden fang to replace the one that had been knocked out the day he’d saved Boss’s life. It was one of the few things he felt he’d truly earned. He hadn’t even bought his old jacket himself; Boss had bought that with the first pay raise he’d been bequeathed after his acceptance into the Royal Guard. Things weren’t always bad between him and Boss.

They’d hit rough spots with each other, sure, and they’d pummeled each other a lot over stupid shit. When push came to shove, though, they’d had each other’s backs. He’d wished he’d had the chance back then to develop a more brotherly, less strained relationship with Boss, but Papyrus had always felt the need to push, push, and then push him some more. It was kind of understandable; who wants to admit that their older sibling had any authority over them? Still, at least he’d protected Boss to the best of his ability, and hopefully he’d prevented him from being as utterly screwed up as Red knew himself to be.

As he lay there, initial excitement ebbing, he began to bitterly ponder his own ability to be a father. You had your own doubts about motherhood, but that was to be expected. You were so much younger, and not to mention inexperienced. He had every faith you’d be a wonderful mother, regardless of that fact. “Do…do ya think it’ll like me?”

You sighed and turned to face him. “They’ll love you, Red. You act like a mother hen to practically everyone, so you’ve already got the parent routine down pat.” You grinned and poked him in the sternum. “And, you’ll be the coolest dad. Meanwhile, I’ll be the uncool, librarian parent that every kid is ashamed of.”

“Uncool librarians don’t usually listen to Dragonforce, Metallica, or AC/DC. Pretty sure they don’t run with MC members, either. You say uncool, I say well-rounded…in more ways than one.” He squeezed your hip before reaching up and palming your breast through your shirt. “Such a fuckin’ turn-on. I can’t wait ‘till ya start showin’.”

“Maternity clothes, ugh.” You wrinkled your nose. “I’ll look like a hag.” Even you, with your closet full of modest, wool skirts and long-sleeved shirts, had standards. “I’d be better off naked.”

“I won’t be objectin’ to that idea.” In fact, he quite approved of that. He’d just need to get some black-out curtains first.

“I’m going to look like a human light bulb.” You replied in a mopey, muffled tone of voice. Muffled, because you’d buried your burning face into his turtleneck.

“A sexy light bulb.” He knew he’d won when you started shaking with noiseless laughter. “I love that.” He curled his other arm around your neck, and delighted in the way you melted into the embrace. “The way ya lose all that tension the moment I touch ya. Makes a man feel all fuzzy an’ shit.”

“You are such a teddy bear.”

“A ferocious, blood-spattered, teddy bear, I’ll have ya know.” He lightly tickled your stomach to make you giggle. “Rawr!” He swung a leg over your hip and clamped it down to prevent your escape.

“Oh no! Help!” You managed to say, though you becoming breathless with giggles. He pulled back for a moment to let you catch your breath. Your chest heaved, and you were still laughing a little. His eyes traced your face, memorizing every detail down to the shape of your eyebrows, and leaned
down to let his forehead rest against yours for a time.

You intended, he thought, for your kiss afterward to be quick and sweet, but he couldn’t help sneaking in some tongue action. A clash of tongues led to kisses down your neck, your fingers stroking down the spines on his vertebrae, and that led to his hand up your shirt. Tiny mewls escaped your mouth that he drank down like a well-aged glass of ice-cold scotch. “R-red, hold on.”

He jumped back to rest on his knees. “Somethin’ wrong? Fuck, I didn’t hurt ya, did I?”

“What? No, I just wanted to…um…” You motioned at his sweater.

He knew now what you meant; no matter how heated things had gotten, he’d never fully undressed in front of you. That was on purpose; he wasn’t sure how you’d deal with the mess underneath. His hard-knock life had left him screwed up inside and out, and he knew it wasn’t pretty. “You sure ya wanna see that?” You nodded. “A’right, sorry, but ya asked for it.” He drew his sweater over his head.

Your hand flew to your mouth. “Oh god-“

“Yeah, I know.” He was all too aware of the hardened, uneven, scars that crisscrossed his entire upper body. There were a few on his legs, too, but nothing was as bad as his back and chest. His ribs were slightly knobbled in several places where repeated breaks had caused permanent damage. There were lines upon lines, jagged cracks that had healed wrong, and a few places where he’d lost pieces for good. One of his bottom, shorter ribs had been shattered so badly in a long-ago brawl that it was nothing more than a nub. His back, along his spinal column and scapulas, was a muddle of twisted, bony bumps. He reached for the sweater. “Kind of a mood-killer.”

“Don’t.” You reached up to brush your fingertips along some of the worst of the lot. “The people who made these…they’re dead, right?” Your face was a mask of some powerful, yet unreadable emotion.

“Wouldn’t be here if they weren’t.”

“I’m glad. I wish I could find them, and kill them again.” You threw the clothing off the bed.

“Aww, babe, you’re so cute when you’re violent.”

The anger he’d seen flash briefly in your eyes made his soul gleam that much brighter. You’d never expressed a wish to harm anyone, under any circumstances, but it seemed that you’d taken exception to this. A real battle, however, was something he’d never allow to happen to you. He was trained from his creation to fight, and to kill. You were soft, although you had your talents and intelligence, and sweet things didn’t deserve to be hurt. It wasn’t because he didn’t believe you could handle yourself, but it was because he’d seen what violence did to people.

Humans and monsters alike were transformed by it; murder always gets easier after the first time. It was a slippery slope of questioning your own moral code down to the bottom of the cliff, whereupon reaching said bottom, you ignored your former code completely. He’d grasped the jutting rocks of that chasm, clinging with desperate hope to stone that slowly crumbled as time wore on. If he fell, he would make sure he’d be the last to do so. He’d been careful to only take contracts for the most despicable of monster kind, and he’d taken great lengths to avoid conflict with anyone who didn’t fit that bill. Thus, he was known to be lazy, weak, and a coward. But those were choice descriptors as compared to hypocrite, liar, and a traitor.

He was afraid, make no mistake, of the future. The news of your pregnancy had come against a
backdrop of racism, violence, and an uptick in gang activity. People were being killed every day in the street for simply wearing the wrong colors. It was madness, and he was scared it would creep into the happy, content bubble he’d formed around his growing family. His friends and brother could take care of their own. Paps no longer needed his protection, but that didn’t mean he feared the worst any less. What truly put the fear of Polaris in him, though, was the knowledge of how easily his newfound dreams could be dashed, and how the flap of a butterfly’s wings could determine the survival of his world.

So, he could only hold you tighter, and plead to an uncaring universe to refrain from stealing back its brightest star. No matter what happened, he would do whatever it took to keep his pocket of peace alive.
 Magical Maternity In Modernity

Chapter Summary

Thanks to everyone who has been commenting, and kudo-ing. Support really helps. I'm sorry this is a bit late. I had to take a lot of time to research for this chapter and for future chapters concerning the pregnancy, since I'm not familiar with that stuff.

You’d scheduled a visit to an OB-GYN immediately after going to the walk-in clinic. And in the proceeding two weeks the minute soul’s magic grew brighter, and morning sickness soon became a problem. The cravings started a few days into your second week. You found yourself grabbing the biggest jar of pickles, an economy jar of peanut butter, and at least two bags full of black cherries, and tossing them all into your cart during your bi-monthly trip to the grocery store. It was all just stuff that caught your eye. You liked these things anyway, but you were now eating them more often, or in strange combinations. You did hesitate over the bottle of Dijon mustard, but then you went for it, and threw three whole bottles into the cart. And who was the jerk who thought anyone would want individual chocolate bars? Pffft, nah. You bought one of the twelve-pack packages instead of falling for a rip-off like that.

Red’s objection came that night after dinner, when he caught you dipping squares of chocolate into the Dijon. “I highly doubt that tastes good.”

You frowned down at his dipping bowl of plain mustard, in which he’d been doing something similar. “You’re doing the same thing!”

“Yes, but that’s Dijon, and it’s fuckin’ gross as shit.” He countered.

“Well, your kid thinks it’s bangin’, so deal with it.” You grumbled, and continued enjoying your snackage. You polished off the last of your mustard-laden sweets, and then took up both of the dessert bowls to wash them up.

Red came up behind you and settled his hands around your waist. “Y’know I love it when ya sass me.” He purred. “Ya wanna go t’ bed a bit early, angel?” He pushed your hair back to get at your neck, scraping the edges of his teeth over your skin as lightly as a whispered promise alluding to what he had in mind.

You rinsed the soap off your hands. You weren’t going to let him off that easily. “No, I’m going to go cuddle with King. He doesn’t question my choice in desserts!” You weren’t really upset. This was just a game the two of you played sometimes. You’d pretend to be frustrated, and he’d act like he was flustered, but it always ended up with laughs and cuddles.

“What? Aw, c’mon! I’m at half-mast!” He stomped over to King’s bed, but the dog was already up on the couch with you. King sprawled out with his head in your lap, and left no room for your poor, rejected lover.

“Take care of it yourself, then!” You teased him saucily.

“Off, ya mutt.” He gave King’s back a tap with one finger. “Down! I said giddown! Geddoff the fuckin’ couch!” He gave the dog a shove, but King only snorted and tried to lap at your fingers as
you patted his head.

“King, you look so adorable in your leather cut.” You praised loudly to further incite Red’s ire. “I love it.”

“I’m wearin’ leather. How about showin’ me some attention, huh?” He grouched at you. If you didn’t know better, you’d have thought he wasn’t pretending anymore and that he was honestly jealous of the pooch.

“Yes, but he’s a better cuddler.” You wrapped your arms around King’s neck, and nuzzled him. “Who’s a good boy? You are. Yes, yes you are!” King was looking quite smug as he rolled onto his back for some belly rubs. King totally knew he was a good boy; he just wanted to help you rub it in Red’s face.

Suddenly, your world was a tilt-a-whirl as you were plucked from the couch, and then slung unceremoniously over Red’s shoulder. “She’s my snugglebutt. Get yer own woman, mutt.”

Things were like always like that with him; he made your life one full of laughter, teasing, and love. You’d never been happier, but the next day was your first scheduled visit with Boss’s maginurse. It wasn’t that you were cowed by the appointment, but that it solidified your pregnancy in your mind as a definitive idea of what lay ahead. A child was a massive responsibility, and you had only a bit more than seven months left of preparation for that. For you, that meant you were now seriously goal-oriented; instead of settling for the many internships you’d previously taken to earn experience, you were now hunting for career jobs in your field. At this point, though, you had enough time to get that particular obstacle straightened out.

In the peach-tinted light of the next morning, you were walking into Ebott Mercy. Thankfully, it was not the ER this time. You peeked at your fiance out of the corner of your eye, and your heart dropped to your feet. The bags under his eyes were heavier than a poke full of wet sand. He looked haggard and worn, and so exhausted that even his fur-lined hood was looking droopy. He, true as ever to his word, had taken up a third job. He worked as a mechanic at an auto repair shop, continued taking on construction jobs, and had added a part-time gig as a bouncer to his paycheck. He came home at three am sometimes, and was usually so tired he often skipped meals to have more time to sleep. It worried you, and you tried to take on a second job yourself, but he made a clear point that yours was a high-risk pregnancy; you couldn’t chance overworking yourself. “I can handle it. It’s only temporary, anyway, just ‘till we can save up enough for a down payment.” That was his usual argument, whenever you brought it up.

“You fell asleep in the shower today, Red! Working yourself to death isn’t a solution. We can save up slowly. The baby will sleep in a bassinet in our room for the first six months, so we don’t need a nursery straight away. My dad called, too, he said he’s giving me access to the savings account my mom made for me.” Your mom had opened that account up on your first birthday, and had continued to put a decent amount into it every month until the day she died. After her death, money had continued to flow in from her social security to the account until you’d turned 18. “There’s twenty-five thousand in there. We only need another five thousand to make it to the minimum twenty-percent down payment for a very nice place. I’ve checked the listings for every three-bedroom house outside the city, and most of them are well within our budget.”

“Still gotta save up for the weddin’.”

“We’ll do it at the courthouse. I don’t need all the bells and whistles.” You replied on your way up to the check-in window.

“I want ya t’ have ‘em.”
“I want you. You’re all I’ve ever wanted or needed. I don’t care about white dresses or renting out churches or paying for catering or a giant cake! We could do the wedding on a $600 budget, have it outside, and our honeymoon could be a weekend at an amusement park for all I care! I hate to see you working yourself so hard when it isn’t necessary—“ He cut you off with a passionate kiss.

“I fuckin’ love you.”

“Ahem?” You both turned to look at the lady at the desk behind the window. She was looking suitably embarrassed. “Ma’am? What time did you say your appointment was?”

“Oh, sorry, I didn’t. It’s for 2:00.” Once you were checked-in, it was a short wait to be seen. Your OB-GYN, a middle-aged man with untidy brown hair whose name was Dr. Mackintyre, stepped into the waiting room and called your name.

“I’m so sorry that our resident maginurse is late.” He checked his watch with a concerned look. “She’s typically very punctual. I’ll go see if I can find her. In the meantime, you may go ahead and undress for the exam.”

When he returned, your feet were in the stirrups, and you were beginning to get cold because of the thin gown. Boss’s maginurse, who was close behind him, was looking almost as bad as Red did; obviously, she was also overworked, though probably not underpaid. “Alrighty, then. So, I’ll just give you a run-down of your first prenatal. It says here that your test came back positive about two weeks ago, that’s good, most people try to come in as soon as they know.” He waved the maginurse farther inside and closed the door behind her. “So, we’ll want a bit of information about you; medical history, mental health status, just stuff like that. Then we’ll do the testing; we’ll be pulling out all the stops for your little bun. That means Rubella, HIV, Varicella, Cystic Fibrosis, Hepatitis B, Tay Sach’s, Sickle Cell, Rh factor, and hemoglobin/hematocrit. There might be more depending on how you answer the questions before that. And then, we’ll just have a little Q and A session to figure out things like diet, exercise routine, and medications to avoid.” The maginurse cleared her throat. “Right, I’ve forgotten to add that she’ll be doing an empathic-ultrasound because of the nature of the pregnancy.”

He began asking rapid-fire questions about allergies to food and medications, which you refuted, and moved on to your history of surgeries, although you’d had none. Nor were you a drug addict or an alcoholic. Most of the answers to the questions were ‘no’, but you forced your impatience under wraps because you understood the need for them. After flipping through pages and pages, and checking only a handful of boxes, he started to prepare you for the blood draw.

Out in the hallway, however, there was a huge commotion. “What the heck?” He tossed the alcohol pad into the trash and pulled off his gloves before reaching for the knob. He caught the arm of a passing RN. “What’s going on?”

“Reporters in the lobby!” She grimaced in distaste. “They’re demanding to see the mother.”

“That’s illegal. They can’t barge in here!” He spluttered out.

“No, but they can camp out in the lobby and the parking lot. We’re trying to get them to leave.” She went on her way as soon as the doctor let her go.

“How the Hell did the bastards even find out? I haven’t even told my bro yet!” Red stood up. “You let me out there, doc. I’ll run ‘em off. Gimme five minutes.” He snarled deep in his throat. “Damn vultures.”

“No, no. They haven’t done anything wrong yet. We’d have to try to find a reason to contact
security. Otherwise, they're allowed to stay.” He pinched his nose and sighed. “Let’s just continue with the blood work and finish this up. It’ll take more than an hour to get all of this done, so maybe they’ll give up.”

“Red, calm down. We should’ve known this would happen. It actually might serve to strengthen human/monster relations. Almost everyone loves babies!” You touched the inside of his wrist and let your hand slide down into his.

“If those assholes want an interview so bad, I’ll give it to ‘em…with my fist.” He clenched his other hand so hard that the knuckles popped. “Ain’t none of ‘em getting’ close to ya.”

“Let me go out there and talk to them. No one’s life should be plastered all over a tabloid.” These were the first words the nurse had spoken. “I’m itching to let off some steam; I need this.”

“You an’ me both, sister.” Red laughed maniacally. “Lead the way!”

Dr. Mackintyre’s face paled a little as he watched the pair leave. “Oh gosh, should I have stopped them? She hasn’t slept in a while, she’s always crankier when she’s tired…” He looked to you for guidance. “And, no offense, but your fiance looks a little…rough around the edges.”

“None taken.” You rubbed a hand over your face and groaned. “You might want to see if you can convince security to get down there. It might save a few lives, and more than a few eardrums.”
Knock, Knock

Reporters, reporters everywhere, but not a drop of ink; not a drop nor a smudge even somewhat resembling your name and face was seen on the paper the next day. The paparazzi, although they had been chased off by the combination of Red’s evil glares and the maginurse’s shouting (which you’d been able to hear through two doors and a wall), kept up their furtive attempts to snap photos from afar or trap you into interviews. You’d been stopped in hallways, parking lots, public transport, and several times where Red was unable to come to your aid. You fended them off well enough, though, by methods of your own devising.

Your first line of protection was a thick shirt or sweater with a camisole under that, which hid the tell-tale gleam very well. Your second method was to avoid going out by yourself; you took care to join the morning rush of people headed off to work, despite the fact that this meant you often had to come into work two hours early. You’d never even allow yourself to cross the street alone, which kept the reporters confused as they hunted the crowds for your face. Fortunately, you were terribly short, which gave you an advantage in sneaking about. You didn’t mind all of it, though, because it felt a bit like you were playing a grown-up game of hide-and-go-seek, which you’d once mentioned to Red after barely escaping a determined journalist by ducking into a broom closet.

He, however, felt differently. If it were up to him, he’d have gutted them and used their intestines to make long pork sausages for the dog. Alas, he could no longer act on his violent urges. His three jobs left him barely enough time to eat or sleep, let alone hunt down the voracious members of the press. Slowly, though, his anger built up like layers upon layers of salt on the bed of the Dead Sea. He finally broke when you came home panicked, eyes wild and wide, and completely out of breath. “What happened this time?”

You slammed the door shut behind you, still hardly able to form proper words, and let your head fall back against the wood. “Elevator…got me in the elevator…I think he followed me.” You shivered, your hands automatically crossing over the minuscule baby bump. “I should have known not to get into a confined space-“

“Nuh-uh, don’t ya dare blame yerself.” He got up, stormed over the door, and flung it open.

There stood a mousey-looking man with a camera in hand, and a recorder tucked into his pocket. “Ahah! So, you’ve finally decided to give an interview? How exciting…oh, I’m going to get a raise for this! Hold on, I’ve got a lapel mic somewhere-“

“Get the fuck outta my buildin’.”

“Excuse me? No, the public has a right to know about this! This is a scientific breakthrough that could-“

“Get the fuck outta here, an’ leave my wife alone. Don’t make me warn ya a third time.”

The reporter was clearly incensed by this, and straightened his back impudently. “Is that a threat, sir?” He hissed through bucked teeth. He tried to step inside, but Red took up ninety percent of the doorway, so it was impossible. Red remained quiet, barely shifting every time the reporter saw a hint of an opening. “What are you doing?! Let. Me. In!”

“I’m givin’ ya a chance t’ walk away.” Red yawned, unaffected by the reporter’s angry tirade. “Now, git.”
“And give up on the career move of a lifetime? Absolutely not!” He continued to try to worm his way through.

“Keep goin’ and it won’t be a career move yer givin’ up.” Red cracked an eye open lazily to regard the smaller man with great disdain.

“If you continue to threaten me, I will be forced to call the police!” The reporter slid his coke-bottle glasses back up to the bridge of his nose.

“Call the police?” You scoffed from the living room. “If you put a single toe over the threshold, that is unlawful entry of a private residence. You’d be the one getting arrested, dumbass!” You stalked up behind Red, putting your head into the space just under his arm. “Besides that, how would you like it if people stalked your spouse and unborn child?”

“That is non-applicable because my children are completely human, just like me.”

Red’s sleep-deprived body stiffened, and then his mouth twisted up into an unholy grin. “Those poor ankle-biters. Gotta feel sorry for ‘em, seein’ as they’ve got a maggot like you for an old man.” He yawned again, making sure his dagger-like teeth glinted in the light enough to draw attention to them, and then looked his unwanted visitor in the eye. “Look, pal. Take a hike. I’m tired of yer shit, an’ when I’m tired I get angry. An’ no one wins if ya piss me off, so do us both a favor, a’right?”

The reporter stared at Red for several seconds; his face went blank as he backed up a few steps. His sins crawled on his back like an entire nest’s worth of ants were marching over his skin. “I’ll get you.” His voice cracked a little. “I’ll find something. If you have so much as an unpaid parking ticket, I’ll make sure everyone knows!”

Red slammed the door in his face. “Yeah, good luck with that.” He squeezed his eyes shut, and then opened them again. He wasn’t feeling too hot; he hadn’t slept or eaten in a few days and his magic was starting to dip into his HP to feed itself. “Fuck, I need to sit down…” He was seeing fuzzy doubles of everything, his eyesockets slipping closed without his leave, and he all but collapsed back on the couch.

“Red!!”

“I’m fine, angel. Just grab me a bottle from the fridge, would ya?” He felt your lips touch his cheekbone. You were always so worried about him; he wasn’t in the habit of taking care of himself, and you had gladly taken on that role in the relationship. In spite of your limited cooking skills, you’d try your hardest to cook for him these days. And you’d noticed he slept better with you in bed, so you always went to bed with him even if you weren’t actually tired.

“Jack or mustard?”

“Both.” He appreciated all the effort, but it did tend to make him feel inadequate at times, usually whenever he was in one of his fouler moods. Tonight happened to be one of those times. So, when you came back bearing his odd preference in mixed drinks, he thought nothing of taking a sip—Until he felt a distinct prickle in his chest. You’d given him one of the magic supplements that the maginurse had prescribed. The short rush of energy gave him the strength to glare at you. “What the hell? You slipped me a fuckin’ pill?”

“Because you’re killing yourself!” You shot back. “You’re working yourself to death, even though I told you there’s no need for it! I have money, Red!”

“I told ya I’m fine! An’ I don’t need a fuckin’ cent from you.” It came out harsher than he’d
intended, but he couldn’t keep a lid on this can of worms he’d opened. “I don’t want a single fuckin’ thing from you.”

You took a deep breath through your nose, and exhaled shakily out of your mouth. “I should sleep in my old room tonight. I think we clearly need a bit of space for a while.” Wait, he knew that face you were making; that emotionless mask that slipped down whenever you were trying your hardest not to break down. But he let you go, and heard you sliding those heavy bins in front of the door to make it more difficult to open. The walls were still thin, though, and he heard you crying quietly inside.

His grip on the bottle tightened until the liquid inside gushed up and over his hand. “Fuck!” He threw it at the wall, leaving a massive splotch of mustard and whiskey to ooze down to the floor. His anger was quickly subsiding, but he tried to hang onto it because it was easier than feeling the pain that came with hearing you cry.

King growled at him, trotted over to the laundry room door, and laid down in front of it. “Et Tu, mutt?” He growled back, but his real anger had completely evaporated by this time. He put his head in his hands. This was a disconcerting first; he’d never fought with you over anything before. You both were too easygoing to sweat the small stuff that a lot of other couples rowed about, so this came as a shock to his system. He didn’t care about you slipping him the pill. He would’ve done the same thing if he were you. He knew he had a thick skull, and he wouldn’t have admitted he needed the boost until he was down to half a point of HP.

What he cared about was taking things from you; that was a pill that you needed, and the same applied to the money. He wanted you to have everything, but you were determined to only have him. The best way he knew how to express his affection for anyone was to give and give, but that was the problem. You tried to give back. And, sometimes, he didn’t know how to handle that.

Now he had to fix it. He knocked on the door with his usual ‘shave and a haircut’ tune. “Knock, knock.”

“Red, this…this isn’t the time for that.” You sniffled from behind the door. “Just let me-“

“Knock, knock.” He said again. “Knock, fuckin’ knock!”

He heard you sigh defeatedly. “Fine, who’s there?”

“I’m berry.” A weak smile crept onto his face. ‘Progress!, as you’d once said.

“I’m berry who?”

“I’m berry sorry.” He let out a relieved sigh; he heard you laugh a little, which was a good start even though it sounded like a cross between a giggle fit and another hiccupy bout of weeping. “Knock knock.”

“Who’s there?”

“Love.”

“Love who?”

“Love you.”

You snorted, and he heard those damnable tubs being moved. “You’re so cheesy.” You wiped at your eyes, and tried to glare at him, but failed as soon as you opened the door. Instead, you burst out laughing. “You’ve got mustard on your face!” His grin faded a little as you reached up and slid your
finger over his temple. “You’re supposed to eat it, Red, not wear it.” He licked the tiny glob off your finger. “I’m sorry. I should’ve asked if you wanted the pill.”

“I wouldn’t have let ya give it t’ me. You didn’t do anythin’ wrong, you were just tryin’ t’ help, an’ I was bein’ an idiot like usual.”

“You’re not an idiot.” You jumped up into a hug. “You’re charming, and sweet, and terribly cheesey, and funny, and I love you.”

“Please, don’t leave me. Yer my world, angel.” He’d been genuinely worried you would. There were better guys in the world who wouldn’t stumble over themselves and end up hurting you. He hated it, and hated himself as well, but he was selfish at heart. He wanted to keep you, he wanted a family with you, and he’d beg if he had to. “I’m sorry, I was being an ass.”

“Red, I’d never leave you over a stupid fight we had because we’re both overwhelmingly stressed and tired. Every couple, even the healthiest ones, has fought a few times. It’s how we deal with them that affects things.” You paused, and then added. “I promise I won’t try to give you anything else without your permission. That was wrong, even if I did it with the best intentions in mind, and I’m sorry.”

“S’awright. Didn’t really care ‘bout that, anyway. I shouldn’t have snapped at ya. What I said was true; I don’t want anything from you. I just want this.” He kissed the top of your head.

“It’s what I want, too, Red. Now, let’s go to bed before-“ You were the first to walk into the living room, and your mouth gaped open at the giant mess he’d made. “Scratch that, I have to clean this up. You go to bed, and I’ll come in after I’m done.”

“It’ll be there in the mornin’. Besides. we’ve got better shit t’ do.” He played mischievously with the waistband of your jeans. “Make-up sex, for instance. Lots of make-up sex.”
Peaches And Cream

Chapter Notes

So, I'm putting up another couple of small audio clips. They'll probably be posted sometime within the next two weeks, so I hope you're ready to hear Red proposing to Reader and a bit of advice on life from Boss. XD At this point, I might as well just make a composite recording of all of his best lines, lol.

Do you guys wanna ask Red something? Then, head on over to my Tumblr!
https://meldaburke.tumblr.com/ask

“Hey, angel, wanna see a trick?” He tugged you back by your belt loops, shut the door with the back of his booted heel, and dragged you into his lair of sin. He spun you around, did a jazzy little wave just to be silly, before taking a shortcut right out of his clothes.

“How did you even-“

“Magic. And laziness. All of the laziness.” His eye lights rolled up and down over you as he seemed to debate with himself over what to do next. “I wanna unwrap ya like a present.”

Gift wrap doesn’t typically stay intact, as you were well aware. You’d already lost three pairs of panties, two pairs of jeans, a skirt, and two shirts to Red’s libido. “No, no, that’s okay! I’ve got it.” You shed your clothes quickly, just in case he got impatient, and joined him for a good old-fashioned spooning session.

He buried his nose in your hair, as he was wont to do whenever the two of you cuddled, and purred. “Stars, ya smell so fuckin’ sweet, just like spiced peaches.” He breathed deeper. “And me, fuck. You smell like me…wait…what the hell is that? What the HELL is that?” He sniffed at your hair, closer to the back of your neck, and behind your ear. “Who else has been touchin’ on you?”

“That awful journalist tried to grab me as I ran out of the elevator.” You recalled. “It couldn’t have been anyone else. You know I don’t like being touched as a general rule.” You’d always had a strong aversion to physical contact with others, although there’d been a few exceptions. You’d allowed your best friend to hug or fistbump or do other friendly touches. You allowed your father to do the same; whenever the stick up his ass allowed him to shit out a bit of affection, that is. “Does he smell that bad to you?”

“Smells like a rat; dirty cedar chips and old cheese.” And just like that, the both of you were in the shower. Red was already reaching for the soap before you’d done so much as turn the water on. The first, cold blast from the showerhead led to you jumping out of the way. He seized this opportunity to pull you flush against his body. In spite of wanting for room, his presence made the space more comfortable. Wasn’t it always that way, though? Somehow, he could turn any given place, time, or conversation into a pleasure. It was as if he was able to cushion every edge, if he so wished, and pad the walls with his good-natured spirit.

There were no words for the time spent in his embraces, excepting the use of poetic descriptors, of course. His arms were home, his words were a honeyed balm to any woe, and his love held all the sweetness of summer rain. He was lightning, fierce and blindingly bright, in his own storm; the
warmth of his rain comforted you, while he struck down with merciless bolts any who witlessly opposed or challenged. His laughter was thunder, rolling over the sky in booming, bass beats. “I love you.” You leaned back into him, bringing your hands up to lock behind the thick vertebrae of his neck. “I love you more than anything.”

And, because you loved him you would never tell him about some things; how you weren’t really a messy eater, you just smeared your nose or cheeks whenever he wasn’t looking simply to make him laugh. Or how many times you’d whispered how much you loved him in the dark because he never failed to mumble it back in his sleep. Or how nice it felt when you both were sharing the couch, but he’d pause his game to reach over and touch your arm every once in a while or steal a kiss. Those moments were ones that felt like gossamer dreams in your hands, and you feared they’d slip from your grip if you spoke of them. How had you earned such a beautiful life? You weren’t special, you weren’t gifted in any new or exciting way, and there’d passed some horrid nights, long before you’d known him, that you’d feared you would die alone and unwanted.

When you were younger, you’d been more naïve. You’d often fallen for the tricks your classmates pulled; you’d reveled so many times in having seemingly earned someone’s admiring eye, only to find yourself being the butt of a cruel joke. It wasn’t a falsehood, what you’d told him about being too busy for a relationship before now, but it hadn’t meant you hadn’t desired one. You simply hadn’t trusted anyone who’d made a move not to be playing a prank at your expense. You’d been stood-up so many times, abandoned without a ride home, only to force yourself to hold your head high as you picked your way down the side of the road in high heels and a dress. Nights, back in those days, had been spent with your face buried deep into a sodden pillow and an ache eating away at your heart. Your crushes had always made a point of pulverizing you back, until you gave up hope entirely.

You weren’t a great beauty, and you’d have said you leaned toward the plainer side of that spectrum if anyone asked your opinion on your own looks. When people looked at you, it was never truly at you. It happened to be more like their eyes glossed over you, the way one’s gaze might flit from face to face in a crowd, except you were the only one there. Sometimes, sometimes you even wondered if he was just being nice or if he was just trying to make it work because you’d stuck him with a kid. That was why his possessive nature didn’t bother you. Whenever he went out of his way to punch some asshole’s lights out or react to someone else’s scent clinging to you as he had today, it made it that much clearer that he did love you. Whatever he saw in you must not have been present in the Underground; he treated you like a precious rarity, though you were as common as the dirt wedged in the tread of his work boots. And the city needed someone who wasn’t afraid to get their hands dirty or to go outside the law, anyway. It was yet another reason why you couldn’t be mad whenever he went on one of his wild tears. In your head, he was the punchline in a world where justice was a joke.

“Whatchya thinkin’ so hard about?” His voice rumbled next to your ear. He’d nabbed your loofah while you were caught up in your thoughts, and was hard at work making your skin disappear under a cloak of bubbly, peach-scented foam.

“You.” Your breath left you with a soft sigh; his phalanges had crept a naughty path down between your legs. “And how lucky I am.”

“You got it all wrong. I’m the lucky one. Couldn’t be luckier if I ate a bowl of four-leaf clovers every day for breakfast.” He chuckled at how his attention made the muscles in your thighs twitch. “Still so sensitive, angel? Woulda thought you’d gotten used t’ this by now.”

You shuddered, and craned your neck to place a kiss on the underside of his jaw. “Your fingers are
rough!” Not that this was meant to be a complaint.

“It’s what happens when ya work with yer hands.” He playfully skimmed over your clit with a single, sharp fingertip.

You wiggled out of his grip, let the shower clear the soap off, and snatched the loofah back. “Your turn!” You announced gleefully.

You’d have never thought you’d share a bed with such a handsome devil. You didn’t deserve it. He was too good for you. You’d hold tight to this conviction for the rest of your life; Red was amazing, sexy, and utterly out of your league. No matter how much he insisted, you couldn’t relinquish the thought. You’d had inferiority beaten into your head so often, and by so many, that you’d grown to believe it. How someone like you had managed to attract someone like him was beyond your comprehension. Regardless, he seemed happy, and you were overjoyed to have him, so that was more than enough.
Cherries Jubilee

Chapter Notes

Thanks, as always, to the comment section for being such brilliant inspiration. I hope you enjoy your fluffy erotica, you naughty little bugs. XD

Your wet hair was soaking his pillow, but he paid it no mind. He crawled atop you, bracing himself on his hands and knees so that he didn’t crush you. It was so incredibly, dammably cliché, but he knew he could have stared into your eyes forever. You had such beautiful, soft, kind eyes; yours were the sort of eyes romantics wrote poetry and songs about. He wasn’t a poet or composer, but he knew art when he saw it. “You’re staring, Red.”

“Can’t help it.” He smirked down at you. “Yer so beautiful.” You blushed and tried to avert your eyes, but he grabbed your chin. “No, listen, you are. I know you think ya aren’t, but you’re the most beautiful woman in the goddamned world t’ me. And t’ Hell with anybody who doesn’t agree.” He kissed down your chest between your breasts.

You rested your hands on his skull, hugging his head to you. “Maybe I am to you, but why me in the first place?” His scarlet eyes flicked up to meet your own. “You’re…well, you’re you…and I’m just…me. You’re this big, handsome, wrong-side-of-the-tracks, lone wolf-type. You’re interesting, and you’ve never taken crap from anyone.” You motioned randomly in the air for emphasis. “And here I am, librarian extraordinaire, hole up in my room constantly, and living vicariously through youtube, books, and internet forums. You have a motorcycle, for goodness sake. What is that, if not every girl’s wet dream? I’m sorry, I just don’t get it.”

“Yer smile, yer laugh, the way ya look at me with those big, sad eyes…there’s a thousand reasons, angel. Didn’t know I had a type ‘till I saw you, though. It was all just one night stands; before you the sex was hot, but nothin’ special. But now?” He grinned against your skin. “It’s like drinkin’ six-dollar wine for years, and then findin’ out there’s a free bottle of Talisker one door over. You’re adorable; everything aboutchya is a siren song t’ me. Plus, nobody else would put up with my bullshit.”

“You do realize you’re not that difficult to live with, right? It’s just a matter of scrubbing the bloodstains out of your clothes, and keeping the fridge stocked with mustard and whiskey.” He had to be thankful you had experience getting blood out of clothes; periods sounded like a real bitch to any wardrobe. Female monsters didn’t have periods, so it wasn’t something he’d been familiar with upon reaching the surface. He didn’t like the sound of a pissier-than-usual, alpha female monster either, so he was definitely glad monster women’s bodies had evolved to absorb their endometria.

“If anything, I dunno whatchya see in me. I mean, I’m a mess. If ya knew half the shit I’ve done-“

“I’d handle it. I love you, Red, and that means I can accept the person you used to be. I won’t judge you on past mistakes. As for what I see in you, there’s so much that it’d be impossible to explain it all without gushin’ through the rest of the night. You’re charismatic, for one. You can have people hanging off your every word. There’s the way you smirk and call me ‘angel’ half a dozen times in a single conversation. Or how sexy you look dripping with sweat after work. Oh, and there’s the dirty talk. I don’t know how you do it, but you could make me come with your voice alone…I think you have, actually.”
“Without touchin’ yer clit? Fuck, that’s hot. Let’s see if I can do that tonight.” He tucked his arm under you and rolled you over to get to your back. Your back and neck, he’d learned via much exploration, were the most sensitive. It worked for him, too, since he loved to watch your ass bounce. He was feeling hornier than usual; it must have been a combination of suddenly having a shit-ton of energy and feeling the need to make up for being such an asshole to his beautiful, little angel. “I’m gonna make you scream for me, baby. I’m gonna work you so hard, you’ll be beggin’ for it.” He raked his fingers down your back hard enough to leave a trail of pretty, pink welts. “I’m sorry for makin’ ya cry, sugar. Lemme give ya a treat t’ make amends.” He lapped at his marks. “Cuz I can’t risk runnin’ ya off; the thought of you with another guy makes me wanna strangle somethin’. Yer mine, angel.” He cupped your slightly swollen stomach. “I’ve marked you inside an’ out. You look so beautiful with my baby growin’ inside ya. Spread yer legs.” You obliged, and he yanked you farther down the bed into his lap. “I love havin’ ya this way. I can watch myself fuck you, an’ I can see my cum drippin’ outta yer pussy.” He slipped a finger inside you, a crazed expression taking over his face. “I’m gonna fuck you until ya cream around my cock, and then yer gonna lick me fuckin’ clean, understand?”

“Y-yes, daddy.”

“I never did get that blowjob, angel. I’d say I earned it, considering that little bitch Silas lived.” His eye lights went out for a split second as he jerked your hips down. “Can’t believe he thought he could win ya over; yer better than some snot-nosed brat. You wanna man who’ll treat ya right, an’ I’m over the moon that ya picked me.”

You peeked shyly out from under the hank of hair that had fallen over one eye. “You’re big; I feel safer with you.”

He growled out his laugh. “Almost forgot, didn’t I? You love yer men fierce and built broad. Fuck, it’s like I pulled ya right outta my head; so sweet, chill as fuck, an’ always down for a bit of boot knockin’.” He pushed you forward onto the mattress, grabbed your hands, and laid them over the headboard. “Grab that, you’ll be needin’ it.” He dragged his teeth down the side of your neck as he picked up a solid, rhythmic snap of his hipbones into the flesh of your ass. He spread you wide to watch his cock move inside and out. He got lost in the sight of his idea of the epitome of perfection. He knew you weren’t perfect in reality; your deep-seated insecurities, your anxiety, and your ineptitude in the kitchen made that abundantly clear. However, those were small flaws he could overlook. Suffering occasional annoyance over your self-conscious behavior was hardly a price at all for what he got in return. And he could overlook an odd pimple, had learned to adore the little birthmark on your butt, couldn’t care less about scar down the back of your right leg acquired during a dirtbike accident, and thought your chipped, left canine was actually kind of cool in a Dracula’s fang way. To him, you were no less a goddess. Hell, he’d be the worst sort of hypocrite if he tried to criticize looks down to the tiniest detail. “Beg.”

“Please…please, don’t stop. Red, I’m so…I’m going to…”

“Fuck, yeah, sugar! Cum for me.” You clenched down on him so hard it stole his breath, and your cry rang in his head loud as the bells of Notre Dame. You had aftershocks so strong, he could feel your body rolling over him in a way that kindled an arduous wildfire from the most primal parts of his mind. He slowed his movements to a loving crawl, bending over your body to squeeze your breast, kiss you through it, and draw out the moment. Now, it was his turn. He rolled off, and let you slither down between his legs. “Look at me, don’t ya dare close those gorgeous eyes.” He coiled locks of your hair around and between his fingers. “Yer mouth is heaven, baby.” He swore he saw galaxies swirling overhead the second you twirled your tongue around. He was close already, having edged himself earlier. “Okay, sugar, might wanna pull back I’m…” He choked out a laugh. “I’m just
“about…” You responded by taking him all the way to the back of your throat. “Oh, hell. Yer gonna swallow? Fuck, baby, fuck, fuck, that’s it. Take it!” His entire upper body left the bed for a second as he poured himself down your throat. He thought he might’ve blacked out in the time it took for his body to relax, and then to flop backward.

“Are you okay?!” You wiped your mouth with the back of your hand.

“Just…ah…feelin’ kinda boneless after that. You take a class? Practice on a banana? Because, stars, that trick you pulled with yer tongue?” He made an exploding gesture with his fingers next to his temple. “Mind fuckin’ blown.”

“I…I read about it.”

“Oh, stop with the shy bit for now, will ya, angel?” He pulled you down in for a cuddle. “It’s cute, but kinda outta place after puttin’ on a show like that. His sockets blinked closed for a second, and he sighed contentedly. “Are you a can of Red Bull? Cuz you just gave me wings.”

“Red, if you ever pun during or after sex again, I swear I’ll start making Markiplier noises during the deed.” You retorted vindictively.

“Kinky.”
Chapter Notes

Hello again, everyone. I hope you enjoy yet another chapter full of fluffy goodness!

“And, in other news, police are still trying to identify the person, or people, responsible for the mass murder and arson incident that occurred at what we now have confirmed to have been a local gang activity hotspot. We have obtained an interview with the chief of the Ebott City police department. Jim Larken is there live. Tell us, Jim, is there an update to this horrifying mystery?”

Red flipped off the television, stretched, and left his divot on the couch to retrieve a snack. “You feel like taking a walk? The pooch hasn’t been out since ya got back from work. He’s probably dyin’ for a piss.” He barked out his question from the kitchen.

You were seated on the opposite end, one hand draped over the arm of the loveseat idly scratching King behind his ear and a book clutched in the other. You glanced out the window, and then at the clock. “Sure, but it’ll have to be a quick walk. I don’t trust the streets at night these days.” Ebott City’s crime rate had been steadily climbing, if the information you’d obtained from the Daily Dispatch Log posted online was at all accurate. Gun violence, especially committed with handguns and low caliber rifles, was a record high for the past fifty years. It wasn’t safe to go wandering about alone, or in the dark of the night, and you knew that this fact had little chance of changing for an extended period of time.

“Yeah, didn’t plan for it t’ take longer than fifteen or twenty minutes. Just wanted t’ get out for a smoke, let the mutt stretch his legs, and enjoy the Sunday’s final hours.” He popped his head out. “You want anythin’ before we head out?”

“Sure, how about…a bologna Sans-wich?” You chuckled as his face lit up. He always loved it when you actually participated in his love-affair with puns. “With mayo, since we’re probably out of mustard, thanks to someone.”

“We still got some of yer nasty-ass Dijon.” He retorted with his customary acerbic humor. “Or do ya want pickles an’ chocolate, instead?”

“Oh, Dijon, then!” You grinned enthusiastically. You weren’t exactly feeling like chocolate-dipped pickles this evening.

“No wonder yer crap at cookin’.” He made an exaggeratedly disgusted face. “Do ya even have a sense of taste?”

“What I lack in taste, I make up for in comedic ability; unlike certain people who rely solely on puns.” You stuck out your tongue playfully, and he flipped you the bird before retreating back into the kitchen to make your snack.

One leashed-up doggo, sandwich, and a shortcut later, you were all moseying along the fenced-in edge of the park as it cut around the bank of the river. The waterfront trail was lined with trees at the height of their blossoming; petals fell to the paved pathway like twirling ballerinas clad in pink and white, while the branches stretched out overhead to touch each other in a perfect promenade. “Bank
called.” He said as he took out his lighter and a half-finished cigar. He’d been working on that one throughout the day, letting it go out for a while and then relighting it an hour or so later. “We’re gonna have the pre-approval letter in the mail soon.”

“No way!” You bounced about with excited abandon. Red had finally given in to using the $25,000 from your savings, along with the extra $2,500 you both had scrounged up in savings since learning about your pregnancy. You’d had to compromise, though, because he’d made you promise to let him work up about $6,000 for the wedding. He’d made it clear he intended to keep his intense work schedule until then. “We’ll have to look into finding a good realtor. And, we’ll probably have to do some small cosmetic renovations to the house we pick, especially if it has carpet.” You made a sickened face. “I mean, who’d want carpet left over from the people before. Carpet’s nasty, even if you were the one who made it that way. Hardwood flooring is expensive, though, so that part might have to wait, but we could definitely get to painting straight away.” To your left, where the sky was stained by lavender swirls and baby-blush pinks, the water was washing against the muddy embankment just beyond the wrought-iron fence. It added a certain peaceful ambiance to the evening that made your heart grow lighter, even under the weight and stress of the future. “We probably won’t use all $6,000 for the wedding, either, so whatever is left over we can put toward the renovation work.”

Red stuck his hands in his pockets, falling a little behind as you quickened your pace at King’s huffy behest, and watched your back attentively. “Ya sound excited.”

“Aren’t you? This is the start of our life together; we’re buying a house, we’ve got a puppy, and we’re going to have a baby!” You paused momentarily and looked back to him. “Are you…unhappy?”

“What? No, I just…kinda…y’know, I’m waitin’ for someone t’ pull the rug out from under me, is all.” He fiddled with the spiked collar that was buckled around his neck. “Havin’ the time of my life over here.” He lifted his shoulders in a shrug. “But I just gotta wonder when it’s gonna end.”

“Everything ends; I will end, you will end, and so on, but that doesn’t mean we can’t enjoy the good times. If you keep looking toward the end, then it will come sooner and be all the more dreadful for having spent your life rejecting the wonderful and expecting the horrible.” He’d caught back up to you by this time, since you’d stopped to allow King to do his business, and you threaded your arm through his. “I know you’ve had a hard life that’s taught you to always be on guard, and it shaped you as a person. However, you are away from all of that now. You’re here with me, the baby, and King; we can all do our best to move forward together.”

He smiled half-heartedly, and went on to change the subject. “Speakin’ of the kid, we gotta get on with decidin’ on a name. I was thinkin’ Bahnshrift for a boy, an’ Ebrima or Marlett for a girl.”

“Um…Bahnshrift? Maybe as a middle name.” You snorted into your hand. “I like Marlett, though. I’ll keep that one in mind. What about Zinfandel for a girl, and Gamay for a boy? Their magic is a rich, red wine color, so I think a wine name would fit. Or maybe Rose…oh, this is harder than I thought.”

“Zinfandel. That’s a long-ass name, maybe if we shorten it to Zinny-“

“Bahnshrift is just as long, though.” You countered as you knelt down to clean up King’s mess. You tossed the used bag into a nearby trashcan, and took out a bottle of hand sanitizer from your pocket. Ahead, you could see a pair of people walking the opposite way, although they didn’t appear to be walking together; one looked to be a man, while the other seemed to be an older lady, and there was a good amount of distance between the two. “Oh, we have company. Let’s move a bit over to give them room.” The path was terribly narrow, so that it could only fit two people walking abreast.
You moved into the shadow of the trees off to the side. The elderly lady, now that she was much closer, was escorting a tiny dog, who strained at the end of a retractable leash to sniff at every single blade of grass and crinkled leaf. “Hey, it’s ol’ Granny Shih Tzu. Wonder what she’s doin’ out this late?” Red muttered questioningly, his eye lights darting to the man following not so far behind her.

She was only three or so yards from where you both stood, when the man behind her broke into a sprint. Her dog zipped around behind her, barking like mad at the guy gaining on her. The suspicious character was nearly on her in half a minute, his hands already reaching for the bag in her hands, and Red was tensing in preparation to have to intervene when she casually swung her bag up and smashed the purse snatcher in the face. “I keep bricks in this bag just for scum of the earth like you!” She turned on her heel, ignoring the groans of the thief who was clutching his bloody, broken nose. She was about to walk past them, did a double take, and smiled sweetly. “Oh, hello, dears! I haven’t seen the two of you around in a long time.”

Red was doubled over, roaring with laughter. “Did I mention I love this old broad? Because I totally fuckin’ do.” He declared to the world. “How ya been, gran? Whatchya been up to?”

“You know, all those typical old people things; knitting, sewing, Bingo, beating up various hooligans-“ There was smart-ass twinkle in her gray eyes like sunlight reflecting off of steel beams on a cloudless, summer day. “My grandson is coming down from New York for a visit soon, too, so I’ve been fixing up the spare room for him today. And you? How is my favorite pair of lovebirds doing, hm?”

He picked you up under your arms to present you for inspection. “I’m gonna be a dad!” She leaned in, and took her glasses off to peer closely at your stomach.

“How lovely, congratulations! How far along are you, sweetie?”

“About two and a half months, give or take a few days.” You lifted up the corner of your sweater, bunching up the camisole underneath, just enough to show off the barely-there curve of your stomach.

“She’s cravin’ all this weird shit, it’s a fuckin’ hoot.” Red added, chuckling. “Hey, gran. It’s gettin’ dark. You want us t’ walk ya home?”

“Oh, I’m fine.” She winked and straightened her frail shoulders. “I was in the Army Nurse Corps back in the day, son. I can take care of myself.”

“I believe ya, but I gotta insist. Everyone’s got a fuckin’ gun these days, an’ they ain’t too careful ‘bout where they point it, either.” It wore him out to warp all five of them to her apartment, which was only a block up from their own, using her directions as a mental guide. The elevator in her building was out of order, so you waited downstairs while he took a shortcut with her and the Shih Tzu up to her place.

He was back seconds later, nomming on a homemade chocolate chip cookie. “Gran offered t’ watch the kid when we need it, so I guess we’ve got a babysitter. The only other option we would have is Paps, an’ I wouldn’t trust that kid to babysit a goldfish.” He cocked his head questioningly at you. “What’s that face about?”

“Oh, nothing.” You snickered. “I’m just trying to reconcile your big, tough guy image with you walking little, old ladies home after dark. Next thing I know, you’ll be counseling troubled youths at the local YMCA.”

“Yeaaaaah, no. Fuck that noise.”
I apologize greatly for the delay in uploading. No excuses. However, I must warn you that I wrote this while I was sloshed, so any mistakes are entirely on me (no judgement, please, it was my wedding anniversary this weekend, so I had a bit of wine to celebrate). This is another 18+ chapter, with a small amount of mild femdom, stripteasing, and a bit of bondage, so do skip it if you're uncomfortable with that.

"So, lemme get this straight…" Red leaned heavily into the door frame, his face a mix of annoyance and disappointment. "I gotta get my ass off my comfy couch on my day off t' go to a birthday party for a guy I ain’t never met?"

You stuck the post of one of your favorite sterling silver, amethyst earrings into your earlobe, and then moved on to do the other ear. “You don’t have to go if you don’t want to. It'll be awfully boring; there’ll be some food and probably a gratuitous measure of alcohol bought with the company card, but that won’t make the attendees more interesting. I’m definitely not looking forward to it, but it’d be rude not to at least stop in for an hour or so.” Personally, you would have preferred to skip the party altogether, but it was in honor of the assistant manager and making a poor impression on your superiors wasn’t the smartest move you could make right now. With a baby on the way, you had to play the office politics like a game of chess; one wrong move could put in your king in check.

“I’m not lettin’ ya go out alone anymore…not after that little girl got shot in that drive-by the other day.” His mouth was set in a stern, severe scowl. “They’re gettin’ bolder out there. I’m not about t’ risk it, even if I have t’ go to some square’s bumknuckle bash.” His thumb brushed along his jawline, while he watched you get ready. “Do I gotta…ugh…dress up, too?”

“Not if you aren’t comfortable with it.” Technically, there wasn’t a dress code or any such expectation for the party, but you’d been feeling rather…dissatisfied with your body as of late. Therefore, you were using the party as an excuse to slap on some make-up, wiggle into your cutest, little, black dress, and try to feel pretty for an evening out. You were making a conscious effort these days to refrain from giving in to your anxious, overtly-reflective thought patterns. The baby deserved a mother who was strong, dynamic, and, if not confident, then supremely determined to appear that way.

You’d also picked up on how your insecurities, which continued to stick around despite his reassurances, almost seemed to hurt Red more than you at times. “Then why’re you goin’ all out for a party in Snoresville, eh? You’re finer than twenty-four-carat gold wire; you don’t need all this shit.” He swung a massive hand in the direction of your make-up bag.

“Red, do you own anything dressy at all?” You danced around the previous subject with all the clunky grace of a ballerina with an inner ear infection.

He raised an eyebrow at you. “Every man’s got a suit in his closet, doll.” He slunk away, shoulders hunched in a grumbly, pouty manner, and you heard him rustling through his closet through the wall. During his safari adventure into the wild savanna that was his wardrobe, you finished up by adding a few, loose curls to the ends of your hair with a touch of heat-protecting mousse and the iron. Now that you’d finished with all of that nonsense, you could finally squirm your way into that dress.
It was risqué, though not by most people’s standards, and a relatively new addition. It was cut in a similar style to a skater dress, but modified by the triangle of black lace you’d sewn in the other night to make it discreet and professional. The hem, as well, was longer than the traditional skater dress in that it reached the tops of your knees. And, when you considered it as ‘new’, it was because you’d bought it nearly a year ago, yet never gathered up the guts to wear it. That was partially due to it having been bought with the intention to seduce.

Red was unaware, as far as you knew, of how hard you’d crushed on him from nearly the exact moment you’d laid eyes on him. You could recall that day as clearly as you could see yourself reflected in the bathroom mirror right now. You hadn’t been able to afford, and still couldn’t, the sky-high rent that came with living within city limits by yourself, so you’d searched high, low, and every which way but loose, for roommate ads. You’d answered sixteen before Red, and had been overlooked on every occasion (although, you were glad that creep with the cockroach collection hadn’t called you back). So, you were expecting yet another rejection when you knocked on his door.

He’d opened it after a few knocks, grousing on in a loud voice about how he’d just sat back down, in all his leather-clad glory. The day of your meeting he must have only recently returned from a ride with his MC because he was still wearing his denim cut over his leather jacket. You distinctly remembered he had a newly lighted cigar hanging out of the side of his mouth. Your mind went blank, so that all you could do was stutter out a greeting and smile up at him like an idiot.

So, there began your insane crush. The dress had grabbed your attention in a store window not long after having moved in, and you’d bought it while high on the wings of hope that it would be enough to make him take a second look…and then, you’d returned to find a woman lingering outside the apartment door. She’d been a leggy, curly-haired blonde number in a pleather half-jacket, high heels, and a mini skirt, you remembered that quite well, too. Your tentative dreams were seemingly dashed, so you’d never even taken the dress out of the bag you’d brought it home in.

But, now, you were the one in his bed, so you felt justified in taking out this dress and strutting around like a prize-winning peahen. Having attained a satisfactory appearance, you stepped out of the bathroom and peeked into the bedroom to check on his progress. And holy Hell, words were stolen right out of your mouth by the sight that greeted you. A black blazer shrugged on over a scarlet t-shirt with black slacks on his broad frame made your mouth begin to salivate. “Whatchya think, sugar? Fancy enough for this little soiree?”

Your mind was burned out faster than a Mazda’s engine belt. “I…uh…yeah…that’s great.” You shook your head from side to side. “We should head…um…yeah, we should go.”

“Bike or shortcut?” He inquired, a saucy smirk tilting the left side of his mouth up in a way that you were surprised didn’t make you start to drool.

“Bike this time, I think.” You focused on the floor, swallowed with great difficulty, and backed away. Only to see Red disappear, and feel his hands rest on your shoulders as he materialized behind you.

“I know that look, angel.” The waves of vibration from his nearly silent chuckle sent a delicious shiver down your back like a cascade of hot water. “Ya want it, dontchya?” His hands had a grip on your shoulders that flexed with every second that ticked by in silence.

“I always want you.” You melted into him like chocolate in a microwave on high. “But, I have to go to this god-forsaken party.”

“Waitin’ makes it better anyway.” He spun you around. “So, let’s play a game while we’re there, a’ight? You’re not allowed to look any other fuckin’ guy in the face while we’re there or there’ll
be…repercussions.” His grin was positively sinful.

“There’s no one except for you, daddy.”

The bridge of his nose brushed yours, his eyes ablaze with flaming magic. “Damn right there isn’t.”

The ride to the party was uneventful, but you were on the receiving end of numerous strange, yet admiring glances. The greater majority appeared to be curious, the remainder were hesitant, while the minority were hateful in nature. No one else had shown up on a bike, much less on the arm of a monster, so you could have been the Belle of the ball for a time, if it weren’t for the limo that pulled up not long after Red’s cruiser swung into a free space.

Your manager was a …ostentatious type. She was an extroverted, assertive kind of person, which probably explained her position in the company; the cosmetics industry was both lucrative and boisterous, so it suited her well. Fortunately, she didn’t bother with you immediately, and instead chose to flit about speaking briefly with your more vital colleagues.

Catering arrived within the hour, to everyone’s delight; it was the usual white tablecloth and mini-tuna-sandwiches routine, but most people were happy enough to relegate their awkward conversations toward the quality of the food, rather than the scant subjects of interest considered appropriate within the workplace. You mostly held your peace, although you were approached by your cubical neighbors once or twice for some back-and-forth about various work assignments and the complaints thereof. Overall, it was an unenthused environment that had nearly everyone’s eyes glancing at their phones, watches, or the wall clock.

Thusly, you were greatly surprised when your boss came sauntering toward you, red solo cup in hand, apparently ready to move onto you in terms of conversation prompt. “Oh, hello, ma’am.” You nodded your head respectfully.

She ignored you completely, however, her eyes fixated on your fiance. “Hm, hello.” Her eyes flicked from you, to Red, and then back again. “Is this handsome fellow your date?”

“Yes, ma’am. Mrs. Bandicote, this is my fiance, Sans Osseus. Sans, this is my boss—” You had to practically dodge her hand as she speared it between you to grapple his in a handshake.

“A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Osseus. I’ve never had the opportunity to meet a monster before this evening. As a worldly woman, I assure you I’m quite interested in hearing about your experiences in the Underground, as from what I’ve heard it must have been awful, but I wouldn’t dare presume such things from rumors.” Her eyes were pinned on him in a predatory manner that had you shifting disconcertedly in your sensible mary-janes.

“Things were tough, yeah, but not worth talkin’ about in classy company.” His tone was guarded, unsure and that only served to place you on higher alert.

“Mrs. Bandicote, I was wondering if you had any commentary on my latest research report on the pros and cons of organic versus synthetic products?” You interrupted, lacking any guilt in abruptly changing the subject. You certainly were unappreciative of the way your boss’s icy blue eyes were regarding your fiance like a piece of meat, as opposed to a person. “I never received a review, so I was hoping you could provide some input.”

Her gaze switched to you with a tiny measure of dislike. “You failed to take into account the relative income of the region, I’m afraid. It was a lovely argument you posed in favor of organics, my dear, however you didn’t seem to grasp the economic advantages of selling the synthetic product to a lower income consumer base.”
Her tone raised your hackles a tad, but you refused to say anything that could offend her. “Next time, I’ll be sure to include the average income as a statistic, then. Thank you for your help.” You spoke through your teeth, your eyes narrowed, but focused down in submission. You had a baby to think of, after all, you couldn’t let something as insignificant as this infringe upon that. You’d work harder, you’d work faster; whatever it took to get that promotion because you were determined as fuck to live the life your baby deserved. The life that Red’s baby deserved.

“So, Mr. Osseus, may I offer you a selection? I’ve arranged for the drinks to be served after dinner, of course.” She waved her hand at a passing caterer, and he returned with a bottle of wine. “We have Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and a lovely Pinot Noir from 1973, if I’m not mistaken.”

“I’m good. More of a whiskey or bourbon man, but thanks.” He crossed his arms behind his head. “S’ides, I’m DD if angel decides to drink, so it’s whatever.”

“I see.” If you were a more aggressive person, her responding glare sent your way may have been enough to incite you. “Mr. Osseus, if you wouldn’t mind, I’d like to speak to her alone for a moment. Purely business, I’m sure you understand.” She motioned you into a corner, far away from anyone else, and glowered down at you. “I know you’re looking for a promotion, angel.” She made his nickname for you sound poisonous. “So, why don’t you give me his number, I’ll agree to bump you up and we’ll call it all even, hmm?”

You turned your head to regard her with one, suspicious eye. “You’re supposed to be a leading representative of this company, Ma’am.” You whipped out your phone to show the recording app you’d loaded up with your thumb hovering over the middle button. “But you’re going to stoop so low as this? I’m disappointed.”

“Where—how?” Her sultry, confident act was dropped for a moment as she stared at you in sheer amazement.

You glared back at her with the intensity of a collapsing star. “I’ve been stalked by reporters for the past three weeks for stuff completely unrelated to your unprofessional BS. I always have my phone ready to record. Do you want me to pass this conversation on to the CEO? Because I will, if you don’t keep your greedy, homewrecker eyes off of my future husband. AM I UNDERSTOOD?”

You couldn’t remember ever being so incensed, your blood boiled, and your eyes were only slits as you sneered up at your boss with a courage that you’d never believed yourself capable of.

And then, she did the unthinkable; your boss laughed! When she was finished giggling over your tirade, she reached out to touch your shoulder. “Oh, honey, I don’t want your fiance! That’s just a test! Congratulations, sweetheart, you passed with flying colors!”

You stepped back, completely bamboozled. “What?”

“It’s an office tradition!” She was teary-eyed by now. “My boss did it to me back when I was a green-thorn intern, his boss did it to him...it’s all a prank, I swear. We find something to pick at enough to irk the temper, and see how the newbie handles it.” She held up her hand in front of her defensively. “It’s supposed to be something we do to interns to give them a chance to show their backbone. What kind of person would we want who wouldn’t even stand up for themselves? I mean, it’s kind of a dick move, but it’s an effective evaluation of behavioral authority under pressure, don’t you think?” She slapped a hand to her forehead. “You were my favorite for the position anyway, but I waited to start looking until I got my own promotion because I wouldn’t really need a full-time assistant until then. Oh, you look pale, are you alright?”

You blinked slowly out of disbelief. “So...that...with Sans...it was all just a test?!”
She beamed cheerily. “Yep, and now I’ve found my new, full-time secretary! I’ve been looking for a few months, you know, so this is a big thing for me...and you, of course!” She was quick to add. “That’s why I’ve been so tough on you these past few months, you silly goose! I wanted to see if you could handle me at my absolute worst. Plus, I wanted someone who’d have the cojones to put me in my place, if I needed it.”

“So...I’m...”

“Yep! You start next week, sweetie! Nobody else around here has the sense or patience to do it, but you didn’t hear that from me.” She pushed your shoulder in a friendly way. “You do have a handsome fiance, though, not gonna lie. I love my husband, but damn...” She smiled broadly at you, her six-inch height advantage no longer seemed to be quite as imposing. “Anyway, I wish you both the best—and the baby, of course!” With that said, she trotted off, humming to herself in a way that belied the stone-cold image you’d formed of her in the past year.

Well, that was different. You mosied back to Red, slightly wondering if someone had slipped you a mickey and you’d somehow hallucinated that entire exchange. “Home?” He asked with a gritted, serrated grin.

“Home.” You agreed, without a second thought. “That was ridiculous! I thought she was hitting on you, and I was about ready to slap a bitch, but then I somehow earned myself a promotion to a more permanent position in the company, and I think I’m going to literally faint...ugh...” You rested your head against his shoulder as you explained the conversation in greater detail. Once you’d re-lived that harrowing experience for his sake, you shook your head wearily. “I’m gonna go bid my farewells, and then I want to get the heck out of here.”

He nodded, but tapped his foot impatiently through every ‘goodbye’ you had to endure. You didn’t see his magic at first, but he was puffing it out like a smokestack. Ethereal fingers of the brightest scarlet eddied, hovered, and shimmered in the air. By the time you’d spoken with everyone, he was enveloped in a small cumulonimbus of magic. His eye lights were brighter than ever, like twin pinpricks of sanguine, ball-lightening in a storm cloud peering down at you with an intensity that made your tongue turn to stone.

The entire ride back, he was a speed-demon. In addition to his ability to Check every human in sight, his advanced reflexes, honed by years spent in the Underground, granted him the gift of hyper-awareness to even the minor details. So, he was always, but he was pushing his cruiser harder tonight than he’d dared to do with you on board before. He wove through traffic, his body tense under your hands while his own gripped the handlebars so tightly you feared he’d bend them out of shape.

Upon arrival, he ripped off his helmet and slammed his hands against your head on either side of the wood. “You claimed me? I am so fuckin’ turned on, angel, I could fuck you against this goddamn door.”

“Why don’t you, then?” You replied, having been in a daring mood inspired by your recent promotion.

His eye lights blinked out. “Not this time. You wanna be in charge, baby? Well, now you have the floor.” He let his arms fall to his sides. “I want you to fuck me, sugar.”

Your entire confidence nearly dropped out like the bottom of a cheap pizza box, but you put a stop to that feeling immediately. “A-alright.” You pointed. “Bedroom.”

“Sure thing, babygirl.” He was the sexual dominant in the relationship; therefore, this sudden change
of pace wrongfooted you, and left your entire mind going haywire with the question ‘what the hell
do I do now?!’ You wracked your brain trying to come up with some semblance of a game plan.

You didn’t speak until you were sure you could give an order with the proper authority
necessary. “Strip.” He threw his motorcycle jacket over the top of his dresser immediately, an eager
grin splitting his mouth as wide as it could physically go, and was already working on freeing
himself from his suit jacket. “No, slowly. I want a show.” Magic seeped from his sockets, nose, and
mouth in tiny huffs with each breath as he drew back his shoulders, and dragged one arm free from
his blazer. He plucked at the cuff of the opposite arm as delicately as picking a flower; nary a thread
was folded, pulled, or crimped. His eyes didn’t leave yours for a second until the blazer had been
flung carelessly to join his riding jacket. His fingertips then teased up his tucked-in shirt to just above
the crest of his hipbone, but that was where he stopped. Mouth drier than it would’ve been if you’d
sucked on a chunk of rock salt, you caught him giving you a sassy, evil smirk that commanded you
to force him to go the distance. “Keep going or…or…”

“Or?” He purred in a voice as rich as crushed velvet.

“Or I’ll tie you up, and edge you until you beg me to cum.” You weren’t sure how you could have
said something like that, and your jaw snapped shut so hard you bit the inside of your lip. You
weren’t doing this right at all. To your own ears, everything you said sounded awkward and horribly
inexperienced, but you had to power through it. Maybe, with time and effort, it would get easier.
“Keep going, now.”

“Nope, I’m done. Whatchya gonna do ‘bout it?” He was poking fun, you understood, but it did its
job in raising a hint of ire out of you. He said you had the reigns tonight, but now he was going to do
his best to overrule that authority? Game on.

“One more chance, da-…dog.” You marched over to his closet, your fingers wrapped around the
handle, and stared up at him. “If you don’t do your trick, I’ll chain you to your bed.”

He raised his brow at you meant to challenge. “Like t’ see ya try, angel.” His magic snapped like
static coming off of freshly laundered wool socks. “This dog bites.”

“Dogs that bite get muzzles.” Your tone was acid enough cause him to appear taken aback, so you
offered a small, apologetic smile that disappeared quickly as you re-assumed your dominant role. He
had a Cuir bouilli suitcase where he stored all of his BDSM gear. He’d yet to use most of it on you,
since he was so hesitant to get rougher than a slap on your butt, but that didn’t mean you were
unaware of the uses of any of it. You withdrew a set of faux-fur-lined, black leather wrist restraints
from the depths of the suitcase, a gag, and then snapped it closed again.

He was watching you closely, his entire body still and poised as if he’d been gorilla-glued to the
floor. You swung the restraints around your finger, so that the motion caused the swivel bolt clips to
jingle ominously like spurs on the floor of an Old West saloon. “You still want to cop an attitude,
pup?” You grabbed his chin and jerked his head down to your level.

He groaned so loud and deep that the sound echoed in the quiet room. “Fuck, babydoll.” He made a
move to grab your hips, but you smoothly stepped out of reach, and captured his hand to buckle him
into the first restraint. You tugged him forward by the end of the loop that was fastened to the
remaining cuff.

“Get on the bed now, or I’ll shove this gag into your smartass mouth.” Your other hand pressed a
feather-light touch to his chest, a question hanging behind the gesture. He shot you a quick wink, so
you shoved him hard and he let himself go off-balance to fall softly onto the bed behind him. “Good
boy.” You locked the restraints into the slotted wood of the headboard, and took your sweet time
straddling his hips. You were really getting into this now, and were kind of proud of yourself as the initial embarrassment had evaporated into a mere mist of self-awareness.

“Sugar, pants off? *Please?*” He panted, straining his body to try to grind himself against you.

You smiled back, and pressed your own hips down hard to meet his. “You didn’t wanna take your clothes off for me earlier, so…no.” You shoved his shirt up to his chest, bent your head down, and licked the length of his lumbar vertebrae up to the edge of his thoracic, and back down. You scraped your teeth along the ridge of his pelvic bone, heard a sharp intake of breath, and then a loud snap before his hands were digging into your shoulders.

He’d broken the restraints, which you realized he was capable of doing in the beginning, but you’d have thought he wanted to play along. He’d changed his mind, apparently, though, and he’d flipped you onto your back half a heartbeat later. “No more games!” He was snarling, his magic popping and crackling like the static buzz on a tv. His hands were at his belt, scrabbling in a craze to get the thing open.

“But, daddy, you said-“

“I know, I know, but *goddamn it-*“ He pushed the edge of your dress up. “You, in this little number,” He threw your legs over his shoulders. “An’, tryin’ t’ dom me…and actually being *good* at it…fuck!” He stopped for a second to catch his breath, magic leaked from both edges of his mouth and curled around his head to join the burgeoning cloud that wreathed his skull in sanguine power. “Yer so perfect, angel. I’d kill for ya, I’d die for ya, I’d…I’d take up jazzercise classes for ya!”

“Oh, my god.” Your laughter shook your shoulders, stealing your breath. “You’re unbelievable!”

“Believe it, baby.” Your chuckles turned to moans at the flip of a coin, and a thrust of his hips. “An’ look me in the eye when ya cum. I wanna see that shit.” Your hands fist ed in the bedsheets; the sheets that you’d had to clean almost every single day due to Red’s insatiable appetites, and which were now getting quite worn out. He slammed into you at an angle that had you seeing more colors than a Lisa Frank coloring book filled in by a hippie tripping on LSD. “Ya like that, *sugar*?” Your mouth moved, trying to force an answer to your lips, but failed. His mouth came down on yours to trap your bottom lip between his teeth, the points of his incisors clamping down and drawing a few beads of blood to the surface. Blood smeared his teeth when he pulled away, even as his tongue swiped across the abused flesh to soothe the punctures he’d caused. “I love ya, angel. You know that, right? I’ll love you ‘til mah dyin’ day.”

You uncurled your fingers from the sheets to caress his temple. “I know, I love you, too; to the moon and back.”

His sockets lowered as he was completely caught up in the rapture of the moment. “Ya feel it, right? I…I mean…I’m an asshole, but yer my angel, baby. Do I do enough…y’know…to make ya feel it?”

This was a rarity, but also one of those instances that made you believe in the worth he placed on you. He hardly grasped for reassurance, but always gave it; he was the provider of safety and comfort. Yet, he trusted you enough to give you glimpses into his own vulnerability. “More than enough, I swear. Do I…”? Despite the occasional comfort, a botched meal, kisses, cuddles, sex, and a paycheck, you didn’t feel like you provided enough at all.

“Back in the day, angel, there were times when I thought about running my bike into a fuckin’ tree t’ put an end to my miserable life.” He admitted. “It was back when I thought I had nothin’ t’ live for; there was no one that needed or wanted me.” His eye lights flickered like dying embers. “I learned how to race cuz I wanted Paps t’ think it’d be an accident…wouldn’t want him feelin’ guilty or
whatever…but, I found out I loved racin’ so much I couldn’t bring myself t’ wreck the bike. Didn’t wanna subject my guys to that sight, either, so I figured I’d just find some other way, eventually. Then, you came along an’ lovin’ ya gives me reason enough t’ stick around for good. Saved my life, I guess, in a big way. So, you’re not a waste of space, or a burden, or whatever other crap floats around in that pretty head. Yer mine, yer enough, and I love the fuck outta you.”

“I’m…I’m so glad you didn’t. Red, you mean the world to me. You don’t still feel that way, do you? There are people you can talk to about this…medication, if you need it. I don’t want to lose you, we can-“

“I’m fine, angel. It wasn’t just bein’ with you that screwed my head back on. I found a lotta stuff up here worth livin’ t’ experience; races, people…I figured myself out. I’m not about to fling myself into a ditch somewhere clockin’ out at 140, don’t worry. I just thought it’d make ya think a bit; maybe realize ya mean more t’ me than you thought.” He rolled off, and gathered you into a snuggle. “Cuz I know I’m a pain in the ass, a grade-A Oscar the Grouch, but I’d like t’ think I treat ya good. An’ I do, right?”

“You kind of spoil me, truth be told.”

“That’s what I like t’ hear.” His voice was going lower and his words lurched sluggishly from his mouth; drowsiness from the afterglow was taking its toll. “G’night, my angel.”
Bright and early, two months and three weeks into your pregnancy, you were woken by your stomach pitching about like a canoe in a tsunami. You scrambled over Red, your hand clasped firmly over your mouth, and made it to the toilet with seconds to spare. The acrid tang of stomach acid stung your throat, leaving your mouth tasting nearly as sour as though you’d licked a battery. Morning sickness had finally came to ring your bell. When the final spasms of your abdominal muscles had ebbed, you flushed the toilet and braced yourself using the lip of the tub to force you back up on your shaky legs.

“Whus…whussammatter, baby?” Red, still drunk on sleep, stumbled into the doorway. “Are ya okay?”

You spat out the mouthful of water you’d started swishing, and coughed to clear your scorched throat. “Not feeling great.” You croaked your words out, sounding comparable to a frog who had smoked a pack per day for forty years. “It’s just morning sickness. I’ll have a shower, and I’ll be fine in a few hours.”

He rubbed at his sockets as his nasal bone twitched at the sour stench of vomit. He shrugged the t-shirt he’d slept in over his head. “Alright, let’s get you cleaned up, then.” He flicked the vent fan on.

“You’ve got work today; you should go on back to bed.” You shimmied out of your pajama bottoms.

“Already up, no use in going back t’ sleep now. ‘Sides,” He gave your butt a little pinch. “Means I got more time t’ spend witchya.” He got in the shower behind you, stole your loofah, and grabbed his chocolate-scented body wash. That was something he’d picked up as a joke; he’d waggled it in your face at the store with a quip about chocolate being an aphrodisiac. He ended up liking it, ironically, and now you were the one making jokes about him smelling like Queen Anne chocolate-dipped cherries. You bent over to fiddle with the tap, and he couldn’t resist the opportunity to slap your ass. You glanced over your shoulder, and he shrugged. “By now, you should expect it.”

“Pervert.” You chuckled, shaking your head as you rose. The warm water trickled down your body in wayward trails, dampening down your hair and making it stick a little to your face. “So, I was thinking…remember the dress I wore to the party last weekend?”

“Yeah, why?” He stuck the loofah into the water to work up some suds.

“Well, I was wondering how you…um…if you liked it.”

“You could wear a burlap sack for all I care, sugar, but it was pretty sexy, sure.” Where you were
going with this, he had no clue, but it seemed important to you. Your body language was reserved, nervous, and tight.

“So…theoretically, if I were to say I bought that the week we met to try to get you to sleep with me…would that be creepy?” Your cheeks were aflame with shame. “I never wore it! I mean, I wanted to, but then I saw one of your…dates, and I couldn’t do it.”

He stared long and hard at you before he could find his voice. “You sayin’ what I think yer sayin’? Cuz if ya are, I’m a stars-be-damned idiot.” He pointed at you. “You felt it, too?”

“I think it was the way you swaggered around the room, but it was probably the riding gear, too.” You smiled at the floor of the tub. “All that confidence, and attitude…like Meat Loaf owning the stage with a rock ballad.”

“Yer smile was the brightest thing I’d ever seen, and I’ve caused a few explosions in my day.” It all made sense now, if he thought about it. He’d believed you were simply a nervous person by nature, which you definitely were as shaky as a cafffeinated Chihuahua, but he should’ve known. He could’ve avoided months of pussyfooting around the subject. He prided himself on being good at reading people, at judging, and making decent calls in most situations, so how could he have missed it? “I feel pretty fuckin’ stupid now.”

“I…I’m sorry!”

“Hey, calm down. I’m not upset, babe. I’m kinda annoyed with myself, though, cuz I thought I had it figured out in the beginning. Figured I was branded as a pal, maybe an older bro, for a while.” He scratched his head, and then ended up cursing because the soap from his hands dripped into his sockets.

“If…if you thought that, why did you come on to me that night a few months ago? I thought, at first, you were just being nice, but you kissed me when I asked.” The mist of the shower was filling the room, making the air muggy enough to cause condensation to bead up on the plastic curtain.

“Uh, yeah…about that…” Sheepishly, he grinned down at you. “This sounds stupid now, but you were late, and I was worried, so I kinda broke into yer room t’ see if I could find out why. I found that picture; the one in the bottom drawer with the lock. An’, I was already head-over-heels for ya, so I took a gamble. A gamble, by the way, that made me the happiest scoundrel in the whole fuckin’ universe.”

You twisted your hands awkwardly. “That’s so sweet.”

An’, y’know those ‘dates’ you were so worried about? I only fucked ‘em cuz I thought I couldn’t have you. Thought it would go away if I went with other girls…it didn’t, I just ended up picturin’ you the entire time, every time. So, I stopped, it wasn’t fair t’ use ‘em to get off to you.” He’d tried for months to ignore it when he’d first recognized his feelings for what they were. He was a selfish, black-hearted bastard, and you deserved so much better than his ugly mug to wake up to. It hadn’t crossed his mind even once that you’d wanted him, too, before he’d found that picture. “I was droolin’ over you for the longest time.”

“If I’d had the backbone to say something earlier…” You sighed from exasperation, and laid your hand on your forehead.

He laughed in response, reached out, and squeezed your upper arm. “Don’t worry ‘bout it, doll. Let’s finish up here, an’ make up for some lost time, eh?” Poofs of suds, clumps of bubbles caused by his body wash, squished onto your skin and stuck there until they were washed away. His hands
slid down your back to cup your butt, one of his favorite hand-holds, and bit down on your shoulder with the lightest, playful pressure. “Wish I could stay home with ya. Nearly kills me t’ have to leave when yer sick, babygirl, but I’ll warp back in whenever I get a free minute.” He started on your back, making little circles with the soapy loofah.

“It’s not so bad now.” You rested your head on his collarbone. “I think I’ll just go back to bed for a nap after this.”

You both stayed in the shower until the water ran cold, and then you stopped to brush your teeth to get that foul taste out of your mouth. Red followed suit, watching you intently with concern written all over his face. He shared a towel with you, wrapping you up, and trapping the ends under his arms to keep you close. He finger-combed your hair gently, saying nothing, and wondering how he would bring himself to go when the time came.

Once dry, neither of you bothered with re-dressing just yet, and went straight back to bed. You curled up in your usual spot on the far side, and he slipped in beside you. His heart liquefied into a pool of goo when you took his hand, and then curled it up tighter to your chest. “I wish you didn’t have to go. We never have full days off together anymore.” You were lacramose. “I’ll be working more, too, with the promotion.”

“You know what? Screw it, I’m gonna call off.” He had to steal his hand back for a moment to grab his phone. “The shop can survive without me for a day. The club has other bouncers; it’ll be a you-an’-me day.” He dialed up his boss, who was probably in the midst of the process of opening everything up. There were questions, but Jerry was sympathetic; he’d gone through three pregnancies with his own wife. It was tougher to get the club manager to understand, so he had to negotiate a shift trade with one of the other bouncers. His co-worker, fortunately, was okay with the trade and more than willing to help a brother out. He threw the phone back on the nightstand when he was finished, and willed a wisp of magic to his hand to do his best to soothe your aching stomach. “We’ll stay in bed ‘til noon, order whatever ya want for lunch…it’ll be great, promise.”

You shifted, turning to face him, and attacked his face with a barrage of kisses. If kisses were bullets, he’d be dead as dust. His soul sang in his chest, its slow pulses ratcheting up to a gallop. When you finally stopped for a breath, his vision was unfocused, and he couldn’t form a proper thought. You happily returned to your position as the little spoon, but now he had a few other thoughts in mind beyond simply sleeping. His fingers brushed against the curve of your hip, and down your leg before pressing himself hard against your ass. “Ya asked for this, sugar, after kissin’ me like that.” His mouth was at your ear, and his nose was half-buried in your hair. He squeezed your thigh. “Leg up.” He licked a finger and slipped it inside you with ease.

His pace, however, was agonizingly slow. “Red, please, I…I…” Your voice was small, and going higher with the teasing.

“You are fuckin’ precious.” His words were grated by the metal teeth of passionate hunger. “Yer such a goddamn sweetheart. I wanna hear those little gasps, moans, and ‘Oh, Red, don’t stop’ every day of my life. Beg me for more, baby, say ya want my cock.” He crooked his finger just right, and felt you twitch around it.

It was so cute, watching over your shoulder as you writhed, and your face turned so pink. “Please, daddy, I need your cock.”

“I’m gonna show you how much I love ya, babydoll.” He climbed over you; his arm crept behind your neck to brace your shoulder. His free hand pinned one of yours to the pillow beside your head, and nudged your legs apart. “I swear t’ the stars, I’m gonna spend the rest of mah life treatin’ ya like a fuckin’ queen. And, frankly, I dunno if I oughta track down an’ destroy all the clowns that fucked
with ya or send ‘em all thank you notes for bein’ dumb enough not t’ snatch ya up in a heartbeat. Probably a good thing ya didn’t end up with any of those assholes, anyway. Wouldn’t know a fine woman from a fuckin’ hole in the ground, or how t’ treat one even if they did.” He rubbed the side of his face lightly over your cheek. “Feel like givin’ daddy some more sugar, sweetheart?”

You beamed, though your eyelids were lowered bashfully. “Always.” Your lips pecked a line down his cheekbone, over the back of his mandible, and down to his third vertebrae. The tip of your tongue slipped into the small crevice between his third and fourth neck vertebrae. His bones rattled, his shoulders shook, and his ever-present grin nearly encompassed his entire face. “I’ve never loved anyone like I love you.” You let your fingertips glide over his ribs to stop over the scarlet luminescence in his chest. It stuttered and spat, like throwing water droplets on a hot frying pan. Yet another, uncontrollable shiver rolled through his body, and Red had to crack his neck to release the tension building in his shoulders. He’d said he’d take it slow this morning, and he aimed to stick to that. You were making it pretty damn difficult for him to hold to it, even if it wasn’t on purpose. “You’re everything I’ve always wanted, and more. I can’t wait to wear your marks to work tomorrow, I wanna show them off to everyone. I wanna show everyone I belong to you.” Your little speech and tiny gasp for breath when he rocked his hips forward nearly did him in, so he stilled and gritted his teeth. “A-are you-"

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine, sugar. Just…heh…almost busted a nut there. Ya got me all worked up.” You weren’t often talking back to him during sex, it was more often him yammering on and you barely speaking through your pleasure. Not that he didn’t like it that way, but this was an amazingly sexy remix of the dynamic.

“I wouldn’t have gotten upset if you had. It’s more of a compliment than anything.” And that was classic of you, he thought; forever soft, full of reassurance, and sweetness. You were a security blanket made of marshmallows. “I-if you need to, I-"

“We’re gonna cum together. We’re gonna synchronize this shit like swimmers at the mothafuckin’ Olympics. Keep talkin’, babygirl.” His eyes shifted to land on the hand he’d settled beside your head; your fingers were interlaced with his. He brought your paired hands up and kissed the back of your hand. You did the same for him, and a thought struck him like a brick to the face; this was forever. No more death. No more waking up wanting nothing more than to drive off a cliff. No more life without anything to live for. This was real. This was actually fucking real, holy shit. He’d had an inkling that this entire thing might’ve been a dream or something, but it was happening.

“Oh no, no, Red, you’re crying!” You wiped away the tear that had dripped onto your cheek. “Are you okay-!”

And he was laughing, too. Laughing his head off, really. “I’m good. Better than good. I’m goddamned ecstatic, angel.” He stroked your face reverently. “Listen to me, baby, alright? I fuckin’ love you. I fuckin’ love you. Sugar, sweetheart, angel…yer everythin’ t’ me. Yer my angel, everythin’ I never thought I deserved, an’ more than I had the imagination t’ wish for.” He must have sounded manic, practically insane, but he was in his head enough to consider that. “Marry me, and I mean today…well, first I’m gonna fuck ya ‘til yer cross-eyed, but that shouldn’t take longer than a couple of hours-"

“Hours-!”

“An’, then I’m gonna steal Paps away from his girlfriend. Oh Hell, who gives a fuck, she can come, too! And I gotta invite all the Fangs, can’t forget ‘em. Ducky’d have my skull, if I did. You’re gonna have t’ get yer dad on the phone an’ warn him that I’m gonna pick him up so he can walk ya down the aisle. Figuratively, I mean. Probably won’t be an aisle. We’ll get married in the park. Ya mind if
Gran comes? She’d like that, the old, sappy broad…” He used his weight to grind his cock deeper. “Holy fuckin’ Hell, I’m wanna see ya limpin’ over t’ sign yer name next t’ mine, baby. Ya got a white dress, right?”

“I’ve got a black one w–with white polka- ah!-dots.” He had you whimpering now, gasping, and that was just egging him on.

“Close enough, we can do a rockabilly thing. Oh, fuck…you with red lipstick, and a little leather jacket of yer own, I could cum t’ that. I could cum all over that. I’m gonna make ya mine today, angel. Where do ya wanna have the honeymoon?”

“Well, I’m good with just staying home for lots of cuddles and food.”

“Fuck, it’s like I made ya at Build-A-Bear!” He laved one of your nipples with his tongue. “Have I ever told ya that ya’ve got the cutest, most gorgeous tits? Because ya do. Best damn ass I’ve ever seen, too. I’m gonna love ya forever, doll, swear t’ the stars. Yer my girl. Yer my fuckin’ world, I…”

His body tensed, but he shook it off like a dog after a bath. “Damn, I’m edgin’ again. I am so damn gone.” You cried out his name as he merrily went to town. “That’s right, say my fuckin’ name. Scream it! What wazaat, doll? Harder? Faster? Don’t mind if I fuckin’ do.”

You clung to his shoulders, lapping at his neck, and biting where you could. “Red, I love you!”

Your nails dug into his spine, but it had him purring like an F-type Jag on a recently-paved strip of blacktop.

“I’m all yours, baby.” Little flowers of purple had blossomed over your skin where he’d dipped down for a taste. “Yer so beautiful, I can’t get over it, blushin’ an’ wrapped tight around my dick. I’m gonna wreck yer sweet, little pussy, and then I’m gonna do yer mouth. I think I’ll be calm enough by then t’ take my time enjoyin’ yer ass; I wouldn’t wanna hurt my babygirl.” He nuzzled his face into your neck, listening and savoring even the smallest of sounds he could coax from you. “Stars, I love ya so fuckin’ much.” Endearments and praise spilled uncontrollably from his mouth. “Ya won’t regret pickin’ me. I…fuck, I’m gonna cum, angel!” He pushed down on your shoulders, and snapped up his hips at the same time. A snarl curled the plates of his lips up over his teeth. He wouldn’t hold out much longer, but neither would you if he had anything to say about it. You were already tense and twitching, your hand working furiously between the both of you. He knocked your hand gently aside, and pinched your clit viciously. Your eyes went wide, and rolled back as your orgasm hit you with all the force of a speeding eighteen-wheeler. It was enough to push him over at the same time. White light erupted into existence within his skull; he had to catch himself with the edge of the headboard to keep from falling forward and crushing you.

You, though, you were out completely for a couple of seconds. He couldn’t keep his eyes off your face. He spaced out, completely enamored, and just stared until your eyes fluttered open groggily. “H-h-hey…”

“You alright, sugar? Need me to grab some water?” He asked softly, his voice barely raised above a rough whisper.

“Mhm, water would be nice, thanks.” You sat up on your elbows, gazing at him dreamily. You caught the edge of his clavicle as he went to turn away, and yanked him down for another kiss before letting him go. “If we’re gonna get married today, I think we should save the encore until after.” A quick glance at the clock told him it was already eleven am, and he scowled at it as if it had personally insulted him. He left to go fetch some water, your prenatal supplements, and a snack. When he returned, you were on the phone with your father. “Dad, he’s a monster. Monsters have magic. Magic means you don’t have to take a plane-…yes, I know this is last minute…no, it’s not because I’m pregnant…actually, I am, but it’s not because of that-“ You held the phone out from your
ear as your father began to fall apart on the other end. You hadn’t told him about the baby, yet, and this was exactly why. He hadn’t even known you were engaged, just that you were with ‘some monster boy’. “Can you make it? It won’t take long…two hours as a rough estimate. No, that’s not a quote, it’s a guess. We still have to make tons of other arrangements, I’ve got to go to the store and buy a cake. No, not those stupid ones that are half-cardboard and half-fondant, those taste awful! Dad, no, you don’t have to bring anything, seriously. I don’t…well, I guess I could use some stuff for the baby if you really want, but you could also just buy a bunch of pizza and that’d be fine. Yes, I know most people don’t have pizza at their wedding.”

Red listened, highly amused at the banter that you were trading with the man that would soon become his father-in-law. You came from money, your father was a commercial farmer who owned around three hundred acres of saffron, lavender, and some kind of Godzilla health berry or whatever. Odd, but lucrative and it had apparently paid off for him. The thing he really loved is that you didn’t act like you had money, and he could respect a man who raised his kid like that; a man who’d told his kid to find their own way. You turned out great, so this guy couldn’t be all that bad, right?


You smiled gratefully at him, and swallowed them down quickly. “Yes, dad. We had a rough plan in place, anyway. We’re going to have a justice of the peace do it, if we can. If not, your certification is still valid, right? Yes, I promise I’ll tell you more once I’ve worked the kinks out. No, a church wedding is out of the question…why? You know why. I don’t care if you can rent a church, I don’t want a church. Everybody does the church thing. The theme’s rockabilly, and we’re having it in a park.” You facepalmed as indecipherable chatter continued over the speaker. “Yes, it’s very non-traditional. We’re totally loose-cannons living on the edge. I’m a rebel in a pleated skirt.” You shot Red a dirty look because he’d started snickering. “You can buy a leather jacket, then! Or a pompadour wig, if you don’t feel like styling up your real hair. Honestly, we don’t care…actually, I might take you up on hiring a swing band, that kind of sounds cool…elvis impersonators? Well, I guess it’s already weird, might as well make it weirder. Red’s going to –well, no that’s his nickname. His name is Sans, yes, just like the font. He didn’t get to pick it, okay? Anyway, Red’s going to pick you and the rest of our guests up while I’m out shopping.” You smiled a little. “Uh…yeah, I-love you, too, dad. Bye.” You clicked the ‘end call’ button, and stared disbelievingly at the phone. “He almost never says that…it’s nice that he did. He’s being very good about this, considering we sprang it on him in the middle of a workday. I thought he would freak out.”

“That wasn’t freaking out?” Red arched an eyebrow skeptically. “Does your entire family have a nervous condition or something?”

“…If I answer that, it’ll only give you fuel to tease me.” Your mouth was struggling hard against a grin. “Now, you’re going to pick up Papyrus first, because we have to clean and I can’t do that if I’m shopping. I’m not saying I don’t trust you to pick up the apartment by yourself, but the last time you did, I found all of the dirty clothes in the trash. And, I’d had no idea that soda could grow mold until I found that open bottle under your bed. So, honey, I love you to death, but you’re a bit of a slob sometimes.” You ran your fingers through your wet hair. “Ooooh boy, I’m going to need help. You think Alphys and Undyne would want to?”

“Uh, considerin’ Alphys’d probably try to barter her help for your help with ‘research’, I don’t think that’s a good idea. What about Boss’s girlfriend the maginurse? She probably needs a break…not from work, from Boss. Y’know he’s livin’ with her now? He called yesterday, and bragged t’ me about his room in her fancy-schmancy apartment. Sheesh, I dunno how she puts up with ’im.”

“Are they together, then? That would be lovely, he really needs someone.”

“Yeah, someone t’ put a foot up his ass, more like. But, nah, I don’t think that’s it, yet. I think she
just felt sorry for the twerp because it’ll be difficult for him to get a place or job of his own with his record, even if he’s going on the straight an’ narrow for real this time.” He wriggled into a black t-shirt. “Did it t’ himself, I say, but maybe I’m just an asshole.” Once he was dressed, right down to having his belt buckled and his boots tied, he dipped you down into a kiss before he left to go wrangle everyone up.

Chapter End Notes

If you don’t feel like voice acting for the SY comic dub, but would still like to help in some way you can simply message me on my Tumblr and we’ll try to figure something out. ^.^

-----> https://www.tumblr.com/blog/meldaburke
Manic Panic

Papyrus appeared with him, mere moments later, looking very disgruntled and only half-dressed. He was trying his best to appear ferocious, however, that was hard to accomplish as he was only wearing a pair of Sans’s basketball shorts. His cracked sternum, where the bullet had been lodged, was looking much better than it had when you’d last seen it. “Boss, how are you feeling? I’m sorry this is such short notice—”

He strode past you, ignoring your opening inquiry, and stomped around the apartment in a sort of inspection. He hummed disapprovingly, swiping his phalanges over various surfaces, and picked up THE ENTIRE FRIDGE to inspect the space underneath. “My brother tells me he intends to make an honest human out of you.” He announced once he returned, his volume at a level that would have busted your eardrums, if you weren’t familiar enough with him to stand a reasonable distance away. “I believe human customs require that I congratulate you…therefore, congratulations.” He eyed his brother warily, until Sans left to retrieve everyone else. “And, even if you refuse to be mine—your loss, you ABSOLUTELY chose the wrong brother— I still think you shall make a fine baby sister.”

He looked around the apartment. “And, I do not believe I have ever mentioned that I am somewhat impressed at how you manage to maintain the apartment. Sans’s living habits are slovenly, and it takes great effort to keep his mess contained. Still, it is not quite up to my incredible standards of cleanliness. Now, direct me to the place you’ve designated for your cleaning essentials, and I—The Great Papyrus, Sworn Enemy of Mold, Mildew, and Dirt—shall mutilate your dust bunnies!”

“Oh, well, we weren’t sure of the date, either. Sans was just kind of like ‘let’s get married today’, so…yeah…” You grabbed your purse from its place on the coat rack. “I kind of meant for you to keep watch while Sans cleaned. I don’t want you overdoing it.” You squeaked a little in fright, and had to jump out of the way as he started tossing pots and pans out from under the sink with the intention of re-washing them and cleaning the cupboard.

“Hey, asshole! I thought ya were gonna clean the place, not destroy it!” Sans growled at his brother as a pot skittered across the floor and rolled on its side to be stopped by the toe of his boot. King glared from his dog bed at the commotion, and growled as a frying pan landed on his head like a hat, apparently less hurt by it than he was offended by its presence.

“THIS APARTMENT REQUIRES A DEEP CLEAN, BROTHER! DO YOU NOT WANT YOUR FUTURE FATHER-IN-LAW TO TOLERATE YOU?!” Boss screeched back, annoyance and frustration clear in his voice. “I AM TRYING TO BE HELPFUL, BUT YOU ARE BEING EXTREMELY UNGRATEFUL, YOU BULL-HEADED JACKASS!”

“Red, please, it’s fine. Just let him do his thing, it’s okay.” You petted his arm soothingly, sensing an impending brawl fueled by the stress of the suddenness of such an important event being launched.

“Fine, but there are a few conditions; no touching our rooms, and I’m taking our toothbrushes into our rooms BECAUSE NORMAL PEOPLE DON’T USE A DUDE’S TOOTHBRUSH TO CLEAN A FUCKIN’ DRAIN!” You felt you were clearly missing something, but Boss’s nurse took your hand and hauled you toward the door.

“Sweetie, I don’t think I’ve properly introduced myself to you outside of work. Papyrus has probably mentioned it, but everyone calls me Hazel.” She smiled kindly down at you. “Congratulations on getting married, by the way. Love is a precious thing.”

“That’s a cute nickname.” You nervously glanced over your shoulder at the door. “Are you sure-“

“They’ll be fine, trust me. He’s has been recovering his strength rather rapidly over the past 48 hours, although I’m not entirely sure why.” She tapped her chin thoughtfully. “It’s quite curious, considering he languished for so long in the hospital, but then again it could be that he finally feels comfortable and relaxed in his own space. Monsters are extremely territorial, as I’m sure you’re aware.”

“Yes, I know. Red has…um…demonstrated that.” You immediately thought back to poor Silas, and Red’s reaction to the apartment being invaded so many times. You were sure that the only reason he hadn’t gone so far as nailing the windows shut was solely his need to go out on the fire escape to smoke. Her eyes shone, obviously deeply intrigued by something. “May I ask you something personal?”

“Well, I…um…you’re a nurse, and you’ve already seen my lady bits, so I guess we’re at that point, yeah.”

“Has he marked you? I’ve never seen a mating mark in person before, and I’d very much like the opportunity to see how the embedded magic reacts with the latent magic of a human soul.” Hazel was vibrating with excitement in the literal sense; she was rocking up and down on the balls of her feet. Green magic buzzed at the ends of her fingertips. “Could I please see it, if he has?”

You weren’t sure what all the fuss was about, so you pulled down the edge of your collar. “Yeah, he has, and yes, you can. It’s…well, I would say it’s nothing special, but that’s really not true. Please be careful, I don’t think you would be comfortable with what happens when it’s handled roughly.” You could feel the heat rush to your face; you probably shouldn’t have mentioned that and mentally berated yourself for it.

“Don’t worry, Angel – that’s your nickname, right? It’s what Papyrus calls you, and he said he got it from Sans.” You nodded. “Lovely, I promise I won’t do anything you’re not comfortable with. This is a real honor, you know! I’m going to be introducing the first monster-human baby into the world, and, if that weren’t enough, I’ve somehow obtained a personal invitation to witness what has to be the first monster-human wedding! This is simply a once-in-a-lifetime chance, and I am very grateful you’re sharing the experience with me.” She brushed your hair aside, and prodded the area around the spark of magic. The pad of her finger swiped gently over it, and you prepared for the sensation of intense bliss that typically accompanied such an action…except it didn’t come. “Am I hurting you?” She must have noticed you’d squeezed your eyes shut.

“N-no, actually…there’s nothing…” You slowly relaxed. “That’s weird, whenever Red touches it, it feels ama- uh, I mean, it feels different.”

“Oh, that’s because it’s supposed to work as an extra erogenous zone, but the magic belongs to Sans,
not me, so it won’t react to me.” Her smile made you feel silly for being so embarrassed about it, especially when she was able to talk about it so flippantly. “And, according to the slight build-up of scar tissue lining it, I’d say your relationship is wonderfully healthy.” She winked, and there was a glint in her bright eyes.

“Y-you’re…you’re teasing me.” You curled your toes up in your shoes, another little habit you had that especially appeared while talking to people you weren’t terribly familiar with. You’d only met her a total of around ten times, and never been with her for longer than a few minutes alone. “I’m… I’m supposed to uh…laugh…right? That was a dirty joke.” You scrunched back into yourself a little. “S-sorry, I’m just…I have a thing…and you’re a bit…well…not that you mean to be…but-“

“Honey, are you okay? Am I making you uncomfortable?”

“No, no, it’s not you!” You insisted urgently. “I’m just…” Your chest was beginning to hurt, a stabbing pain that made it hard to take deep breaths. Your body was locked up, every joint frozen. Hot tears seared your eyes. “I’m sorry, I’m an idiot, I…I didn’t mean…please, don’t be mad, please, I swear it’s not you!”

“Okay, sweetheart, you’re having a panic attack.” She pulled her phone from her pocket, talking slowly and calmly the entire time. “Do you think you can walk back to the apartment?” The two of you hadn’t made it that far from the building.

“I…I need Red. I need him, please!” Tears were streaming down your face in a scalding river, everything was too hot, but your insides were ice-cold. This was a truly awful one; the worst ones were those that caught you by surprise. It was the unpredictability of it that scared you; it never failed to make you paranoid about being crazy.

“I understand, it’s okay, you’re safe. I’m going to have him on the phone in half a second. Focus on your breathing, like you’re meditating; in and out.” You heard her talking, but you also didn’t. It was tunnel vision, tunnel hearing, and like you were entirely blacking out, except you could still see; as if someone had turned out the lights in your head.

“Hey, baby, I gotchya. It’s awright.” You weren’t sure how much time had passed between Hazel taking out her phone, and Red’s arms going around you. You pitched forward, but his grip kept you from greeting the concrete with your face. “What happened?” His tone was even, but clearly forced to be so.

“I’m not sure, we were talking, the poor thing went white as a sheet, and then broke down into a panic attack. Did I do something to upset her?” The nurse sounded worried, and that broke through to you a bit.

“N-not you.” You mumbled hoarsely. “It’s not you.”

“She’s not so good bein’ around new people. I mean, yer not new, but I don’t think she’s been alone with ya before for long. Hold on, there a bench somewhere?” You faintly realized you were being scooped up and carried.

“Perhaps you should take her back to the house-”

“Nope, that’s not what she’d want. Give us a few minutes, I’ll calm ‘er down, and then you girls can be on yer way.” He paused, glancing up from you to her. “Look, I know it’s kinda hard t’ understand, but she feels better if she does stuff; cleanin’, organizin’, workin’, or pacin’ around. I think it burns off the energy from the overstimulation or somethin’, shit, I dunno, but it works okay? It’ll do ‘er good t’ be out an’ about.” He sprawled out on a bench.
“I won’t pretend to be a psychologist, so I’ll take your word that it helps.” Hazel knelt down beside the bench. “She…she knows I’m not going to hurt her, right?”

“It’s not about that. It’s a hardwired thing; a learned reaction, I think. She start beggin’ ya not t’ be mad at ‘er an’ stuff?” Hazel nodded, her eyes clouded with worry. As a person in the medical field, she was probably upset at being unable to provide assistance. “Yeah, that’s how it usually starts.”

“Did something…happen? I’m sorry, and you can absolutely tell me to mind my own business, but I don’t want to upset her again.”

“She’s a nervous person naturally, apparently her whole family is just a bundle of nerves, but I’m gettin’ off track. It’s usually new people, large groups of people, new situations, loud noises, and sometimes it’s because someone’s angry or she thinks she’s upsettin’ people. She’s told me bits an’ pieces ‘bout why; it makes me wanna punch shit.” He brushed hair back from your face. “She’s been abandoned a few times, had a lotta guys string ‘er along for her money because she can’t give t’ people, an’ I think she said somethin’ about gettin’ kicked outta a movin’ car once…that’s probably why she favors motorcycles, now that I think about it, and she told me a bit ‘bout watchin’ her mom die…Just lots of stuff, probably not a good time t’ get into it. She should be the one t’ tell ya, not me. She’s used t’ be a lot better at handling it, but ever since those gangster fuckwads messed with her, she’s gotten loads worse.”

“Kicked out of a car? My god, what kind of person does that?! I’d like to find them, and kick them out of one!”

“Hey, I’m all for that, if I can ever get ‘er t’ give me names. Problem is, she won’t. She knows what I’d do t’ ‘em. She can’t stand hurtin’ people.” He shifted you on his lap to properly look at Hazel. “She’s tender-hearted, but I love ‘er for it. Keeps me from throttlin’ people…sometimes.” He grinned. “Speakin’ of kickin’ the shit outta assholes, how’s my old pal Silas doin’? He givin’ ya any more trouble? Need me t’ come down an’ put the fear of Polaris in ‘im?”

She chuckled and shook her head. “Actually, I think he’s turned over, or is in the process of turning over, a new leaf.”

“See, this is what I mean, sometimes a piece of shit just needs a little kick in the ass. Bet he won’t be sleazin’ on any more girls, right?” His hands rubbed little circles into your shoulders, and gradually massaged out the knots.

“Definitely not. He was in a ri-dick-ulous amount of pain, after what you put him through.”

He shared a laugh with her over that. “I like you, sister. Ya been good t’ Boss, an’ ya know how t’ handle ‘im. Dunno what yer doin’, but yer makin’ a man outta that kid. I spent years tryin’ t’ do that, so that’s the highest goddamned compliment I can bestow.” He noticed that you were finally stirring. “Feelin’ better, sugar?” He turned back to Hazel. “It’s usually only a matter of holdin’ ‘er through it. And it’s not the words ya say, it’s the tone.”

“That makes sense, I suppose.”

“She’ll be a bit jumpy for a while, so maybe go t’ one of the smaller stores first ‘till she works herself back up t’ being around a big group of people. I know she don’t seem like it, but she’s pretty tough. She’ll be fine.” His head whipped around at the sound of pounding footsteps.

Papyrus was bolting at top speed down the block. He skidded to a halt mere centimeters from the bench, grabbed you away from Sans, and held you under your arms high in the air. A scowl was carved deep into his face, but a dusky, blood-orange blush had formed over his cheekbones.
“HUMAN SISTER! I DEMAND THAT YOU DO NOT SCARE—ahem—I mean, you should NOT display weakness out in the open like this. It will get you killed, maimed or seriously injured!” He shook you hard, and you blinked down at him without fright, but more with confusion. “I command you turn that frown upside down this instant!” He huffed out his nose and stomped his foot. “Smile, damn you!”

“Hey, hey, hey! She’s not a damn shakeweight. Put ‘er down!” Sans stood up to make a grab for your ankle. “You okay, angel? How’s the weather up there? Cuz it sounds like there’s a lotta hot air blowin’ yer way.”

“Sans, do you wanna say your wedding vows from a gurney? Because I WILL HAPPILY OBLIGE YOU! Your mate is in pain, and it didn’t look like you were doing anything about it! My dating handbook clearly outlines the need for chocolates, flowers, and cuddles!”

“I was cuddlin’ ‘er, bricks-for-brains! An’ she don’t like flowers, F-Y-fuckin’-I, they make ‘er sneeze and she thinks they’re impractical gifts. Don’t ya dare think I don’t know my woman. She likes those raspberry-filled chocolate bars the best, too, so there.” Red growled back. “I get ‘er one of those, an’ a green Monster every Friday.”

“Um…can I come down now?” You swung your feet a little. You were being held almost four feet off the ground, and your knees were level with your lover’s head.

“Do you promise to smile?” Papyrus asked suspiciously, as if you’d only say ‘yes’ so that he’d let you down.

“Yeah, here’s me…all smiles…see?” You forced a wide grin that showed nearly all of your teeth. A yawn broke your smile, however. “S-sorry, I always get so wiped out after…after…” You swallowed hard, took a deep breath, and did your best to direct your mind away from your panic attack, otherwise you’d overthink it. Anxiety was a circle of barbed wire, and your thoughts were always getting tangled up in it. “Anyway, I’m smiling now, Boss. Please, I’ve wasted enough time.”

“It wasn’t your fault. Papyrus, put the girl down.” Hazel stepped up beside Red. “We all have a lot to do before the day is over.”

“I only concede because I shall soon have to return to the dungeon of dust you deem an apartment to slay your dirt devils!” He lowered you cautiously to the ground.

“Thank you,” You were still somewhat uneasy around Boss because his moods were similar to oobleck in terms of stability. Right now, though, he was being kind, and you hoped it would last. “For…erm…trying to help, and for cleaning the apartment, too.”

“Nyehehe! You are most welcome, parva soror mea. Now, after the wedding, we will discuss when and where we will begin your self-defense training. That is your wedding gift from me. I am sorry it is unwrappable, as I understand it is a tradition aboveground to wrap presents.” He stepped back, and bowed like a knight of the theatre.

“No way, nuh-uh, not gonna happen. Yer gonna be too damn rough with ‘er.”

“Preposterous! She’s perfectly capable of handling me, you imbecile. I know, because she’s done it before!”

“Guys!” The skeleton brothers stopped to regard Hazel. “We’ve really gotta wrap this up, if we want this wedding to actually happen.” She pointed in the direction of your building. “Papyrus, please go back to the apartment. Sans, you will return to your guest list duties, and we will be getting along to
Red grabbed your chin. “Gonna miss ya. Don’t be afraid t’ ask her to ring me up again if ya need me.” He was gone with an abrupt flash and buzz of red light.

It was healthy, you told yourself, to get out of the house and be around new people. The thought gave you no comfort, though, as you sullenly trudged behind Hazel. You hated stores during the day; it was always so crowded and loud. You preferred to do all of your shopping at night, but you were left with no choice. Thankfully, it was noon on a weekday, so there would be fewer people wandering the store itself.

“So, what are we looking for?” Hazel paused by the carts to pull one out. “The last wedding I attended was so long ago I was young enough to be the flower girl or the ring bearer.”

“Ring!” “Oh, god, I need to pick him out a ring!” Your hand flew to your mouth in horror. “We need to go to the jewelry counter, right now!” Fortunately, no one else was at the counter and you were able to get the immediate attention of the saleswoman manning the area. “At least I already know his ring size.” You said to yourself as you scanned the men’s section of the display. You had a good idea of what Red would like; it had to be something that would stand out from all the other rings he wore. The line of mirror-finish, black tungsten rings caught your eye, and you spotted one that had a diamond chip embedded in the center. “Is this one available with other stones?”

“Yes, we have four versions; diamond, sapphire, ruby, and emerald.” The saleslady replied cheerfully. You asked to see the ruby one, and kept that one out for comparison while you hunted through the rest. You found another that you liked almost as much; another tungsten carbide, but this one had a line of black and red carbon fiber running through the middle of the band. It lacked a stone, but it was equally impressive as your first choice.

“Which one do you think?” You looked at Hazel for her opinion on the matter.

“They’re both nice, and the price doesn’t seem to be much higher one way or the other, but I personally prefer the one with the ruby.”

You stared at the two rings, humming the Jeopardy timer jingle under your breath to remind yourself you couldn’t spend all day in this one spot. It was important, though, to choose the right one. You were leaning heavily toward the ruby one, too, but the simplicity of the second would allow him to wear it almost anywhere. Although, he couldn’t wear either to the shop or his construction contracts because that was just asking to lose a finger, so that kind of negated the argument for the carbon fiber one. The ruby one was just showy enough to wear to a classy event, but also low-key enough to be an every-day accessory. “I’d like the ruby one, please.”

Once the ring was paid for, boxed up, and in your purse for safe-keeping, you moved on to the party aisle. Biodegradable disposable plates and cutlery went into the basket, along with a huge pack of cloth napkins. “We’re going for a rockabilly theme.” You explained as you picked out two strings of battery-powered, red fairy lights. “I wonder if we could find a bunch of those candy cigars and cigarettes? That’d be a cool party favor.” You checked your watch; it was already two-thirty. “Okay, so I’m going to guesstimate that we’re going to have about thirty people. That means I need thirty chocolate cigars, fifteen cherry-flavored lollipops, fifteen strawberry-flavored lollipops, thirty tiny bottles of Fireball, and thirty tiny boxes of malt balls. That’s just for the party favors.” You grabbed a mountain of foldable, plastic, red and white favor boxes.

“I’m going to need a leather jacket. I’m not sure if they sell those here…” Hazel mused as she watched you scurry around like a chicken with its head lopped off.
“Red pumps, too! Do you have red pumps? Or black ones?” You trotted farther down the aisle and held up three spools of ribbon patterned with the classic pair of cherries. “We’ll use these to mark the place off. Oh, and these red and black balloons would look nice!” You were throwing yourself into this; partly because the distraction was doing wonders for the residual anxiety, and also because you were terribly excited for this. It was the most spontaneous thing you’d ever done!

You managed to find the candy, and the actual novelty sizes of booze were stupidly expensive. Therefore, you went into the cooking aisle and grabbed a pack of empty bottles, as well as a pack of stickers featuring cherries, dice, and red and black rhinestones, and three bottles of the regular size cinnamon whiskey to fill them up yourself. You passed by the candle and pre-made wall art aisles, but then backtracked.

“Why are you putting a print of Elvis in the cart?” She looked on in awe as you swiftly directed the cart into the candle aisle and picked out one labeled ‘Tobacco Haze’ and another called ‘Hot Cherry Pie’.

“No rockabilly wedding is complete without a shrine to The King! Now, if only they had one of Aretha Franklin and Jerry Lee Lewis, too, dam it.” You were completely in the zone now, no coming back from this wedding mentality. Despite that, you were able to read the apprehension in her eyes. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, but are you? You’re acting decidedly manic.”

“It’s okay, I get like this after panic attacks; first, I’m really tired, and then my body revs up for some reason. I just need to buzz through everything because I’m a bumblebee!” You made a silly buzzing noise with your lips and sent yourself into a giggle fit as you sprinted with the cart into the next aisle over.

“Ohooookaaaay…you have fun with that.” She walked to the end of the aisle, dialed in Boss’s number, and spoke in a low voice. Either Red or Boss picked up immediately, and put their end on speaker phone. “So, she just called herself a bumblebee, buzzed at me, and then ran off. I’m not sure if I should be worried or laugh hysterically.”

“Laugh it off. It’s the only way.” It turned out to be Red, who sounded plenty entertained by Hazel’s report on your activities. “Her manic isn’t bad for her, most of the time. She just gets super silly, now if she starts tryin’ t’ vacuum the walls, then she needs an knock-out pill and a five-hour nap.”

You zipped back around the aisle with a cart full of baking stuff. “Did you call Red?” You jumped up and down, asking for to borrow her phone for a second, and then yelled into the receiver. “We’re gonna make Black-Out Cake, Sugarnuts!”

“What did she just call you, Sans?! NYEHEHEHEHEHEH!”

“Shut up, bro, or I’ll shut yer mouth for ya!”

“I am NEVER letting you live this down! I will ensure your epitaph shall read ‘Here Lies Sugarnuts’! NYEHEHEH!”

“Then I guess I gotta make sure ya die first, don’t I!!”

You grinned at the phone, and shoved it back into her hands. “Don’t worry, I’m almost done! Oh, and do you know how to bake? Because I almost set my kitchen on fire with a potato once, so Red says I’m not really allowed to touch our oven anymore, and this cake is supposed to be kind of difficult to make, but I will definitely mix up the ingredients for you to put in the oven! Oh, have I
mentioned you’re really nice? Because you’re very, very nice. I hope you like cake. This is a great cake, but I’ve only ever had it once before—“ And on. And on. And on it went. You would definitely have to apologize to poor, mentally-scarred Hazel after this, but the category 5 hurricane that was currently blowing through your head wouldn’t give you enough time to think about doing that right now.

After a second stop at the local clothing outlet, you both were loaded down with yet more bags. Three of which were for her that contained a cute red pencil skirt, a pair black heels of a sensible height, a sweet leather jacket, and a black and white striped blouse. “I don’t think I can manage this cake.” Hazel remarked doubtfully as she scrolled through the recipe on her phone.

“Well, maybe Granny Shih Tzu can. She lived in Brooklyn around the time it was popular.” You replied off-handedly.

“Granny who?”

“Oh gosh, I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to do that! I’m not usually the kind of person who references in-jokes in unwitting company because that’s sorta rude. Gran is a friend of ours from the park, you’ll like her. She was a nurse, too! In the army. How cool is that? Combat nurses! Oh, that sounds like a good tv show, I’d absolutely watch it! I feel like it would be kind of like Totally Spies Meets General Hospital, you know?” You hadn’t slowed down for a second since you’d ramped everything up to 11 back in the supermarket. Your jaw was hurting from talking so much, and you’d probably lose your voice before tomorrow. Hopefully, not before you could say ‘I do’, though, because it’d be awkward if you had to write it out instead. “She’ll probably be at the apartment when we get back. Goodness, these bags are terribly heavy, but I don’t think we should take the bus with all of this because that’d be obnoxious to other passengers and I hate inconveniencing people—“ She already had Red back on the phone. He was there in only a few seconds, and the vibration of his warp hummed pleasantly in your ears. “BABY!” You launched yourself at him like a cannonball made of love and cocaine.

“Still manic, huh?” He patted down your fluffed up hair, which always got crazy whenever you were like this.

“Hey, there, sugarnuts.” Hazel grinned, her frazzled look said it all. It took real stamina to put up with you when you were on one of your hyper-manic adventures.

“Not you, too.” He groaned. “Look, I’ll pay ya, I got cash.”

“I don’t need it, but nice try. Like Papyrus said, you’re ‘sugarnuts’ for life to us now.” She chuckled, though she was looking terribly weary and worn.

“We’re gonna have malt shakes! Did you know you can get Whoppers wholesale?” You struggled to hold up the biggest brown bag of malted candy he’d ever seen in his entire life and brandished it with pride. “And we’re each carrying about a gallon of ice cream, too! And cream soda, and cherry-vanilla coke, and I think I bought lemonade mix for some reason—”

“So, did ya remember the booze?”

“Yes! Six bottles of vodka, three bottles of cinnamon whiskey, and we can always send someone on a run if we need to.” You stepped forward with him into the warp, and then poked your head back out when you realized she wasn’t following. “Come on, slowpoke! We still have stuff to do!”
The moment Sans returned with you and Hazel, he was momentarily astounded at the sheer number of people in the apartment, despite the fact that he’d been the one to bring half of them there. Granny Shih Tzu was seated peacefully on the couch with her grandson; a young man who looked like he could have been Peter Parker and Wade Wilson’s love child. He was fairly nerdy in the face, but the thick motorcycle jacket he wore was strained around his biceps. At his feet was a beautiful, black lab rolling around the floor playing with King and Poopsie the Shih Tzu.

Undyne wrapped a thick arm around his neck and yanked him down for a noogie. “You knucklehead, I’m so proud of you!”

Alphys adjusted her spectacles; her eyes were gleaming and he could just see the gears of her dirty, fangirl mind turning. “Y-you guys are so adorable.” She held up a giant black bag with a felted texture that was packed full of something and spilling over with sparkly red tissue paper. “We brought a gift, I hope you l-like it.

Papyrus was sweeping the kitchen up, and popped his head around the corner. “I am almost done, brother. You should get dressed before you retrieve your father-in-law! Now! Skedaddle!”

He heard the revving of engines through the open window. “Hold on, I gotta go talk t’ the guys. They’re plannin’ somethin’…some kind of trick show for the weddin’, I think.”

The entire chapter had come out for him; Melody, Birdie, Zip, Chopper, Bucky, Ducky, Hercules, Triple Jay, Bomber, Sly Dog, Up-Chuck, and Ziggy. It was touching to see his brothers-and-sisters-in-leather lined up, every one of them ready to root for him on his big day. Ziggy smacked him hard in the shoulder. “We put in for yer Hitched patch, bro. Ya should geddit in the mail in a few weeks.” The patch he spoke of was a small, round, hand-made affair in black and white. The symbol on it was a silhouette of a pair of linked wedding rings meant to be worn over the heart. “Never thought we’d see the day our Enforcer decided t’ settle down.” He’d been their Enforcer from nearly the moment he was patched in, as they’d sorely needed one due to the area once being overrun by the Black Leopard gang. Red had wasted no time in showing he’d deserved his new title by running the pussies off. Strange to think that was nearly a year ago; it seemed like only yesterday.

Up-Chuck, whose real name was Charlie, but earned his nickname after an embarrassing food poisoning incident, piped up. “Woulda had the damn thing ready if ya fuckin’ told us what you were plannin’, dickweed.”

“I thought chaplains didn’t cuss, penisbreath.” Red shot back. “You got the rest of the shit we need?”

Chuck pulled out a thin, red book and an open envelope. “Got the application for the license right here, but you an’ Angel gotta come with me t’ the courthouse. Licenses have t’ be done up with both parties present. We gotta burn rubber t’ get there before they close.”

“We’ll take a shortcut, then.” Red smirked. “Gimme a sec t’ get ‘er, and then we’ll be off.” He warped back inside, and wrapped an arm around your waist. “Let’s go plow through some paperwork!”

In less than an hour, you and Red had signed on every dotted line necessary to bring the government into your relationship. It was after five by the time you all got back home, and the entire apartment
was bustling with activity. Undyne and Alphys were getting dressed in your old room, Hazel was doing her make-up in the bathroom, Gran was working away on the cake and other food prep, and the Fangs were lounging throughout the apartment sharing ideas about bike tricks and the riding games they had planned. Zip, the Road Captain, was deep in a discussion with Bucky about the possibility of a stickerbomb competition. “We’ll need t’ go to the 99 cent place to pick up enough of ‘em. I’m cool with havin’ a book apiece, whaddya think?”

“Sounds good t’ me. Hey, Red! Stickerbomb’s a-go!” Zip gave him both thumbs-up.

“Count me in, what’s the prize?”

“A kiss from the lovely bride-to-be, of course!” Bucky explained, his eyes lit up with a devilish shine. “If she’s willin’.” They all looked to you for approval.

You peeked up from loading the favor boxes. “I don’t mind, if Red doesn’t.”

He shrugged, if it were anyone else outside the club he’d have a big problem with it. However, these were his guys. They wouldn’t cross any lines, he felt in his bones they’d sooner give up riding than backstab him like that. “Doesn’t matter, cuz I’m gonna win anyway.”

“Oh, keep talkin’ ya blowhard. Just cuz you’ve won the most races don’t mean squat!” Shouted Sly, who’d been chatting up Granny’s grandson like the crazy flirt he was. “But, seriously, everyone’s got their gremlin bell, right? We don’t want any accidents durin’ the show.”

“Fuckin’ gremlins,” Muttered Hercules, who was called such because he was a strongman with a couple of local weight-lifting records to his name. “They put my girl’s Gixxer in the shop.” He got a round of sympathetic growls from his fellows.

“All of you are welcome to bring dates, guys.” You informed them, gesturing to the supplies around you. “There’s more than enough for everyone to bring at least one guest with them.” You had bought a little extra of everything, just in case, so there would be around 40 favors in the end.

“Angel, do you two need a DJ for the wedding? I know a guy.” Hazel stepped out of the bathroom, her hair done up with a red handkerchief in a classic 50’s style. “I was texting him while I was getting ready. He says he’ll do it for free, as long as he gets some cake and food.”

“Deal!” You replied enthusiastically. “My dad offered to hire a band, but I’d hate for him to spend all that money. Thank you!” You gave her the address of the park, so that he could go set up everything necessary. “Baby, could you please warp me and Hazel down there early to start putting up the decorations?”

“Sure thing.” He brought you through the void to a familiar area of the park. It was more thickly wooded, and used mostly for camping or hiking. A handful of pavilions lined the interlacing, gravel trails, and the soft whoosh of a low waterfall echoed through the trees. Beyond the pavilions, in the middle of the thickest copse of oak and evergreens, was a small clearing. It was one of the few that boasted a paved road and lot by the entrance, due to it existing along the upper half of the main path. Dappled, late-afternoon sunlight made ever-changing beams that dotted the ground in lacy, mandala patterns. Weather-worn picnic tables were carelessly situated all over the place.

“This place is stunning!” Hazel traced the bark of a nearby oak. Its fallen acorns, left from many years of autumns past, popped and crunched beneath her feet. Spots of lichen made the surrounding trees look as though they were wearing green polka-dots. Moss was lodged firmly over many of the exposed roots, which curled like thick-fingered hands over the topsoil. “Do you two come here often?”
“As often as we can t’ walk the mutt. You should check out the waterfront trail that picks up by the waterfall; it’s not half bad at sunset. All those colors reflectin’ off the water, sure is a sight t’ see.” He’d stolen a few kisses from you along that trail. This clearing, though, was more special. This clearing was the very same from the night he’d heard you admit you loved him, and these very trees had paid witness to the activities that went on afterward. He wondered if any of your lost clothing remained, or if it had been long-since found and thrown away.

“So, what’re we doing, exactly?” Hazel picked up you handed her a pair of scissors. “Please cut me about a foot of ribbon, and do that until we’re out of it, once you’re done with that we can tie them into bows around a few of the thinnest trees. After that, we can start blowing up the balloons. I’m going to work on hanging up the lights.” You slid a fingernail under the cardboard, pulled out several handfuls of thin, wired-up, red bulbs, and popped open a pack of rechargeable batteries. “Once we get all of that done, we can push the picnic tables together into a couple of rows, and tape the plastic tablecloths over the tops. And, we’ll probably have to get all of these leaves out of the way, too. Could you ask your friend to bring a rake?”

He helped himself to a kiss before he warped away, leaving you two to take care of that business. He had a final guest to obtain; your father. He pulled a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket; a description of landmarks, and even the latitude and longitude position of your childhood home. Red wiped away a trickle of sweat from his skull. “Okay, dude, this is really it.” He was going to show this man that he was serious about this. That he was serious about you.

As he made his way through the void, he could see only a small portion of his destination. When he finally stepped foot on the well-manicured lawn, he sucked in a breath. He knew your family had money, but you hadn’t ever said how much. Your house was huge, it was a mansion disguised as a family home. Through the massive windows that faced his direction, he could see a giant chandelier merrily refracting the death of the day in many glass facets. What the hell kind of room was that?! Did you have a motherfucking ballroom in your house?

When you told him your father had wanted to make sure you knew how to make it in the world on your own, he’d had no idea how big of a deal that was. That you, coming from this kind of high-class life, had any sense of the value of a dollar was a relative miracle. He’d thought you meant you were upper middle class, but this…this was the 1% type of rich living. He was marrying a goddamned heiress!

“Excuse me, but what business do you have here?” Red turned around to see a disturbed-looking middle-aged lady in a security outfit staring at him.

“No sir, but thanks. You, too.” He strode through the gate, and up the wide, pale driveway. The rich leaves of Japanese maple trees hung low, as those trees lined the entire thing. Beyond them, on both sides, were beautifully laid-out gardens that sprawled out for yards. The scent of fresh mulch hung heavily in the air.

The door opened and out stepped an older man dressed in an expensive-looking version of a riding jacket paired with jeans and the typical white undershirt. His hair was combed into the classic pompadour; he looked like a fifty-year-old Fonze. He wore the clothes as if he were uncomfortable
in them, although they seemed to fit him well. “Is this suitable for the occasion?” He asked in a timid voice that strongly reminded Red of you.

“Uh, yeah, looks fine, pops…can I call ya that?”

“Yes, yes, y-you may.” He straightened his jacket nervously. “It’s…erm…nice to finally meet the boy my daughter is always talking about.” You had your father’s eyes, Red realized as he shook the man’s hand. Not just the color, but the same wide-eyed innocence and sincere kindness. “She made you sound a bit more decent than the ones she’s gone with before.”

“So, one thing ya should know; I ain’t no fuckin’ kid. I’m a man, an’ I’m gonna treat yer daughter right.” He put his boot up on the stoop. “I’m not here for yer money. Had no idea she even had somethin’ like this goin’ for ‘er.” He gestured at the house as an example. “Yer girl saved my life, pops. It sounds mushy as hell, but that’s what she did. I’d be six feet under if it weren’t for her givin’ me a reason t’ stick around. She’s my angel. So, I don’t want anythin’ from ya, ‘cept for you t’ maybe come down to visit your grandkid every once in awhile, ya dig? I’m not like the other assholes, an’ that’s a goddamned fact. She’ll be safe, she’ll have everything she needs, an’ I’ll love ‘er ‘till the end of time, ya have my word.”

Your father swallowed hard. “That’s…well, I didn’t expect that. Um…would you like to come inside for a minute? I was in the middle of having a cup of hot cocoa. It soothes my nerves, you see. Would you like some, too?”

Red wasn’t about to say no to that. “Yeah, we got time for that. Nice place ya got here, by the way.” Within minutes, he had a mug in his hand courtesy of an honest-to-god butler. “‘Thanks, Alfred.”

The inside of the house was impressive; vaulted ceilings with furnishings that looked too nice to be put to use. Red took a seat in an overstuffed armchair across from your dad. “I have to s-say I’m surprised I was invited at all. I’m sure you know that we don’t have a…ideal relationship. I’m ashamed to say I threw myself into my work after her mother passed. She must have felt so ignored.” He stirred his drink slowly, as if he were searching the chocolate depths for forgiveness. “She looks too much like her mother, I think that was the reason I couldn’t bring myself to spend more time with her for so long. Have you ever seen a picture? They could have been twins, except for her eyes. Here, I think I have one in my…yes, here it is.” He slid a tiny picture out of a fold in his wallet and held it out for Red to see. In it, three people smiled widely back at the camera; you as a toddler, your father before his hair had gone gray, and your mother. The resemblance truly was uncanny, Red had to confess.

“Well, all I can say is that there’s never been a better fuckin’ time t’ start mendin’ things. So, I gotta ask; do ya remember the names of the other guys before me? Just curious, she doesn’t like t’ talk ‘bout ‘em much.” He reasoned he might as well get some leads while he was here.

Your dad’s eyes narrowed. “Now, see here, I did not get where I am by being an idiot. You’re panning for trouble, you are. I can’t say I blame you, I would’ve done something myself if she’d come to me about it while it was going on, but she made nary a peep about it until long afterward.” He took a hearty gulp of his drink, and sighed deeply. “Monsters have magic, do they not? Can you assure me you’ll do some sort of hocus-pocus to keep yourself out of trouble? Because, if not, I cannot give you names in good conscience.”

“No one’ll know, trust me. I used t’ do this for a livin’.”

He paled considerably, and untucked a pad of paper and a pen from the jacket he wore. “Very well.” He scribbled down three names before ripping off the note and handing it over. “So, you were a bounty hunter, I presume? You do have the look, no offense meant of course.”
“Eh, none taken. I know what I am.” He folded the paper over and slipped it into his pocket. “Thanks for yer help, pops. Now, we should probably be poppin’ along before it starts gettin’ too dark.” He put a hand on your father’s shoulder, and summoned a warp right under his feet.

Your father reeled as his knees gave out at the sudden re-appearance of solid matter beneath him. Red, being used to the feeling, remained undisturbed and simply grabbed him by the scruff to keep him from falling right to the floor. “Is everythin’ ready?”

“The favors are packed, the food’s done, the drinks are in the cooler with the ice cream, and the cake is iced, iced, baby.” Gran told him with a cool smirk.

“Ya know, every time you open yer mouth, I find another reason t’ like you.” He shook his head in awe.

“’Ey, Red, come over here an’ write yer fuckin’ vows!” Chuck waved him over urgently.

“After ya get done with that, we’re gonna need you to zap down to snatch up the bride. She hasn’t had the chance to get ready, yet. We’ve got somethin’ special planned for her entrance, anyway, so me an’ Bucky are gonna hang back here while the others pick up their dates.” Ducky added. “Sly’s gonna ferry yer bro, Gran, David, and the dogs down in the grocery getter before headin’ back for his Evo.”

David scratched his lab behind her ears, and smiled widely as he held aloft an expensive, professional camera. “I’m a photographer and free-lance journalist, so I’d be happy to take your wedding pictures!”

“This is coming together quite well for being so…spontaneous.” Papyrus observed with no small amount of self-satisfaction. “Of course, you couldn’t have done it without my or Hazel’s help. I expect a formal thank you card in the mail.”

“Oh, shove it, blimphead.” Red rolled his eyes, but he was laughing all the same. He was flying higher than a kite on a blustery, October afternoon. This was it; this was the final hour before the happiest moment of his life. You made his life a dream, where once it was a nightmare, and now he’d be waltzing in a haze of heavenly fog. You were an angel from up on high sent to save a devil down below, and he would raise his arms to the sky in open invitation.
The soft wind, as gentle as the caress of warm water upon your skin, blew your hair behind you like a flag. You weren’t going faster than around ten miles per hour, but it was no less thrilling. Balanced on the locked arms and shoulders of the twins, exhilaration flooded you with an irrepressible giddiness typically only brought on by chugging eight monsters and two five-hour energy shots back-to-back. Your heart was reacting like you had eaten a Foxglove salad for lunch, though, in truth, the butterflies in your stomach hadn’t let you eat anything all day.

Below you, the two men were yipping and yowling as they drove along to announce you with all the spirited nonsense and mischief of a pair of foxes. An answer came from the distance; ‘Here Comes The Bride’ was riffed by the squeal of an electric guitar. Your fingers clenched at your friend’s shoulders in anticipation as the wedding party slowly came into view. On went the wedding march, as the powerful engines’ growling died at the edge of the paved expanse. Somehow, your dress did not ride up in the slightest as you slid off their shoulders to the ground. Your father was there waiting, his eyes already red and wet, to take your hand. This was a day for building bridges over emotional chasms. Every step was one in the direction of a new, and joyous future.

It was dark by now, the evening held at bay by the swaying strands of lights. A stack of pizza boxes taller than you sat at the end of two tables dedicated entirely to food and drinks, which you saw as you slowly passed between the three rows of linked picnic tables. You heard a snap and saw the flash of a camera; David was lining up several shots. The path below your feet might have only been an aisle runner tacked into the dirt, however, it made this moment no less a prideful, joyous march. Your father’s hand was clammy, although he was doing his best to hide his anxious feelings. At the back of your mind, you could only wonder how it was you weren’t tripping over your own nerves.

Victor, a broad grin on his face and one hand on his equipment, let the remixed bridal chorus slowly fade as you approached the makeshift altar. Chuck’s little book was open now, and he, too, couldn’t keep a smile off his face. Everyone was smiling; even Papyrus allowed himself a small twitch at the corner of his mouth.

Red, just as his MC family had chosen to do, was flying his colors over his jacket. He, as well as his brothers and sisters, had tucked (or, in some cases, pinned) a single rose in his breast pocket. In place of his sweater, he wore a strikingly handsome button-up, and his jeans had gone overlooked in favor of slacks. He still wore his boots, and he still looked every inch the biker he was, but it worked.

Chuck tapped at the lapel mic Victor had given him. “TEstin’…TESTIng…FuCk, IT’s toO LouD, KiD. WhY the heLL is iT DoiN’ thAT?” The sound cut in and out for a few seconds, until the screechy feed-back noise finally went away. “Okay,” He tried again. “So, this is how it’s gonna go. I’m gonna read out some sappy bullshit. After I get done runnin’ my mouth, Big Red’s gonna say his vows, then Angel will do hers, and then whoever the hell has the rings—” King let out a loud woof and pawed at the ground. Around his head was a tiny pillow attached by elastic, and the rings were nestled there. “Riiiight…so, the dog’ll come up, they’ll put on the rings on each other’s fingers, and
you all better fuckin’ clap because, if ya don’t, I’ll come over an’ clap all of ya what didn’t in the head. After that, we’re gonna shake our goddamned groove things, the boys’ and I are gonna put on a little show, then we’re gonna take a fuckton of pictures, eat a fuckton of food, clean up, and head on back t’ destroy all of Boss’s hard work.” He elbowed Red with a low growl about standing up straight. “But, first, what kinda bride at all is a bride without a bouquet t’ throw?” He plucked the rose from his own pocket for you to hold. On his cue, the club lined up and handed their roses over in turn. Once Red, who was last to do so, had passed his on to you Chuck cleared his throat to begin. “We’re here today, friends and fiends, to escort these two oddballs into a lifetime of joy, love, and a whole lotta bed-shakin’. If ya’d told me a few weeks back that I’d be standin’ here now, between these two smilin’ idiots, I would slapped ya in the face an’ called ya a liar. But here I am, and here you two are, so now I guess I owe Bucky that 12-pack.” He laughed at the evil eye Red made at him. “Yeah, we bet on ya. What did ya expect, asshole? Now, back t’ what I was sayin’ before…the two of ya stand here in yer little bubble of love, makin’ everybody sick with them goo-goo eyes, and it’s easy t’ say the ‘I do’s right now. But, ya gotta remember t’ draw the strength to break down adversity from each other, an’ to stoke this fire with honesty, dedication, and respect. Ya both know what all this means, so now I’m gonna ask you t’ say the vows. Red, what would ya do for love?”

“I would do anything for love.” He pledged.

“Will ya raise her up? Will ya help ‘er down? Will ya get her right out of this godforsaken town? Will ya make it all a little less cold?” In the back, Boss could be heard letting out a whiny groan; presumably over Red’s cheesy choice of vows. “I can do that.” He replied sincerely, and flipped his brother the bird.

“Will ya cater t’ every fantasy she’s got? Will ya hose ‘er down with holy water if she gets too hot? Will ya take ‘er places she’s never known?”

“Yeah, I can do that.”

“Will ya let it all turn t’ dust and let it all fall down? Will ya, soon or later, be screwin’ around?”

“No, I won’t do that.”

Chuck called King over and took your ring off the pillow. “Let this ring be a reminder of your vows, and a cause for you t’ keep them forever.” Red slipped his ring on your finger without hesitation. The weight of the gold on your skin was a welcome return; you’d missed it in the four hours it had been gone from your hand. “And you, doll, what would ya do for love?”

“I…I’d do anything for love.”

“Would ya run right into hell an’ back? As long as planets are turnin’, as long as the stars are burnin’, would ya do anything for love? Will ya be there ‘till the final act? Will you take this vow and seal the pact?”

“You’d better believe it.”

“Will ya forget the way he feels right now? Will you forgive yerself if ya don’t go all the way tonight? Will ya ever do it better than you did it with him? Will you ever stop dreamin’ of him every night of your life?”

“No, I won’t do that!”

You took his ring off of King’s pillow, and prayed to the god of sex, drugs, and rock’n’ roll that the ring would fit well. As it turns out, the god of rockers everywhere must have been listening closely
because it fit perfectly at the base of his ring finger.

“Uh…angel? Wrong hand.” Red chuckled as you fumbled to fix your mistake.

Chuck repeated the words he’d said to bless your ring, and settled one hand on your back, while the other made a home on Red’s shoulder. “Any objections? No? Great. So, by the power invested in me by that class I took ten years ago an’ never used ‘til today, I now pronounce ya man an’ wife!”

Many claps and shrill whistles followed his words, but it was Alphys, who could be heard over all the others, that really took the wedding cake. “KISS THE BRIDE!” Alphys shouted at the top of her lungs. Her impassioned yell started a chant that soon had all of the guests stomping their feet and shouting with her. “KISS THE BRIDE! KISS THE BRIDE!”

“Well, if they insist…” Red’s eye lights popped and fizzled, his magic landing in your hair and making it shimmer under the glow of the string lights. He dipped you down, and you could see the moon above shining brightly. If moonlight truly drove people insane, that would explain how crazy in love you were right now. Your friends and family went nuts as well, when he ardently captured your lips.

He held your mouth for ransom until Chuck was forced to smack him lightly with his tiny book. “A’right, a’right! Save the rest of that for the bedroom,” he said, joking. He waved at Victor. “Yo, kid, let’s get this fuckin’ party started!”

Victor’s hands flew over the keys of his laptop, bringing up the set you’d requested. He dipped his head down to his mic. “Alright, lovebirds, Elvis is in the building and he’s asking you to please let it be him.”

All eyes were on you and Red, and your lungs were suddenly useless, blocks of ice. “Red, I-I can’t dance!” You hadn’t thought of that little problem when you chose the songs, but now you were growing terribly self-conscious as the waltzing notes flowed through the air.

“Guess you’ll just have t’ wing it, angel.” He laughed softly in your ear, and the world fell away.

Elvis crooned, pined, and pleaded in the background while you rocked together in a slow circle. Like ants following a path to sugar, your lead was followed by the guests as they gradually paired off with their own sweethearts. Even Gran was drifting about, waltzing by herself with an imaginary partner. Perhaps she was, you wondered, remembering dances on days long-gone with her own husband. She twirled, her gray eyes like sun-warmed steel, and a few other couples took notice of her solitary dance. They gave her space, and pretended not to notice the tears that glistened like lonesome stars on her wrinkled cheeks as Elvis’s voice faded into the air with the whisper of bittersweet memories. For a moment, right on her final spin, you thought you saw her as youthful and bright as she’d been at your own age, and that was beautiful.

Yet, when you heard Elvis’s deep warble begin again, your confusion drew your eyes to Victor. He’d skipped over the boppy, chipper Rockin’ Robin, and went straight into And I Love You So. Through the small crowd, you saw him shoot a furtive, frustrated glance at Hazel and Papyrus, who were the only ones still seated and without any partners. Once or twice, one of the Fangs would come up and offer her a dance, even if they had their own dates, as a kindness. She still politely refused them, and it suddenly dawned on you why Victor was messing around with your setlist. You hid your smile in Red’s blazer and quietly giggled.

Three love songs later, and you saw Papyrus start to agitatedly fidget. Hazel had her head propped up by her fist, caught in a wistful daydream as she stared into the crowd. In the meantime, Victor was tapping furiously at his computer, looking as if he were about ready to yank them up and shove them
into each other’s arms.

The crash of symbols over the speakers made everyone jump in surprise. Victor grinned devilishly, cranked up the volume. The drumbeat bounced around, a piano’s keys were swiped from end to end, and a trumpet blared. Invisible fingers hopped from key to key, and the music swayed, dipped, swung, and tickled your ears in an attempt to coax your feet into quicker, slicker movements.

Red gently pulled away, shot you a wink, and picked up on the beat with some touch-stepping. His fingers snapped side to side, until he triple–stepped forward and caught your hand. “Don’t be impressed. It’s the only kinda dancin’ I really know how t’ do.” You let him lead, and followed by example. You caught on quickly; walk-walking, and triple-stepping your way through a sugar push. He pecked your lips as you came in a final time, and then changed it up into a wrap.

Your feet were a flurry, as if you didn’t fully have control over them, and a few of the guys joined in. Red spun you out of a wrap and, without warning, let go. Ducky grabbed the hand he’d abandoned, and soon you were being passed around from biker to biker like a blunt at a house party. Bucky stole you away from Sly, and dipped you low enough to see the stars overhead. Hercules cut in with a tap to Bucky’s shoulder, rock-stepped, and talked you through a barrel roll. As each one finished with you, they stepped out of the way of the other dancers, and ran to stand beside their bikes one-by-one. Out of the corner of your eye, you saw Papyrus and Hazel had finally joined everyone on the dance floor, but didn’t have time have time to think as you were practically tossed back to Red by Chuck, who ran off to accompany the others in their line. They wolf-whistled and cajoled from the sidelines, urging you both to follow.

The energy of the music pumped everyone up as the attendee’s interest was peaked by this abrupt change. Engines roared to life as every biker strapped their helmets on, and once the pair of you were in their midst, they began. It started as a circle, but the speed increased in steps until they were all only blurs around you. From their pockets, they pulled handfuls of bang-snaps; tiny fireworks that popped and sparked as they hit the ground at your feet. Red’s arms went around you from behind, his head resting on your shoulder, and completely at ease. Your heartbeat kept speed with them, your eyes unable to keep focus on any single one, but you saw a cigarette pack go flying, which was tossed again and again, until all of them had cancer sticks poking out from their open visors. The same happened with a box of strike-anywhere matches, which zipped right by your nose.

The first to pop into a wheelie was Melody, and as soon as her front wheel left the pavement she dipped her left hand down, lit the head of the match on the ground as she passed, and brought the tiny flame to her cigarette. A whirlwind of smoke was funneled by their speed above your head. A shout rang out from Melody as she let her bike back down, only to go into an endo. Again, this was followed by the others, until she rocked back and the group’s speed slowed to a crawl. “Hold out yer hand, angel!” She ordered, and you did as you were commanded. “May I have this dance?” She purred, her voice as sweet as sugar and as slick as motor oil. You were twirled slowly around; first by her, and then when she’d completed a full revolution, your hand was given to the next biker, and the next, just as it had been when they were dancing. This was their own, personal dance meant for you and you alone. You’d never felt more welcome, or appreciated, by his friends. But they weren’t merely his friends any longer; they were your family, too, now. Everyone, from Granny Shih Tzu to the Fangs to Papyrus and Hazel, was your family.

The brief show ended in a round of applause, and David called out that the time had come for pictures to be taken. Several different ones were snapped of you and Red alone, but when it came time for the group pictures and the subsequent cake-cutting pics, no one could find Papyrus or Hazel. “Where the fuck is he? We gotta finish these goddamn pictures so I can fuckin’ eat.” Red was starting to get a bit hangry now.
“Hazel! Papyrus! Where are you?!” You cupped your hands around your mouth and called into the forest. “If you guys were eaten by a bear on my wedding day, I’ll be very upset!”

The brush rustled, and then the tall grass and brambles that bordered the treeline parted to reveal Papyrus. His face was reflector-light orange, but he was otherwise alright. He offered no explanation for his absence, nor why one of his gloves had mysteriously gone missing. Only a few minutes later, Hazel was also tromping out of the brush. Pine needles were stuck randomly in her hair, and her makeup was quite smudged. Red’s angry telling-off died in his throat, though you couldn’t understand why he was suddenly grinning. His moods were so turbulent sometimes, it was hard to tell.

“Oh, thank goodness. You weren’t eaten by any bears, I was beginning to get worried. Now, come along, we have pictures to take!” You crowed happily.
Chapter Summary

Don't forget to check in on MsMK's companion story 'Fight Me!'. She's great! Oh, and stop by my Tumblr if you wanna ask Red a few questions and hear his answers!

-->https://www.tumblr.com/blog/meldaburke

And also, we're steadily getting closer to that comic dub, I hope all of you are excited for the first episode! XD I know I am!

The afterparty was as wild as Chuck had implied it would be, and the stickerbomb competition was a huge highlight for his guys; they hadn’t played this particular riding game in a while, so everyone was super hyped. His job was to warp Granny, David, Paps, you, Hazel, and the Fang’s dates to different spots all around town, and then give the guys a list of the locations. From the starting point outside the apartment building, he and the others would race to get to the most people first and tag them with a sticker from their booklet.

Much to his annoyance, he was caught behind a goddamned roadwork truck and ended up losing to Bucky. Bucky was a good sport about it, though. He tried to kiss the back of your hand and call that a win, but you shook your head. “A deal is a deal. You won fair and square.” You stood on your tip-toes and gave him a swift peck on his cheek.

“Don’t look so bummed, Red.” Ducky came up behind him with a grin. “You get t’ kiss ‘er for the rest of your life.” Red knew he shouldn’t begrudge anyone for something he’d agreed to, his best friends least of all, so he let it roll off his back. In any case, you were comfortable enough with the twins to insist on rewarding Bucky with a proper kiss, and that had peaked the interest of his kinky side. He’d never considered sharing you before, and he wasn’t sure you’d be comfortable with it yet, but maybe it could happen someday.

Toriel and Frisk stopped by to drop off a gift, and to deliver some congratulatory hugs before they left. Red wished the kid and Tori could have been at the wedding or at least stuck around until the afterparty was over, but she couldn’t have pulled Frisk out of school on such short notice. The kid had school tomorrow, too, and Tori kept them on a strict, weekday bedtime schedule, so they’d have to go after seeing all of the gifts opened.

He hadn’t been looking for anyone to buy anything, but it seemed that had been the prompt reaction of nearly everyone. Gran gave you both a knitted set of baby booties, scarf, and hat. Her grandson David, too, had pitched in with a small stack of children’s books that had belonged to him as a child. Your father, who now insisted that Red should call him Al, presented an heirloom baby rattle carved from teakwood. Hazel signed off on a four hundred dollar check and shoved it into Red’s hands. And a short delay came, as Sly was called upon to run Hercules, Triple-Jay, and the twins to their respective apartments to fetch their gifts. Upon their return, he was grinning ear to ear. He held the door wide for Hercules, who was struggling to fit a truly giant box through the doorway. “It’s the same brand I bought for Iris a few months after she was born.” He patted the stroller’s packaging proudly. “Excellent control on turns, has a collapsible rain/sun shield, enough storage to fit a Prius in the undercarriage, a tray attachment, brakes, super easy to fold up, fits a kid up to fifty pounds, and the seat padding is detachable for whenever ya need t’ wash it.”
“You sound like you’re advertisin’ for the company, Herc.” Bucky chuckled as he maneuvered around the corner with the edge of a tall, thin box. “Comin’ through!” Hercules picked up his gift and made way for the twins as they came in. “Know ya didn’t ask for it, but we don’t wanna hear a peep about it.”

“It’s a four-in-one.” Ducky added as he dusted his hands off, and propped the box against the wall. “Should last a good while.”

Sly slipped out the door, and came back up with yet another box under one arm and two bags looped over his arm. “The twins and I kinda conspired.” He deposited his gifts beside theirs. “I bought the mattress, and there’s bedding in the bags.”

Triple-Jay, or TJ as his friends sometimes called him, bequeathed you with a baby bath. It was the sweetest thing you’d ever seen, and made to appear to be a tiger lily. “It’s for the sink, y’know.” He gave you a shy, bashful, half-smile that made his bright green eyes sparkle.

The rest of the Fangs happily handed over their own gifts. Chopper, a veteran who’d lost a chunk of his arm and three fingers to his service, dropped a huge bag of toys, diaper supplies, and a rocket-patterned diaper bag at your feet. He wasn’t the type to talk much, and he was quick to try to step back with the others, but you caught him up in a tight, gracious hug that turned his thickly-bearded face beet-red.

Zip went next. “Now, I know this one isn’t conventional, but you’re gonna thank me.” His gift was in a discrete, opaque bag. You peeked curiously inside and were surprised to see a large number of vaginal health home test kits, shea butter lotion, a foot massage ball, a small collection of aromatherapy oils, an economy-size bottle of Tylenol, a bottle of Emetrol, and a bottle of tea tree oil. You glanced up inquisitively and he shrugged. “My dad was an OB-GYN. I called ‘im up an’ asked him whatchya might need.”

“Thank you, I appreciate all of the thought that went into it.” You beamed back at him, and placed the bag beside Chopper’s. Chuck took over after Chopper and politely placed a neatly-wrapped gift in your hands, which turned out to be a lovely, stress-relief bath set.

“Ey, my turn!” Ziggy jumped to it, his slim body popping around as excitedly as a flea in a blood bank. He had a side job as a street performer, was currently a gymnastics coach, and was very much into trick riding. He was the most animated of the biker family, and was forever the theatric type. His brilliant red mullet, the inspiration for his moniker, bobbed slightly with every bouncy step. He bowed deeply before gently placing a little package on your knees. Inside, there was a teether/training toothbrush shaped like a giraffe, the cutest washcloth glove with farm animals on the fingertips, baby oil, baby shampoo, and a rubber duck with a top hat. “Adorable, right?! I knew ya’d love it!”

Melody followed him up, and you were amazed by her sewing skills. “These are some things I made a while back, but I thought ya’d like it.” She held out a quilted blanket, big enough to be a throw or to fit on a toddler bed, that happened to be red with black polka dots. She’d paired that with a plush cherry she’d made, and waved away your praise. “I just picked up what I thought fit the theme the best.”

“How did you guys even find the time to buy all of this?” You asked, utterly bewildered by the pile of gifts.

“Red gave us the heads up before he started goin’ ‘round pickin’ people up. An hour is plenty of time, an’ we’re used t’ movin’ fast.” Bomber winked, and gave his gift. “So, this one isn’t for the kid, and it’s a three-part gift.” For Red, he’d picked up a massive new set of tools; it was a wonder to
you how he’d managed to strap that fifty-pound metal box to his bike. Regardless of how he’d finessed that, you were more stunned by his gift to you. Upon removing the top of a seemingly innocent, rectangular box, your eyes were greeted with the glint of curved, serrated steel.

“A knife?” You already had that massive, unwieldy Bowie knife Red gave you, although this did seem to be fitted to your size and strength (or lack thereof).

“Third part is me teachin’ ya how t’ use that.” Bomber smirked. “Don’t worry, darlin’, it was designed for someone unfamiliar with self-defense tactics. Just hit me up whenever ya have time, an’ we’ll have a few lessons.”

Birdie and Chuck gave their gifts next; several plug protectors, kid-safe locks to attach to the lower cabinets, two baby-gates, window guards, and many rolls of edge protectors for the furniture. They must have worked together, and it definitely had to have taken at least small amount of research to know what was needed. You showed your appreciation with a hug, which was a huge gesture on your part. You were touch-avoidant with most people, but Red had noticed you’d quickly warmed up to showing physical affection to everyone in the club.

Toriel allowed Frisk to give you their gift. Inside was a small amount of children’s literature, just like David had given, but also a couple of parenting/pregnancy guides, and a thick book of baby names. “Hey, Tori!” Undyne shouted, despite the fact that Toriel stood only a couple feet away. “Cover Frisk’s eyes, it’s our turn!” Toriel frowned, but lowered her hands over their eyes as requested. Undyne cackled madly, plunged her hand into the bag, and whipped out a dildo as long as your arm and the width of your fist. She wielded it like a sword, and pointed it in Red’s direction. “I am Inigo Montoya, you killed my father, PREPARE TO DIE!”

“Well, I can’t say this is the first time I’ve been invited to a penis joust.” Red stood up and caught the second dildo that Alphys pitched to him. He saw Papyrus’ jaw drop, and grinned as his brother started to splutter. “Don’t ask questions ya don’t want answers to, bro. Now, en garde!”

While Undyne and Red fenced with plastic dicks, Alphys dropped the remaining gift into your lap. “There’s…um…lots of stuff…wasn’t sure what you’d like…so…I kinda got a little of everything.” Her face was little up with a sunshine-yellow blush that highlighted her cheekbones.

The contents of the bag were enough to scare the cloth off a preacher; lube in a rainbow of colors and flavors, glow-in-the-dark massage cream, chocolate paint, tingly mints for blowjobs, throat-numbing spray in three flavors, and two unidentifiable bottles marked with the MTT brand logo. She lowered her voice. “Those…uh..they’re pretty powerful…well, for humans they should be. I’d know for sure if you’d let me…er…sit in on a few sessions.”

Red, who’d heard what she’d said despite her attempts to be quiet, laughed maniacally. “Nope!”

“Well, I didn’t know it was that kind of party.” Bucky, in all his smarmy gloriousness, watched Red and Undyne whack each other relentlessly with their dicks. “All we need now is a pussy cake.”

“Did I drink too much or did that old lady just say ‘titty cake mold’?” Hercules looked to Zip for reassurance of his sobriety, but Zip only shook his head.

“Can we please cut out the cock-fighting?! It’s almost Frisk’s bedtime!” Toriel shouted at the top of
her lungs, her pun gaining Red’s attention and costing him the battle because he was on his knees laughing so hard he was reduced to wheezes.

Undyne slammed her dick into the back of his head. “YOU’VE JUST BEEN SKULL-FUCKED! “ Red was nearly dead from laughter. He was even tearing up, and couldn’t make any noise that didn’t involve uncontrollable, gut-busting guffaws.

“Oh GOD, THE PUNS! WHY?!?” Papyrus grabbed a throw pillow and folded it around his head. Hazel awkwardly patted his back, while clearly holding back a giggle fit of her own. “MY SENSITIVE, VIRGIN EARS!”

Undyne stole Red’s plastic prick and waved it under your nose. “For you, my fair senorita!” She sent the dildos back to whence they came, and pulled Alphys into a one-armed hug. “I hope my freaky-as-fuck girlfriend found stuff that does it for ya, punk. Alright, Tori, we’re done!”

Toriel glared, rolled her eyes, and lifted her hands from Frisk’s face. Frisk looked around, seeming quite confused, and signed quickly at their adopted mother. She shook her head vigorously despite Frisk keeping up their flurry of questions. “Time to say goodbye, sweetie.” Her tone was terse, and she was glaring hotly at Undyne.

The party went on for a couple of hours after Frisk and Tori left, but Red skipped out for the latter half. He gave you entertaining duties, while he took care of… other things. These duties didn’t take very long at all, much to his own surprise, but that was simply the miracle that search engines could work. He dropped his personal wedding present to you off in the bedroom before checking on the party.

Sly, who wasn’t a drinker, was DD for the rest of the Fangs, and was in the middle of hauling Chuck to the car. Papyrus was intently scrubbing up dishes, while Hazel helped by tucking left-overs into tupperware. You’d slipped on your shoes with the intent of walking Gran and David back to Gran’s place, but David seemed to be having trouble getting his dog Lacey to come along. “C’mon girl, how about a treat, huh? Do you want a treat?”

Lacey was snuggled up next to King in his dog bed, with Poopsie the Shih Tzu standing guard to take a snap at unwise souls who dared disturb her OTP. “Oh, great. Puppy love.” Red pretended to gripe.

When David finally got Lacey to move, and once he’d warped everyone else back home, Red heaved a bone-deep sigh of relief. “Well, that’s done.”

“It was definitely a wild ride.” You let your head fall back. You hadn’t had a chance to do so much as remove your make-up or change clothes. “You remembered to call in to take off from your contract tomorrow, right?”

“Yes.” He pulled you up from the couch, and stepped carefully to avoid the minefield of gifts. “Swear t’ the stars, I never said any of ‘em had t’ bring gifts. Do we seriously need all this shit for one kid?”

“Well, as far as I know…yes? Maybe? Either way, what we don’t use, we can still donate.” You yawned intensely, so intensely that your jaw cracked and your ears popped. He followed you into the bathroom, watching with his hands on your hips as you washed the paint from your face.

“But there is one, last gift of the night, angel.” He purred in your ear.

“Please tell me it’s not expensive…” You let him lead you into the dark bedroom.
“Oh, it was practically free.” Was his cryptic reply before he flipped the light switch. At first, you were terrified of the three…guests…that were bound on the floor of his bedroom, but your knee-jerk reaction was soon followed by the logical side of your thinking processes. And then came the questions; your mouth gaped open, but your throat refused to co-operate with your brain. “I only spent two hours in your hometown runnin’ down these assholes. Lucky for me, they all still live there. Woulda been more inconvenient to warp ‘round the country lookin’ for ‘em.”

You stared, still not entirely comprehending what was going on. “No. Killing.” You choked out when your dry mouth was able to re-connect to your brain.

“Whaaaat? Pssh, nah…well, I thought about it, but I figured that’s no fun. Why kill ‘em when I can rub what I got in their ugly-ass faces?” He nudged the closest man with the toe of his shoe. “Geddup, ya germs.” Red winked at you. “Seriously, don’t worry. All I did was put ‘em in a sleeper hold t’ get ’em here quietly. No one’s been creamed…yet.”

“How did you even find them?!” You clung to his arm, watching with nervous eyes as the trio of young men began to rouse.

Red was rather proud of himself in that regard; he was used to having more information to go on. Still, he’d been one of the best in his previous line of work back in the Underground, and it gave him more than a little satisfaction to see that his skills hadn’t gone rusty in the least. “A little birdie sang for me, that’s all I’m gonna say.” He took your hand from his arm and kissed it. Three pairs of terrified eyes watched Red with abject horror, which he found to be quite hilarious given the fact he had barely done anything so far. “Lemme re-introduce you pukes to the missus. Ain’t she a beauty? Woulda invited ya t’ the weddin’, but I didn’t wanna make anyone sick. Go on, doll, give ‘em a twirl.” You hesitated, but he gave you an encouraging grin, so you did as he requested.

Your dress swished around your legs as you ended your short spin, and he nudged you in the direction of the bed. You took a seat on the edge, and waited silently for him to begin. He could read the worry in your eyes, but could also see a hint of curiosity in the way you leaned forward. “Ya gonna tell me which one kicked you outta that car?” He folded his arms and leaned into the wall. “Or do I gotta guess?” You stayed silent, however, so he went on. “What about the one that left ya three hours from home at night cuz ya wouldn’t give it up? Or maybe we should start with the one who led ya on for yer money?” You squirmed under his gaze, your fingernails dug into the bed and your teeth nibbled at your lower lip. He frowned, grabbed the greasy hair of the man in the middle, and dragged him closer. “They’re skinny, wet rag, nosebleeds. In fact, I found this one shootin’ up junk in an alley. No need t’ feel guilty ‘bout answerin’ me, sugarwing.”

You swallowed hard enough for him to hear it and mumbled. “Joel used to say he’d quit; that he just needed one more fix and then he’d be done. It was honestly my fault, I enabled the drug habit. I couldn’t stand to see him go through withdrawal. And…and he said it hurt so much, so…I…I…” You took a deep breath. “And then, it wasn’t only the drugs…it was clothes, video games, booze, cigarettes, gas…”

“I’ma stop ya there, sugar. I’m startin’ t’ get a little frosted.” He had to take a moment to clear his head. He let the keen tips of his distal phalanges bite into Joel’s scalp. Blood oozed through his hair and dripped down his forehead. “Any of that gets on the carpet, an’ I’ll make ya clean it up with yer tongue.” Red hissed, and yanked his head back. He gestured behind him to the two others, who were also too scared to make a peep behind their own gags. “Let’s move on to these assholes for a bit, a’ight?”

“Chris…he’s…h-he’s the one who kicked me out of his car.” You pulled his pillow into your lap and hugged it, trying to hide your face as you fought back tears. He felt a twinge of guilt for re-
opening old wounds, but it had to be done.

He abandoned Joel in favor of kneeling in front of Chris, who was gawking back at him in soundless terror. “Y’a look scared, pal. You should be, ‘cuz I’m savin’ you for last. Yer ass is grass. You coulda killed ‘er. She’s still got scars from the road rash all down ‘er arms an’ back.” He caught his captive’s chin, forcing Chris to look him in the eye. “You know what I wanna do? I wanna hitch ya t’ the back of my bike, goose it, and drag yer ass down the interstate. I wasn’t gonna hurt anyone, but now my lady’s cryin’ an’ that just won’t do.” He stood slowly, tucked his hands behind his back, and strutted over to his third order of business. “An’ that leaves you, don’t it? You left my angel in the middle of bumfuck nowhere cuz she didn’t wanna put out. That’s a real slimy thing t’ do. Kinda on the rapey side of things. So,” He cracked his knuckles and cast a look at you over his shoulder. “Ready for a show, babygirl?”
Chapter Notes

This chapter is extremely graphic in nature. The torture is described with attention to detail, and this is not meant for anyone under the age of 18. I do not intend for anyone in my audience to apply any of the violence depicted here to real life.

This chapter ended up being pretty long, so I broke it up into two parts. Enjoy. :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Several trash bags and a roll of double-sided tape later, the bedroom had been gore-proofed. The thin, plastic, barrier was covered by a spare sheet. You were huddled in the bed, covers wrapped around you like a cocoon, while Red finished preparing for his ‘show’. How many times, you wondered, had he done this or something like this? His hands were practiced, steady, and he was unmoved to pity or mercy.

He smirked as he rummaged through your sewing box for needles, smiled as he heated pans on the stove top, grinned as he filled the bathtub with water and emptied an entire container of salt into it, and outright chuckled as he coated toothpicks with hot sauce. He sat down beside you with a flat, grey whetstone to sharpen a massive hunting knife to a wicked edge. Each slow scrape of the blade made the kneeling men flinch; Joel’s eyes were squeezed shut, Chris was sweating bullets, and Cody was shaking like a leaf in a hurricane.

You felt a pang of sorrow on their behalf, but it wasn’t enough to make you feel up to stopping him. “N-no one’s gonna die, right?”

“Can’t teach a dead man a lesson.” He quipped jovially as he examined the way the light played along the knife’s edge. Seemingly satisfied, he snapped his fingers and two bones with evil, barbed tips materialized only centimeters from Cody and Chris’s eyes. “Either of ya moves while I’m workin’, an’ it’ll be eyeball shish kababs, ya understand?” He set aside the knife and whetstone for now, and rose to his feet. He stretched, cracked his neck, and stared at them contemplatively. “You first, buddy.” He snatched Joel up again by his stringy, brown hair and hauled him to the side of the bed. He released only one hand from the magic bonds. “There are so many nerves in the hands an’ fingers. Too many people overlook the possibilities.” He’d picked this hand specifically because of the single, long fingernail that capped Joel’s smallest finger. He held Joel’s wrist in a secure grip, gripped the overhung edge of the coke nail, and bent it back all the way to the quick. Joel writhed, and tried to shove his shoulder into Red’s sternum in an attempt to get away, but couldn’t budge him an inch. “Jeez, what a fuckin’ baby. Suck it up!”

It was hard to reconcile the words ‘merciless killer’ with the man you loved because, even as you paid witness to his brutality, you weren’t afraid of him. You had no reason to be; his wrath was reserved solely for people like them. In an odd way, you felt almost…special. Special in a way that went beyond the lust in his eyes, and was it sick of you to adore that? He was writing you a love letter, inked in blood and kissed by screams, and you wanted nothing more than to pull him into bed with you.

Fingernails dropped, one by bloody one, to the ground. The mess of draining pulp dripped to the sheet with every pulse of Joel’s frantic heartbeat. Joel’s eyes were wild with fright, his face pale with
a greenish tint. He gagged behind the thick rope of magic that muffled his moans, and had finally stopped trying to fight for freedom. His spirit had been broken so early, and it seemed as though Red had barely begun. Magic curled around Joel’s fingertips, urging the mangled flesh to re-grow itself, until one couldn’t have known his nails had been ripped out in the first place. Again, and again, Red tore off each nail. Three times total, humming to himself as he did so, and only after he’d regrown them the final time did he stop.

But he wasn’t done. The joints came next, every joint on each finger popped out of place with the slightest tug. That was when Joel well and truly screamed, and your eyes moved from him to his fellows on the far side of the room. They didn’t have a good view of the goings-on, but they could hear it and guess. The stench of ammonia reached your nose; one of them had pissed himself, though you couldn’t tell which one from your perch on the bed. “Well, now I’m glad I put down the fuckin’ sheet. Fuckin’ disgustin’.” Red snarled, reduced all of the joints to their proper places at once with a single swipe over Joel’s hand, and stepped back as the junkie stumbled and fell to the floor in a shuddering, pathetic heap. “Good job not passin’ out, knobnose. Let’s see if the next one is as hardy as you.”

He grabbed his knife from the nightstand as he passed it by, flipping it over and over in his grip, as a sinister smile danced over his face. His eye lights threw out sparks, and a cloud of magic seemed to cling to him like cloak of discolored fog. Flames, higher than those raised by the bellows in the forges of Hell, razed through the room itself seemed to climb with the wildfire that scorched his words to ash as they left his mouth. “Bullfrogs, bullfrogs jumpin’ back to back sayin’ ees ice ohs wis. Listen t’ that ding dong.” It was a joke song you remembered from your childhood years, but he said it slow and menacing, exactly like one of those creepy dolls that sing ‘Ashes Ashes’. “Yo mama smell like King Kong, let’s play a game of ping-pong.” His knife swayed between them on a steady beat. “Say one.” Cody. “Two.” Chris. “Three.” Cody. “Four.” Chris. “…War.” He pulled him forward by the back of his shirt. “You’re gonna get it worse, pretty boy.” The knife went under Cody’s nose. “But, at least ya ain’t that guy.” He flicked the knife’s point in Chris’s direction, and laughed heartily at his own, morbid humor. “What? No laughs? Tough crowd.” He happened to glance down at the front of Cody’s jeans and noticed the stain. “Oh, so yer the one that did that, huh? Son, you need a bath, but first lemme help ya outta these rags ya call ‘clothes’.” Slices, cuts that went beyond the fabric and slipped barely into the skin, were doled out quickly. From collar to ankle, with consideration paid to areas with vital veins and arteries, blood trickled from wounds small enough to have been mistaken for thousands of tiny paper cuts. Red tore Cody’s clothes into shreds of thick strings that hung off his body like spanish moss. The only thing left intact was his underwear, and that was done solely to spare you the sight beneath.

He half-walked, half-dragged Cody to the bathroom, and then there was a splash. He’d thrown Cody into the salted bathwater, and you could hear a pitiful, sob-like, screech of pain all the way back in the bedroom. For once, you didn’t mind how thin the walls were in this apartment, and your only worry was that Red would ‘accidentally’ let Cody drown. Bodies are terribly hard to dispose of, and it wasn’t like you had a vat of hydrochloric acid sitting in the closet.

Things went quiet for a short time, then several protesting, fearful noises rose once again from within. Joel and Chris, upon hearing these, shared a look of deep-seated panic and dread. You noticed Chris actually start to tear up, yet forcing himself to stay as quiet as he could. It both disturbed, and satisfied you that you felt nothing in response; no sympathy, no concern, and certainly no urges to ease their pain.

Your thoughts wandered as you grew bored with seeing them squirm, and you reflected on the day you thought you’d die. It had been a deceivingly sunny, beautiful day, and you’d believed everything to have gone as well as it could have; a date at the local pool, a movie and dinner afterward, and then a leisure drive through town. You’d barely turned sixteen, he was eighteen with
The argument started on the way home over a stupid thing you couldn’t really remember now; maybe you’d glanced out the window at another guy, and he got angry or something… the moments before he’d shoved you out were blurred in your head. All that you could recall was him reaching across, popping the door open, and pushing you roughly out of the passenger’s side. He was going fifty miles per hour at that point, and you remembered thinking *this is it, this is finally it.* You realized that there was a low chance you could survive being thrown out at that speed.

Your life didn’t flash in front of your eyes, nor did you feel regret for all the mistakes you’d made. Your mind was empty, whited-out by pure shock and the kind of primal fear of death that one sees flash in the eyes of a dying deer, and then a sense of acceptance just before your body rolled to a stop in a culvert. The flesh on your forearms, upper back, and knees had been shredded by the pavement, and you could still imagine the stomach-churning feeling of gravel dug up under your skin. You weren’t knocked out, unfortunately, but still hadn’t been capable of moving. You’d laid there, the dirty water under your body going red with blood, until another car came by and that person called the ambulance.

You were shaken abruptly from your gruesome memories when Red returned. He chucked several toothpicks to the floor. Cody was wriggling desperately, crossing his legs and jerking his hips in a way that gave you a good idea where your lover had put those hot sauce-dipped picks. He dropped him next to Joel, and stood silently staring down at Chris. His eye lights were brighter than a pair of LED flashlights, and his spike-toothed grin was made profane by wrath.

Chris couldn’t keep his terrified eyes off of Red’s teeth. Neither could you, although it was for an entirely different reason. “Baby?” He turned around at your call, face changing in an instant from vengeful to soft in half a second. You held your arms out for him, and he crossed the room in two wide strides. On impulse, you yanked on his shirt to pull him down for a kiss.

The bone around his mouth was softer, more like cartilage, and flexible. Despite the fact that he had no lips, kissing him never felt awkward or bad. It was almost always sloppy, though, because he was prone to using his tongue a lot, but you didn’t mind. His hands went to rest on your shoulders, his grip tight as his mouth moved against yours, and his breath came in warm puffs that ghosted over your skin.

The tip of his tongue grazed your bottom lip, flicked inside your mouth to tease you, and then he drew back. “I wanna get kinky tonight, sweetheart. Ya feelin’ it?”

“I think I’m up for it, yeah.”

*Right on.* He was going to go in for another kiss, but he was interrupted by a noise from behind. Chris had gotten on his belly and was trying to crawl to freedom. “Oh, now that is *hilarious.*” Red snorted and snickered before going over to pick the blonde man up by the seat of his pants and dragged him back to where he’d started. “Alright, ya little inchworm, let’s get this over with so I can fuck my wife.” He ripped Chris’s threadbare t-shirt off with all the ease of tearing paper, and then proceeded to the kitchen and came back with a searing-hot pan and a bottle of rubbing alcohol.

The pan he’d left on the stove top was a heavy, cast-iron skillet. He’d wrapped a towel around the handle before bringing it in. With one hand, he pushed Chris to bend forward and kept a strong grip on his neck to hold him there. There was a thin, popping hiss when the metal made contact with Chris’s upper back, and an awful, inhuman, gut-wrenching howl filled the air. When the pan was taken away, bits of cooked skin clung to it and peeled away in stringy, wet threads. Tendrils of magic opened the bottle of alcohol, which was splashed across the round, raw burn, and then proceeded to the kitchen and came back with a searing-hot pan and a bottle of rubbing alcohol.

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*Right on.* He was going to go in for another kiss, but he was interrupted by a noise from behind. Chris had gotten on his belly and was trying to crawl to freedom. “Oh, now that is *hilarious.*” Red snorted and snickered before going over to pick the blonde man up by the seat of his pants and dragged him back to where he’d started. “Alright, ya little inchworm, let’s get this over with so I can fuck my wife.” He ripped Chris’s threadbare t-shirt off with all the ease of tearing paper, and then proceeded to the kitchen and came back with a searing-hot pan and a bottle of rubbing alcohol.
then his eyes slipped closed, and he went limp. “Oh no ya don’t!” Red growled as healing magic coursed along Chris’s back and a new layer of skin slowly grew until the wound was gone. “Yer not gettin’ off that easy.” Electric sparks jumped between his fingers, and arched from him to Chris in several, body-seizing jolts. “Wake up. I’m not fuckin’ done witchya.” Chris’s eyes flew open, and he was gasping behind the gag.

Chris passed out once more after the second burn, but the pan had cooled by then anyway, so Red returned the skillet to the kitchen, and then roused him again. “Those two won’t remember mucha this cuz I’m gonna wipe their memories, but for you, pal…I’m gonna leave an impression. You’re gonna remember the pain. Gonna feel it, too. You’re gonna wake up t’morra feelin’ like ya got brained by a baseball bat.” His fist flew out, catching Chris square in the jaw. A second blow broke his nose. He finished it off with a solid punch to the groin. The pain was enough to make him start gagging. Red snatched him up by the arm, grabbed both Joel and Cody, and warped out.

Chapter End Notes

At the behest of a reader, I'm going to add a summary of things for everyone who couldn't get through it because it was too gruesome. Basically, Red tore each guy's individual ass all to hell, healed them up, and wiped the memories of the druggy and the guy who left Angel in the middle of nowhere. For the guy who kicked her out of the car, he wiped incriminating details, but left in the memories of the pain as punishment. Angel cleaned everything up, and the next chapter will be full of fluffy, kinky lovemaking. ^.^
While he was gone, you took the time cleaning up. You rolled up the trash bags, tape, toothpicks, and sheet, and stuffed all of that into another trash bag along with the pan. You stripped the bed, scrubbed the bathroom down with bleach, wiped down the bedroom furniture with alcohol, and cleaned the walls with wallpaper putty before showering. Red returned just as you were putting down scented baking soda to clean the carpet. “You’ll need to have a shower. Throw your clothes in the hamper and I’ll take everything down the hall for a wash when I’m done here.” You paused in the middle of sprinkling the fine, white dust on the floor. “Oh, and throw the trash into the void.” You weren’t going to risk throwing it out with the regular garbage. “By the way, what happened to those needles? I didn’t see you use those at all. I’ll need to throw them away.”

“Let’s just say…I left Chris with a parting gift.” He chuckled at your exasperated sigh. “Okay, so I might’ve shoved them into his fingertips an’ tapped out God Save The Queen before I let ‘im go. I left ‘em in. He’ll need pliers t’ get those suckers out.”

As awful as that sounded, you weren’t perturbed by it. “You didn’t use the ones I’d put in the smallest divider, did you? Those were getting….” You saw his grin grow as he threw his clothes into the laundry basket. “…erm…dull and r-rusty…” You had a feeling he’d picked those specifically. Oh well, you were going to throw them away, anyhow. “Okay, then…um…well, you have that shower and I’m just gonna…you know…take this…” You hustled out of the apartment, feeling a bit winded and more than a little turned on.

Once the rest of those chores were completed, you flopped exhaustedly back on the bed. Red was rustling around in his closet, and fiddling with something in his cuir bouilli box while muttering to himself. “When we get that house, I’m turnin’ the basement into a fuckin’ sex dungeon…shackles an’ suspension bars…” His shirt clung to his broad shoulders, and his pajama pants were slung low on his hips. You tore your eyes away from him to spare a look at the clock. How was it only three in the morning? You felt it should have been later than that. You still had a few hours before you’d have to call in ‘sick’ to work. “Which way do these fuckin’ batteries go in again?” He made a victorious noise before turning back to you. “A’right, angel,” He sat the entire box beside the nightstand. “We’re gonna talk safewords an’ limits first. A hard limit is somethin’ ya absolutely won’t do, an’ a soft limit is somethin’ you’re gonna have t’ have time to think about. If ya need me t’ stop, or let ya have a breather, use the safeword. I’m not gonna get mad if ya can’t handle or don’t like whatever we’re doin’. We’re gonna go through all of this, an’ you can pick whatever ya think
you’ll be comfortable with.”

“Okay, do you want to pick the word or…or should I?” Your eyes widened as he pulled out a long, folded fabric case of some sort and unraveled it to show several you a collection of long, metal rods of various lengths and girths.

“Safeword is chicken nugget.” You nearly choked on laughter, and covered your mouth with your hand, he chuckled along with you and winked saucily. “Sex don’t gotta be serious, sugar. It’s all about havin’ fun, ya dig? Anyway, these are sounding rods. They’re used for CBT. Good stuff if ya know how t’ do it right.”

“CBT?”

“Cock an’ Ball Torture. One of my favorites.” He waggled his brow bones at you suggestively, and moved on to a contraption made of metal wire. “This here’s a cock cage, also for CBT, an’ it works well with sounding rods an’ ball crushers, too.”

“B-ball crusher?!” Your voice went high with trepidation. “I don’t wanna hurt you!”

“It’s all good, sweetheart. I’d tell ya if it got t’ be too much.” He promised as he withdrew a pair of plastic plates connected by adjustable bolts, which you assumed correctly to be the dreaded ball crusher. It was followed up by a small, double-ended, paddle-like object. “This is a ball paddle for CBT.”

“Y-you’re really into this CBT stuff, right? I don’t-“

“Seriously, sugar, it’s definitely my thing.” He took your hand and kissed it reassuringly, and then returned to pulling things from the depths of his sinful box. “Oh, here’s some bondage classics; ropes, blindfolds, an’ I’ve got a few different gags…” He drew out three different gags, and looked up. “You good? We can stop if ya want.”

You shook your head. “N-no, I’m just…I’m okay.” Be brave, you told yourself, and took a deep breath before smiling at him. “So, what’s that one for?” You pointed out a very particular gag; one with a plastic, open-style mouthpiece.

He smirked, and lowered his voice. “This one’s so I can gag yer pretty little mouth with my cock, babydoll.”

You were sure your heart stopped, and you blurted it out before you could stop yourself. “That one.” He tilted his head to the side and raised a brow at you. “You got a thing for givin’ head.” You were kind of embarrassed he’d figured it out, but you supposed it was only a matter of time. You were blushing hardcore now, and he was blatantly staring. “Holy shit, sugar, why didn’t ya tell me? Goddamn, that’s hot.” He looked torn and conflicted, his eyes darting from the gag to your mouth, and his tongue slid over the points of his teeth hungrily. But he ground his teeth together into a forced grin, cleared his throat, and made himself get back on track.

“You aren’t gonna make me sign a contract, are you, Mr. Grey?” You teased him in an attempt to lighten the mood.

“Those disgraceful books an’ movies are nothin’ close t’ reality, sugar.” He scoffed with a roll of his eye lights. “In fact, I’d say they’re the best example of what not t’ do.” He withdrew another folded bit of fabric, and opened it up. Inside was a pair of stainless steel knives. They were beautiful in a deadly way; the metal winked at you in the dim light, and the red acrylic handles were molded into elegant curves. “Knifeplay. It’s kinda edgy, heh.”
You remembered how skillfully he’d wielded that hunting knife, and your breath caught as your imagination turned that around. “Ca-can we do that?”

He looked taken aback by your request. “You sure?” You nodded, your eyes locked on the shiny blades. “Y’know, you’re surprisin’ me in all the right ways.” He held up a skinny, plastic stick with a few feathers attached to the end, and tickled the bottom of your left foot. “Does this tickle your fancy, sugar?”

You giggled, and groaned at his joke. “You’re so obsessed with dad jokes, you were definitely meant to be a father.” You nuded his chin up with the foot he’d tickled, and his laughter died. His cheekbones were tinged red. You’d never seen him blush, and it was kind of adorable to see him get a little hot and bothered. “You have a foot fetish?” You weren’t terribly surprised because that was one of the more ‘common’ fetishes, at least as far as you knew. “Would you like it if I wore high heels? Oh, what about nylons? Actually, watching you shred a pair of those with your teeth would be kinda sexy, now that I think about it.”

“…I love you.” He grinned, and rubbed his thumb over your ankle. “An’ I prefer ballet flats or mary janes.”

“I love you, too. Now, is there anything else in that box? It’s starting to remind me of Mary Poppins’s magic carpet bag.” It was a miracle he could fit all of those things inside. It must have been the only thing he kept organized and clean, with the other exception being his saxophone, which you still had yet to hear him play, unfortunately. Maybe, if you asked tomorrow, he’d oblige.

“Anal trainers.” He opened a small, velvet-lined box with tiny, black plugs. Each one was backed with a petite, blood-red, quartz crystal. Another, larger plug had its own case, and it ended in a fluffy, faux-fur tail. “That goes with the leash.” He coiled a thin chain around his hands, and pulled it taught between them. “Gold-plated tungsten alloy.”

“Don’t leashes usually go with collars?” You tried to peer into the box, but you caught him leering. He reached up and tugged at the leather collar that encircled his neck. He never removed it, except before going to sleep and for work. It wasn’t something you’d thought of as anything more than an accessory, but now it made sense. “D-do you have another one?” You inquired meekly, and his head shot right up.

“Oh, sugar,” His chuckle was deep, throaty, and dripping with lust. “You’re gonna wear mine.” He undid the buckle, and dropped the collar beside the knives and gag. The leash joined those as well, and he went back to digging around in his box of debauchery. “I’m pretty sure you’ll like this.” He pulled out a container of pink candles set in metal tins. It looked similar to a tealight candle, but just a bit bigger than one of those. “Massage candle. I think it’s supposed t’ smell like cotton candy.”

“Okay, sure, that sounds reasonable. A massage would be nice after a such a crazy day.” The wedding and party had certainly been wonderful, but it was also stressful to be around so many people for so long. Your shoulders and neck, although you’d mostly been ignoring it, were aching with tension. To your amazement, there were still more things to come. He ran you through several different types of dildos (the Devil Dick was rather intimidating), a scary-looking thing called a shock shank, and many bottles of lube. “Alphys bought us a bunch of flavored lubes, and a couple of things from the MTT line.”

He jumped to his feet. “Seriously?” He left without another word, leaving you stunned and interested in his reaction. He brought back the entire gift bag. “I adore that crazy woman.” He examined the bottles closely. “Did she tell ya what these are?”

“No, but she said they were supposed to be really powerful for humans. I guess that means we
should use them in small doses? I really have no clue here.” You lifted your arms in a helpless shrug.

“They’re Soul activators!” He calmed down a bit at your lost expression. “It means I can marry ya the monster way.” He was nearly vibrating with excitement, and looking at you like you should know what he meant.

“I’m sorry, you haven’t explained-“

He slapped his forehead. “Stars, I’m an idiot…sorry, sugar. I keep forgettin’ how different humans are. Monsters have the whole mating thing. Sorta like dating, really, and it’s temporary. But then, there’s Soul bonding, an’ that’s the real deal. It’s…well, it’s forever. All ya gotta do is mix these together, drink it, and it’ll force your body to release your Soul. These babies haven’t even been advertised t’ the public yet. She musta convinced Mettaton t’ let us try ‘em out first.”

“I guess I shouldn’t be surprised that I’d end up as her experiment one way or another.” You left the room for a cup, and set it down next to the bottles. “Alright, do you wanna do this before or after we have sex?”

“Yer shittin’ me.” He accused, and grinned wolfishly. “Tonight?”

“We married each other the human way, why not go through with it the monster way, too? It…um… it won’t hurt, right? I won’t die?” Human bodies couldn’t, in general, survive without their Souls locked inside.

“If she thought it’d kill ya, she wouldn’t have given it to you.” He let himself have a moment to think. “Before sex. We’ll make it part of the foreplay, how ‘bout that?” A thought seemed to hit him then, and he was suddenly diving under the bed. “One more thing.” He pulled out a long, flat, cardboard box. “I bought this a while back, an’ I’ve been dyin’ t’ see ya wear it.”

Inside were two scraps of black lace and tulle. Well, they were meant to be a lingerie set, but they were more air than fabric. You held it up to your chest by the strings that might’ve been the shoulder straps. It seemed to be your size, but how had he gotten that? Probably by going through your clothes or something, you reasoned. It was pretty, though, and your brain was screaming at you that this was much too exquisite for you to wear. “Thank you. It’s beautiful.”

“You go get ready, an’ I’ll set everythin’ up.” He scooched you in the direction of the door, your feet sliding a little over the carpet, and began putting away everything that wasn’t needed.

The bathroom was cold, or maybe you were, and you stared at your reflection in the mirror. The weightless bit of lace in your hands suddenly felt as heavy as if you’d offered to take the world off of Atlas’s shoulders. He’d seen you naked loads of times, why was this any different?

You twisted your long hair nervously between your fingers. He was waiting, but you were stuck staring at your plain face in the mirror like a half-wit. What did he see in you at all? When you looked at yourself, all you saw was an unruly mop of hair and skin so pale you could see the blue of your veins where they were ran closer to the surface. Faded, yet still shiny, patches of scars marred your arms, and you knew your back was just as bad. The women he’d slept with before looked like cover models for Cosmo.

But this was his wedding night, too, so you pushed your self-conscious thoughts to the back of your mind. The lace bodysuit was tight, but not uncomfortable, and it was stretched over your breasts in a lewd way you hadn’t thought your B-cups could accomplish with any kind of clothing. The tulle half was more of a drape, and its ruffled edges ended mid-thigh. It fluttered around your legs as you stepped into the bedroom.
He had his back to you when you came in. He was rolling those little bottles around in his hands, and rubbing his thumbs over the labels. His magic hummed and buzzed around him like a swarm of invisible bees, and you realized he was nervous, too. For some reason, knowing that made it easier to take your next step. The floor creaked underfoot, and he whipped around eagerly. “Aw, shit.”

It started slow; gentle cuddles, and sweet, sensual kisses. He wasn’t a patient guy, and you appreciated how he was so willing to pace it out for tonight. Warm splashes from the candle dripped down your skin, and beaded up in some places. The little, pink beads of oil whimsically reminded you of those button candies you used to eat by the sheet as a kid. A puddle of it formed between your breasts, and you dabbed the pad of your finger in it and smeared the oil over his sternum with a playful giggle. “Promise me somethin’.” His face was suddenly serious. “Forget that buncha shithheads. You got me now, an’ I ain’t ever gonna leave.”

“I promise.” It was probably best for you to move on. They’d paid their price, maybe even overpaid, and it wouldn’t be healthy to linger on it anymore.

His hands worked the oil into your skin. He squeezed your hips as he spread more oil down your legs. He nudged your knees apart, and pushed his face between your thighs. “Lace an’ pussy...delicious.” His tongue lapped at the delicate material, and laughed as you shivered. “You ready, babygirl?”

“Y-yeah.” He reached for the bottles, popped the cork on both with his thumb, and poured them into the cup. It fizzed like soda pop as the two liquids combined. You gripped the thick ceramic tightly with both hands. It tasted very sweet and syrupy, and the aftertaste was strangely reminiscent of key lime pie. For a few minutes, you both waited with bated breath.

“Nothin’s happenin’.” He growled frustratedly.

“My fingertips are kinda tingly, do you think- ahhh!” It felt as though you’d been stabbed in the boob with a dull knife, and someone was twisting it. You clutched your chest, rubbing, and desperate to relieve the pain. Violet light bubbled up from beneath your skin, and it grew brighter with every passing second until you saw a tiny heart push its way through your flesh into the open air. The initial pain eased and passed.

Red’s hand fumbled under his shirt to coax his own Soul from behind his ribs. His was easily three times the size of yours, and it hovered above the bone of his palm. Hairline cracks spiderwebbed its surface, and magic leaked from it like the fog that drifts from dry ice. He pressed his Soul to yours, and, at the very moment your Souls touched, he jerked violently and his arms gave out.

He was heavy, tipping the scale at about three hundred and fifty pounds the last time he’d mentioned it, and it knocked the breath out of you. His bones were denser, as any monsters’ bones were, and thicker than a human’s. Some of the thinner ones were as thick as your wrist, the bones of his fingers and hands were twice the size of any human man’s, and his femurs were wider than your calf. And he was crushing you as he flinched and seized above your body with the power of whatever was happening to his Soul. You could hardly breathe under his weight.

It hit you then, as dark spots started to form at the edges of your vision; you were struck by what had to be a lightning bolt. It sizzled down your spine, hitting every nerve ending, and burned out your brain. Your chest burned as you struggled to get air, and you knew you were suffocating. The feeling tiptoed the line between pleasurable and terrifying, and you swore you felt something….strike that...someone else move inside you. Not inside your body or mind, but inside your Soul itself.

“Fuck!” He seemed to have come to his senses and was scrambling off of you, patting at your face, and cursing the entire time. “Say somethin’, babe. C’mon, sugar.” He shook you lightly.
“You…you need to lay off the burgers.” You wheezed, your chest still aching and your head had yet to cease swirling like a shaken fishbowl.

He breathed a sigh of relief, and smiled widely. “Hey, I’m not fat. I’m big-boned.” You buried your face in his shirt with a moan of deepest complaint, and he smoothed your hair down. “Seriously, though, yer okay?”

“I feel like I was skewered through the boob with a barbeque fork attached to a power drill, but yeah.” You massaged your chest ruefully. “So, what just happened?”

“Take a look.” He opened his hand to show you. Your Soul was blushed with scarlet near the center, while his was darkened to the deepest purple in the middle. “Together forever, babygirl.” Your Soul started to slowly drift away from his, as if it were carried by some strange draft, and its glow dimmed. It sank back inside your chest, and you felt…weird. Your chest felt heavier, but there was no weight. “Why does it…” You let your sentence hang between you, unsure how to describe it.

“That’s me.” He let his fingertip glide lovingly over the spot your Soul had melted back into your body. “Shortest answer is; we’re a part of each other now. Come hell or high water, you’re mine…an’ I’m yours.” He guided his Soul back to its place in his chest cavity. He eyed you wickedly and smirked. “Is it hot in here, or is that just you?”

“You can do better than that.” You scrunched up your nose.

“Yeah, I can.” He agreed, and nuzzled behind your ear. “But I wanna fuck ya silly, so all my brains have gone out t’ lunch.” He grabbed your hand and pressed to his crotch. “Feel that? That’s all for you, babe.” His mouth curled up into a positively feral grin. “Let’s get this party started.”

And that is how you ended up with your head over the edge of the bed, gag forcing your mouth open, and his dick deep in your throat. Swallowing would certainly be painful tomorrow, but it was worth it to taste him. You wore his collar, but the leash was left off for the moment. Sweat beaded on his skull, and trickled down his face as he bucked his hips. He stilled, cock deep enough to make you choke, and pulled back. Saliva stained by pre-cum dripped from corners of your lips. “Ya look good enough t’ eat, angel.” He undid the gag, and pulled you fully back on the bed. “Spread ’em.” You parted your legs, and he settled between them happily. “Man, you’re soaked. Suckin’ my dick really does it for ya, huh?” His tongue laved at the wet lace. “Say it for me, sugar.”

Your entire face was lit up like a red, neon sign. “I…I can’t…it’s too…”

“Always so shy.” He lightly bit the inside of your thigh, making you yelp, and moved the lace aside. “Say it, no one else can hear.”

“I-I like s-sucking cock.” You forced the words out of your mouth, torn between arousal and ineffable embarrassment.

He snarled, his hands digging into your skin with bruising force. “No, ya like suckin’ my cock. Say it right.”

You winced, your face burning brighter than a star going supernova. “I like sucking your cock. Please, Red, I- ouf!” He’d flipped you over in one smooth motion, reached over to grab the leash, and clipped it on.

He wrapped it around his hand and yanked it, not so hard as to hurt you, but enough to pull your head back. “Damn right, ya do.” His distal phalanges grazed the lace that hugged your back and hips in light, affectionate touches. He was careful not to snag the lace, although, when he reached the
thickest point of your hips, his grip tightened possessively. His cock was pushed up against your butt, but he didn’t move. “An’ I forgot t’ ass,” He squeezed your tush to put emphasis on his pun. “But, did ya like mah show?”

*Probably more than any sane person should,* you thought. “Y-yeah, it was…sweet of you.” It was kind of hard to talk like this because the collar was digging into your throat, but you got the idea that you should definitely *answer him* if you didn’t wish to incur a punishment.

“Stars, yer perfect, sweetheart. Such a good girl. Kinda wanted t’ fuck ya in fronta ‘em, an’ show ‘em what they can’t have.” You couldn’t hold back a strangled moan. “Oh, ya like that?” He purred with satisfaction. “Should I have fucked ya before I let ‘em go? Shoved up yer weddin’ dress an’ made ‘em watch while I took what’s mine?” He worked a finger around the lace and plunged it inside you. “I’d have loved t’ shove it in their faces. Those limp dick motherfuckers never coulda made ya scream an’ sigh like I can.” His finger came away sopping wet, and his tongue made quick work of cleaning it off. “You taste like sugar, sweetness. Let’s see how wet I can make ya, eh? I wanna see it drippin’ down the inside of yer legs before I have my way.” The fabric wallet that held those beautiful knives soared into his open hand. The smaller one, the more delicate and elegant one that was probably going to be easier for you to handle in his opinion, was slipped from its place inside the wallet.

From your limited vantage point, you could see him twirling in between his fingers, and taking care to move slowly. The flat of the knife was slid over the skin of your back, and the cold metal made you shudder with anticipation. It felt heavenly on your feverish flesh, but somehow managed to make the burn between your legs grow into a fierce blaze. “I’m gonna write my name all over these fuckin’ scars he gave you. Stay still for me, sugar. Might sting a little.” The edge bit into your skin, and you hissed, but forced yourself to refrain from flinching. “Who do ya belong to?” S.

“Y-you!” A droplet of blood tickled you as it slipped down your side.

“Who makes ya scream yer head off every night?” A.

“You!” You were getting used to the small cuts. If you were to be truthful, you hoped they would scar over.

“Who makes ya happier than anyone else in the world?” N.

“You do!” You keened, and your mind was slowly, strangely, equating the pain as equal to pleasure. You wanted dearly to buck your back up against the knife, but that wouldn’t end well. So, you locked your muscles down, and sucked in a breath through your teeth.

“Who’s the love of yer life?” S.

“You are…” You whimpered under the onslaught. You were floating on wings you didn’t know you had, and euphoria washed over you like gentle waves at low tide.

He leaned farther down, so that his mouth was level with your ear. “What’s my fuckin’ name, angel?” It came out as a bestial growl.

“S-sans! SansSansSansSansSansSansSans!” You gulped down air like a fish stranded ashore. You were desperate for more, you would take whatever he’d give you, and beg for it to never end. You *were* reduced to a trembling, moaning mess hardly capable of any thought beyond – “Fuck me!”

“Beggin’ for cock already, sweetheart? Sorry, sugar, but I feel like *drawin’* this out.” He traced the etching he’d made in your skin with his free hand, and a sweet, familiar rush of power flowed into
your body from the contact. He was outlining it in magic, knitting the flesh back together with loving stitches of his distinctive shade of red. He even cut, and lined the scars on your arms. You could have sworn he’d given you heaven at the tip of a blade.

You were pushing back into him, whining, and incapable of coming up with rational words to describe what you wanted. He paused for a time to admire his handiwork, and you pouted at him over your shoulder. He tugged on your leash a little, teasingly, and flipped the knife around in his hand to prod your pussy with the curved grip.

You cried out, your cheeks still beet-red, but you couldn’t keep it to yourself. “N-no…turn it back around!”

You thought for a split second that you’d said something wrong, and that’s why he hesitated. But then he laughed, and your worry was put to bed. “Never had that request before. Ya sure, angel?” You nodded, and a sheath of magic slid over the entire knife as a precaution. “Well, fuck it then, yer not hardcore ‘less ya live hardcore.”

He hadn’t ever used his raw magic on you until now. It buzzed along the length of the metal, both protecting and teasing you. His magical appendages had always been much more contained than this, and the effect from them wasn’t as intense. It wasn’t easy for a non-mage to comprehend it; his immense degree of magic had previously been merely a series of numbers in your head, but this… this made you feel it. He was…gods above, he was bubbling over with power. “R-red, I c-can…y- you’re-“

“I know, babydoll.” His voice was soft, bordering on sympathetic. “You scared? Need me t’ stop? Just say the word.”

“Keep going, please.” You were already aware, long before this, that he could kill you as easily as he could pluck a blade of grass from its root. However, you’d only known a fraction of what he was truly capable of. He could have literally destroyed the entire city if the mood struck; he could go off like a freaking atom bomb and shower the entire county with the fallout of his fury if he so wished. If you thought back on what he’d done in the past year, after knowing what you did now, it was a bonafide miracle he hadn’t murdered anyone except a few pieces of human trash. He held back because he loved you, and knowing it made your heart do a flying leap in your chest. “I love you.” Your voice shattered like a mirror in your throat, cutting your words to shreds and letting the lifeblood of your emotion spill into the air.

The knife inside you twitched up to hit your G-spot, as if in reward for your admission, and you knew him well enough to tell he wore a smile longer than a country mile. “That’s fuckin’ right, milk my cock, sugar.” The leash was so tight that you were losing breath again, but your adrenaline spiked and it heightened your senses, exposed them to

And you did, you came harder than you’d known was possible. It knocked the breath out of you, boiled your bones to gelatin, and all the while you ground back desperately on the knife in his hand. The cushion of power he held around it made it all the more incredible because through it you could sense his self-control, that mighty padlock of iron-clad will, was slipping. You were doing that, and it made you want to smirk out of self-satisfaction…and tell him to fuck Hell and all its demons out of you.

But, he was already way ahead of you. He Chucked the knife over his shoulder, uncaring that it collided with the closet door, grabbed your hips, and slammed his cock inside you so hard it nearly hurt. Gods help you, you wanted it to hurt. You could feel another orgasm building, burning, aching…He sped up. “That’s fuckin’ right, milk my cock, sugar.” The leash was so tight that you were losing breath again, but your adrenaline spiked and it heightened your senses, exposed them to
a live-wire of pure lust and pleasure that had you screaming for a second time by his hand. Just as he reached his edge of bliss, he bent forward, his mouth at your ear, and let out an unholy, demonic, grunt-like growl of satisfaction. It sent aftershocks so strong through your body that you felt them right down to the soles of your feet.

You were exhausted; that’s all your brain could register afterward. Your thoughts were molasses, and your mind was pancake batter. He let the leash fall from his hand, and rolled off so he wouldn’t crush you for a second time that night. You snuggled on his chest, and listened to his heavy breathing as it gradually slowed. His arm went around your shoulder, and though his sockets were closed, he was smiling. It was genuine, as sweet as red velvet cake, and when he finally cracked one eye open again, you were beaming back. He poked your stomach with a grin. “Who’s yer daddy?”

Chapter End Notes

So, I’ve got a poll over on my Tumblr, but you guys can answer here, too. After Secretly Yours is finished, which Undertale AU do you most want to me to write for next?
Horrortale, Beasttale, Underswap, or Swapfell?

Underswap and Horrortale are now tied with five votes each!

The poll closes on the 18th, so hurry and post your vote in the comments!
Over The River And Through The Woods

Red didn’t sleep much. He could have, he was bone-tired, but he didn’t want to. He couldn’t keep his eyes off of you. The way your mouth was open just the slightest bit, and how your fingers clutched at his ribs as you dreamed in his arms…he was in love. He must have groaned it aloud as many times as he’d screamed it in his head. You were trying so hard to get closer in your sleep that you’d wriggled on top of him, not that he minded in the slightest. You were always like that, had been since the two of you’d started sharing a bed, you’d squiggle and squirm in every effort to press yourself against every inch of him. It was the cutest thing.

Your hair was knotted by now, curled into snarls that had caught on his bones as you moved in your sleep. He pulled them gently free, and patted your frizzy locks back into place. He was growing used to finding long-ass hairs stuck in his joints, and pulling hair fuzz off his clothes because if it wasn’t you, it was the fucking mutt. Sometimes, he’d accidentally inhale one and it’d make him hack like a hellcat coughing up a furball.

Stars, he loved you. He loved your crazy hair that went everywhere in fluffy tufts, he loved the way you smelled, and how you tasted…he let his hand drift down to brush at the apex of your thighs. His magic had long since evaporated, but you were still quite wet near your core. He let his finger slide down, picking up a bit of moisture, and brought it to his mouth. He’d always been a fan of the taste, but the way you tasted was special.

He loved your manic episodes, when anything he said could make you giggle hysterically, and he loved you through the worst of the nervous breakdowns. If you asked him to, he’d eat out of your ass with a wooden spoon. “Stop bein’ hot.” He poked your nose jokingly without waking you. He hoped your subconscious would get the message and just shut off the Cute-O-Meter for once. You moaned sleepily, and nuzzled your nose right under his jaw.

“Mmph…Red…” You mumbled in your sleep, and your grip on his bones tightened momentarily. “Love…you…”

“Love you, too, angel.” He could have laid here for a thousand years or more, and never get the urge to move. He rubbed his thumb over your cheek, and sighed contentedly before checking the clock. Hazel had dropped a hint that she’d be calling today for some reason, and it was already eleven thirty. Therefore, she was likely to-

On the day I was born

The nurses all gathered 'round

And they gazed in wide wonder

Red grabbed the phone, but it was too late. The blaring rock song that was his ringtone had woken you up. You squinted blearily up at him as he petted your hair. “Whassup, buttercup?”

There was a pause before he heard Hazel giggle a little on the other end. “Hey, I hope I didn’t wake you up.” He assured her she didn’t, so she went on. “So, I know I kind of already gave you guys a
gift, but I was wondering if you’d like to spend a few days at my vacation home for your honeymoon? I’m always busy, so I never really get out there much these days, and it’s very private.”

“What kinda place is it?”

“It’s this gorgeous, little one-bedroom cabin in the woods. A perfect ‘writer’s getaway’ kind of thing. There’s an outdoor Jacuzzi, and the bedroom is a loft with a ceiling window. The stars are beautiful out there. And I’m certain I left a lot of camping gear if you guys want to explore the area and rough it a little. There’s a deer trail that goes up by a natural spring that turns into a small waterfall, too. You just have to go.” He could hear a grand hustle of movement in the background, which meant Hazel was probably, unsurprisingly, at work.

Red watched your eyes grow big with awe and excitement. “Sis, ya had me at Jacuzzi. Thanks for thinkin’ ‘bout us. Didn’t need t’ offer.”

“It’s no trouble at all. I hope you have lots of fun. I’ll text you the directions.” He thanked her again, and before he even got off the phone, you were up and packing bags for the trip.

“It’s been ages since I’ve gone camping!” You speedily folded and organized your own bag. “How long are we going to be there?”

He scratched his mandible thoughtfully. “Three days sound good? I don’t think either of us could talk our way outta work for longer than that.”

You jumped around energetically, throwing clothes this way and that, while you spoke. “Three days would be wonderful! Honestly, I would have been happy if our honeymoon was just today at home, but this is much better! I’m going to hug her to death when we get back, I swear.” You froze. “Oh shoot! I forgot to call in-”

“Already did it for ya. I’ll call ‘em again an’ tell ‘em ya need a few days t’ get back on yer feet.” He was already dialing the number in. “Then I’ll work on talkin’ t’ Jerry, an’ everyone else. You go ahead an’ finish packin’ stuff up.”

Your eyebrows furrowed worriedly. “Can we take King? He probably hasn’t ever been out in the real wilderness before. He’d absolutely love it, I know he would.”

“Maybe next time, sugar. I kinda want this t’ be a pure an’ simple, you an’ me thing. No real responsibilities, no work…just you, me, an’ that hot tub.” His Soul gave a little tweak because of your disappointed expression. “Ey, look, we’ll leave ‘im with Gran an’ David. King loves hangin’ with their dogs, an’ I’m sure Gran would love t’ have ‘im for a while.”

“That’s true.” You admitted. “Alright, but it’ll be best to ask them first. And I’m going to clean up and put the gifts in my old room for now.” You flounced away, causing the tulle of your nightgown to fan out around your generous hips and legs.

He shook his head to force himself to stop staring at your ass, and made the necessary arrangements. You were busy as a worker ant packing things up and moving them around. Meanwhile, he memorized the directions Hazel texted him, and googled the coordinates. The place was over an hour away from any real civilization, but he had a feeling the quiet would suit him. He’d bite off his own fingers before he’d admit it, but he was dying to see stars again. He hadn’t caught sight of a single one since the night the barrier was broken.

You finished your preparations, and plopped two backpacks full of food and hygiene supplies beside the suitcase of clothes. “I’ll run King over to Gran’s.” You pulled the leash off of the coat rack by the
door, and clipped it to King’s collar. He was whining, and pushing his head under your hand like a big baby.

“Oh, grow up, mutt. We’re only gonna be gone for a few days.” Red gave King a heavy-handed pat. “Don’t be an asshole t’ Gran or yer not gonna get any table scraps for a month.” He dropped a milk bone in front of King’s paws. “Here, ya little shit. Somethin’ t’ remember me by.” King stared at him for a moment, and then licked Red’s hand.

“Aww! He’s gonna miss you!” You clasped your hands together happily. You waited for the pup to finish his treat before slipping the leash over his head and leading him out.

Red frowned and wiped his wet hand on his pants. “Yeah, yeah. Gonna miss ya, too, ya fugly bastard.”

You returned a few minutes later loaded down by three giant containers of food. You smiled sheepishly and shrugged. “I tried to tell her we already had some packed, but she insisted.” You popped the top off of one and held out a homemade peanut butter blossom cookie. “It’s mostly sweets. She said she knows you love her cookies, so she packed an entire batch.”

He plucked one out and dropped it in his mouth. “She’s the fuckin’ best.” If he’d ever had a decent parental figure in his life, he would have wanted that person to be like her; badass, fearless, quick to anger, but quicker to love. “So, we all set?” He slipped the straps of the bigger backpack over his shoulders, hefted the suitcase under one arm, and curled the other around your waist.

You had a tight grip on the other backpack, and a giant grin on your face. “Yes, let’s go!”

If anyone ever asked him to explain how he managed his shortcuts, he would have a difficult time explaining. Partially, it was his magic that caused the rips in space-time, but it was also vital to use an extensive, mathematical equation to gauge the distance. Once he’d calculated that out, he had to focus his magic to keep the wormhole open. If it collapsed with him or anyone else inside…well, that’s how his father died, and it definitely wasn’t pretty. He was technically creating a wormhole, but one that was safer than any naturally-occurring black hole, and it worked sort of like putting a rigid tube through a sock. His magic created a turgid barrier against the fabric of the ‘sock’, and it would serve to funnel him, and anyone else he wished, through to the other side.

Time passed conversely in the void, or perhaps it would be better to say it didn’t pass at all. He was technically outside of space and time, taking a leisurely stroll around the limits that bound the physical plane, so theoretically there was no delay in getting from point A to point B. In the void, distance was an illusion, but it still felt like a good, long walk before he stepped out of the inky nothingness onto soft grass.

The glade was thickly carpeted by grass, and the branches of pine trees gouged at the clouds above. Dandelions shook their thick, golden manes in the soft wind, which was the only thing except for birdsong that dared disturb this place. The ground beneath arched up into a low hill, not much more than an earthen wave in terms of grandeur, and a narrow, gravel driveway rose with it.

“Sweet melody amidst the moving spheres breaks forth, a solemn and entracing sound, a harmony whereof the earth’s green hills give but the faintest echo.” You closed your eyes, and breathed deeply before opening them again. You looked at him and smiled. “It’s almost like Bessie Parks was thinking about this place specifically when she wrote that.”

The cabin was built upon the crest of the knoll, and was as perfect in form as if it had been built by an architect with a love for Lincoln Logs. “Shit.” Red nearly smacked himself in the skull. “Forgot t’ get the keys from Hazel.” He helped you get everything up to the porch, and then warped to the
Luckily, Red caught her on her break. She was dozing in the hospital cafeteria, her head down on the table. “Yo, sis.” She was startled by his sudden appearance, and flinched back with her fists raised. “Whoa, cool yer jets! It’s just yer pal Red.”

“Huh?” She rubbed hard at her eyes. “Aren’t you supposed to be at the cab-“ Her mouth dropped open. “Oh, right. We totally forgot to exchange the keys.” She fumbled in her pocket for her key fob, and slipped the needed key off the ring. “Here you go!” She smiled cheerfully. “I hope you have the most wonderful time possible.”

“Thanks, toots. Really ‘preciate it an’ all.” He frowned at the bags under her eyes. “An’, damnit woman, take better care of yerself. Gonna work yerself t’ death at this rate.” He clapped her on the back, and was going to take a shortcut back immediately, but spotted a familiar face. He thought the RN’s name was Kevin, if he remembered right. He flagged the boy down, and pressed a twenty into Kevin’s hand. “Hey, listen kid, make sure Hazel eats.” He waited long enough to see the young nurse go through the line, pay, and bring food to her before he left.

Upon his reappearance in the dell, he noticed you were acting disturbed and frightened. You paced the length of the porch, wringing your hands until you realized he was back. “What’s wrong, doll?”

You bit your lip and stared hard into the woods. “I thought…I thought I heard something. It sounded big…like a wolf or a coyote, but the howl wasn’t right. Do you think there are wolves around here?”

He snorted. “If there are, I’d like t’ see ‘em try an’ eat me. I’d love t’ have a badass rug for the house.” He draped an arm over your shoulders and pulled you in. “Don’t worry, if any big bad wolf comes a-knockin’, I’ll show ’im who’s boss.” He squeezed you tight. “Seriously, sugar, just relax. Nothin’ is gonna happen.”
The cabin’s interior was sanded and polished down to show the exquisite patterns in the wood grain. You focused on making random pictures out of the lines of the grain, on gaining sense from the nonsensical, to put your mind at ease. That was what brains loved to do best, after all; recognize possible configurations and force the crazy world into organized patterns. It was relieving to take your mind off of that chilling noise you’d heard coming from the woods.

Rationally, that had to have been some kind of sick or dying animal. Nature was full of disturbing sounds, so you pushed your worry away and forgot about it. Red was unconcerned, so you trained yourself to avert your thoughts from every ‘cabin in the woods’ horror movie you’d ever seen, and tried to get into the honeymoon groove. To help yourself with settling, you started working on making up lunch.

Red always handled the cooking, but it wasn’t necessary when most of the food you’d packed were wedding leftovers. All that you were left to do was heat some up and plop it on a plate, which was rather relieving because you were still fairly tired from yesterday’s shenanigans. While you waited for the microwave to do its duty, you decided to take a better look around.

The floor plan was open and boxy, and the ceiling was high enough to require a cherry-picker simply to dust the deer antler chandelier. You stared disbelievingly at the intertwined fingers of animal keratin that had been chosen as the lighting option for this place. The walls, too, were covered in various hunting trophies; everything from elk to bear to freaking raccoons was mounted and proudly displayed. Frankly, you were getting Gaston-vibes from all of that. You were certain that this wasn’t Hazel’s choice in décor, and it had probably been the work of someone else in her family who was a more avid hunter.

*Avid? More like obsessive,* you silently corrected yourself as you examined everything with fascination. The sitting area, where Red was currently lounging as happily as a cougar in a tree, was furnished with an absolutely massive, black leather sectional, and a finely carved entertainment cabinet that would have made Bernie Mac proud. “Hey, sugar, after we have lunch, ya wanna go up an’ see that waterfall?” Red asked while absentmindedly flipping through youtube videos.

A walk would be great, seeing as you were definitely feeling the urge to stretch your legs a little. Perhaps it was an effect of being pregnant, but you’d become more energetic in the past week. You’d had to lay off of Monsters, simple sugars, and caffeine in general because the excess energy had been affecting your sleep pattern. Normally, you’d be gulping down two or three energy drinks in a day because your body was highly resistant to caffeine, but now you couldn’t even handle half a can without bouncing off the walls. “Are you sure?” You asked, genuinely surprised that he didn’t want to stay in. “I’d have thought you’d want to hang out inside for a movie until it cools down enough to try out the hot tub.”

“Exercise is good for the kid. We can do the movie an’ stuff later.” He glanced out the window.
“Ain’t never been campin’ before, either. Maybe we can do that t’morra night.” His gaze turned back
to you, and his eyes slowly, appreciatively, traveled up your body. “I’ve always wanted t’ try havin’
sex in the woods.”

“As long as no bugs or twigs find their way into sensitive places, I have no problem with that.” You
retorted, and despised the blush that crept up your neck. He never failed to inspire one, and being the
sadistic, sexy, wonderful jackass that he was, he seemed to enjoy causing you to do it.

While the two of you ate, he texted Hazel about the location of the trail. You had your eyes fixed on
the screen, enjoying the latest Jacksepticeye video on a game you sincerely wished to play, as he
tapped away on his phone. “Hazel says the trail starts up behind the cabin on the far left.” He
informed you, and slipped his phone back into his jacket pocket. “An’ she told me t’ tell ya that if
you get kinda hot or dizzy, you have t’ take a break. Can’t go overextendin’ yerself with such a high-
risk pregnancy.”

“Got it, I’ll absolutely tell you if I need a minute.” You took the empty plates and cups, and
abandoned them in the sink. “I’ll bring a couple of bottles of water, too, just in case.”

At first, you weren’t expecting him to like nature at all. You figured he’d walk along, complaining
about the pollen or the rocks in his shoes, but he didn’t. He genuinely surprised you with all the
questions he asked, and then it hit you like one of those cartoon flowerpots that always seem to fall at
the most inopportune time. He’d probably never been in a real forest before. Even if there were
somehow trees in the Underground, it was probably a completely different experience to walk
through an aboveground forest. “How much of the surface have you seen?”

He shrugged nonchalantly. “I told ya ‘bout the immigration stuff, right?” You nodded in affirmation.
“So, first, I had t’ apply for citizenship, an’ then came all those fuckin’ integration classes. I guess I
can see why we needed ‘em, since we were trapped so long that humans didn’t even know we
existed anymore. Had t’ take a GED test, do my interview and set up all the documentation I needed
t’ get my green card. One of the stipulations is that all monsters with a green card aren’t allowed t’
leave the state until they are full citizens. For most monsters, that means they’re stuck round here for
another four years. With how hotheaded some dumbasses can be, a lotta monsters won’t even dare to
step outside of Ebott City.” He smiled at you conspiratorially. “Lucky for me, I got a loophole.
Well…more of a wormhole, heh, but it wouldn’t have been too bad even if I couldn’t take shortcuts.
You know me, sugar, I’m good with just sittin’ back at the house chillin’ like a baller.”

“So…you haven’t seen much of nature or other places at all. How did you think of taking me to
Tokyo, then?”

“When I was thinkin’ about where I wanted t’ propose, I was drawin’ a blank. So, I went t’ Alphys,
since she’s good with romantic stuff, and she suggested it.” He saw a bird flutter down onto a branch
above his head, and grabbed your arm. “Holy shit! What the hell kinda bird is that?”

The ruby-red plumage gave it away immediately. “A male cardinal. They’re super tough; one of the
few birds that don’t migrate when winter comes.”

He let out a whistle, and the bird cocked its head at him curiously. “Never saw birds in the
Underground. We could hear ‘em, though. Does he sing?”

“Oh yeah, they sound sorta like a car alarm.” You pursed your lips and made a sharp
phweep phweep phweep whistles with your teeth and lips. The cardinal dropped open its beak and
tweeted loudly back, before it fluffed its feathers and took flight once more. “If you want something
really interesting, you should hear whippoorwills. If there are any around here, they’ll start calling
around sunset.” You sighed dreamily. “Whippoorwill songs and fireflies…it reminds me of working
on the farm at night.”

“You lived in a fuckin’ mansion.” He reminded you. “You were pampered.”

“Well, yeah, but my dad always sent me out to do some of the lighter, nighttime work. Farming is a family business, and that means we all had to pitch in. My uncle and my cousins helped out, too, until they moved states.” You leaned your head on his shoulder as the pair of you walked. “Dad never let me slack off, which is a good thing, I guess. I mean, I still hate that he worked me hard enough to steal a lot of my childhood, but it’s whatever. Forgive and forget.”

Off the narrow trail, which wound between tall grasses and brambles, you heard a twig snap. You jumped, and pressed yourself into Red’s side as the memory of that horrific wail from earlier surged to the front of your mind. “Stars, that’s cute.” Unconcerned by the possibility of rabid wolves, he rubbed his cheekbone against the top of your head. “Don’t worry, sugar, I’ll protect ya.”

“Sans, there could be something really dangerous out here.” You peered intently into the underbrush, hoping like hell that it was just a silly deer and not a wolf…or a blood-crazed serial killer who recently escaped prison.

He poked you in the stomach. “What did I say ‘bout relaxin’, babygirl? If there is somethin’ out there…” He scanned the area quickly, and then ducked his head back down to steal a kiss. “It’ll be in for a great time.” As if on cue, or perhaps in challenge of Red’s words, the grass in the distance rustled ominously.

Every single step to the waterfall felt haunted, and you clung to him like a barnacle. Now and again, you got the idea that someone was staring maliciously at you both from behind. You were constantly shooting nervous looks over your shoulder, only to see nothing there. Once, you were sure you caught a glimpse of a far-off shadow dart behind a tree.

Red did his best to distract you, of course, and it worked, but only partially. You couldn’t fully shake the unnerving sensation of being constantly under surveillance, and he noticed. Thus, he made sure to keep you under his arm, and cuddle you close. It was clear to you how he thought you were overreacting, but he didn’t understand. You knew much of the natural world that thrived on the surface, and that thing was not natural.

You were certain of it now, after feeling a puff of hot air on your neck that came from nowhere, that you two were being stalked by something otherworldly. Perhaps by a rogue monster? Wouldn’t Red have sensed the presence of another monster by the scent of their magic? Perhaps there were ways to conceal it, in fact, there had to be. Your mind ran rampant with fear, anxiety, and the only thing you now wished for was to be back in the safety of the cabin.

The tromped-down path led through the scrubby underbrush, and slowly curved uphill. As they reached the foot of the incline where the trees became more abundant, the scratchy thorn bushes, ferns, and ryegrass thinned out. A heavy blanket of amber and emerald needles, shed from the evergreens that populated the land, kept the ground from being so overgrown, as did the scarcity of light. The miserly pines made a thick canopy above, hoarding the sunlight, and kept the land below cool and dim.

You looked ahead, taking note of a circle of mushrooms blocking the path, and Red was about to just walk right over it. You grabbed him and yanked him back. “Don’t! You should never cross a fairy circle, it’s bad luck!”

“Since when are ya superstitious, sugar? It’s just a buncha mushrooms.” He hopped inside the circle to your complete horror. He wasn’t abducted by little people, nor was he forced to dance madly until
he dusted, but he simply stood there looking rather smug that nothing had happened.

“You’re not serious, right? Because monsters were a ‘superstition’, and you’re definitely real.” You twisted your head in the direction of a flock of birds that had suddenly, suspiciously, taken flight. The forest was silent as the grave, and eerie. “Who’s to say that there isn’t some truth to other myths and legends out there?”

“Yer just determined t’ worry, aren’tchya?” He chuckled, stepping out of the circle and moving down the path without you. “The waterfall shouldn’t be far from here. Hazel said it’d be up this hill.”

You kept to yourself after that, deciding that convincing him of the lurking danger was a lost cause. You couldn’t properly focus on finding the waterfall without flinching at all of the small noises. And, again, once you reached the highest point of the hill, you felt that puff of hot breath steam over your neck. This thing was toying with you, you knew, and, for some reason, the idea that it had enough intelligence to play with its prey terrified you more deeply than anything else.

The waterfall was certainly as gorgeous as Hazel had pledged it to be. It was a trickle of spring water that burbled up from a rocky outcrop on the side of the hill, and dribbled down into a muddy pool. Tadpoles merrily flipped their tails below, whilst water skimmers played tag on the surface. Red snapped a few pictures of the scene, and then a selfie with you as you quietly angsted.

The trip there had devoured three hours of the day, and you understood that this meant the pair of you would still be walking back by sunset. You’d made peace with getting eaten or murdered to death by this point. However, you made sure to walk ahead, so, if something tried to make a snack out of you, Red would have time to warp away. On the bright side, at least you weren’t going to die a virgin.

Before you reached the thornbush thicket at the base of the steep hill, the sun was hanging low in the sky. The cabin was far in the distance, but the trees were no longer so dense as to obscure the view. Still, somehow a well of hope was sprung within you, and you quickened your pace. “Can we just take a shortcut back to the cabin? I really don’t wanna be out here after dark.” A moving shadow passed in and out of your peripherals, but you forced your eyes on the path ahead and ignored it.

Red, who was behind you, was about to answer when you felt a brush of wind pass close to your back. Red halted in his tracks and tensed. “What the hell?” He cursed under his breath, before warping back to stand by your side. “Did you see that?!” A barbed, bone sword appeared in his hands as quick as a spurred horse, and he pushed you between himself and a wide tree. “This big, black…thing…ran by you. I was textin’ Hazel, so I didn’t get a good look at it, but…fuck.” The strangest thing was that he didn’t sound worried at all; He sounded excited.

“Oh, great, now you see it. That means we’re gonna die. Whenever the oblivious one finally knows something is up, that’s when everything goes to hell. It’s in the rules.” You blabbered on, citing every single horror movie you’d ever watched as a reference. “Can I say ‘I told you so’ now?” A soul-piercing howl, one that sounded as if a wolf were trying to imitate the whistle of a teapot, went up like a war cry. “Red, let’s just run.”

“Running is an invitation t’ chase.” He jabbed the end of the bone into the dirt. “We’re holdin’ our ground. ‘Sides, I haven’t had a good fight in a long time.” His golden fang glittered in the dying light, and he sounded like he was having the time of his life.

“If you’re waiting for it to come out, I don’t think it will. It’s been playing with us for hours. I wouldn’t trust it to fight fair.” You hid your face in his jacket. “Just warp us away!”

But he refused to move. The shadow was growing bolder, perhaps because of the waning daylight,
and was now staying in full view for several seconds at a time. It jumped from tree to tree, and you could see that its form was humanoid. It was hard for your eyes to focus on it; the effect was similar to trying to see through a foggy pair of glasses.

And then came the mimicry. “Sans.” It was your voice…except it wasn’t. If Christopher Judge could put on a good falsetto, that’s what it would have sounded like. “Sans, there could be something really dangerous out here.” The tree underneath the shadow creaked loudly in protest of the weight that was being put on its upper branches. “Whippoorwill songs and fireflies…whippoorwill songs and fireflies…fireflies fireflies fireflies WHIPPORWILL SONGS AND FIREFLIES WHIPPORWILL-” A bone sword buried itself in the wood exactly where the shadow had been perched, but it darted away a split second before the projectile made contact.

“Red, let’s just go already!” You tried to shove him to get his attention, but his stance was too solid. He wasn’t going to warp. He was going to force this thing to fight him.

“RedRedRedRed…RED RED RED SANS RED RED SANSANSANSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS.” The shadow hissed and taunted, pitching its body from tree to tree as Red did his best to hurl bone after bone at the thing. “RunRUN RUN RUN SANS REDSANSRUNSANSSREDRUN. Chase Chase Chase RUN.” Nonsensical bits of words, hashed and dashed phrases from conversations you’d had, were thrown in the air.

“A’right, that’s it!” Red growled out of sheer frustration. “I’m tired of this shit. I’m goin’ out there an’ I’m huntin’ this fuckin’ thing down.”

“No, don’t!” You hung desperately on to the back of his jacket, but he carefully pried your fingers away. He caged you, crisscrossing bones as an all-encompassing barrier against anything that would try to get to you while he was gone. You were forced to watch him stride confidently into the forest, his eyes glowing fiercely in the dark, and tears blurred your vision.

You were thankful you couldn’t see it because the fight sounded absolutely brutal. Blinding flashes, fireworks of blood-red magic, accompanied thick plumes of scarlet smoke that rose up as trees cracked and fell by means of magical fury. Nearby trees were scorched to coals, stones and pine needles were tossed far enough to shower you with dirt, and you heard screams that sounded as though they were ripped from the mouth of Satan himself. You could hear Red laughing occasionally, and hoped to any god who might be listening that he’d come out on top.

Growls, gargled out from a throat filled in by granite gravel, struck fear in your heart like a hind is struck by an arrow. There was a snap of bone, and then…all was silent. The silence lay heavy on you, as heavy as the dirt that caked on your sweat-soaked skin, and you heard a body being dragged across the detritus of the forest floor. Your dread was a ball of iron that chained you to the ground. Your fear muzzled you, and tears burned at the corners of your eyes. You were trapped behind a wall of bone, and even if that kept you safe for now…you had nowhere to run. Could you even force your leaden legs to carry you back? You opened your mouth in horror and your vocal cords tensed with the power of a shriek that would have shamed Nathan Explosion.

“Hey, babe –stop screamin’, it’s just me.” A body was thrown at your feet as the dust settled. Red cracked his neck and brushed the dirt from the shoulders of his jacket. “Look what I caught!” He grabbed the thing by the antler-like protrusions on both sides of its head, and pulled it closer for you to see.

It was skeletal, as if it had no fat or meat beneath the skin that clung to every bone. Its jaw hung open to display broken, decaying, canine-like teeth and a black tongue. Patchy, mangey fur was matted with old blood, and its limbs ended in human-esque hands with dagger-like fingernails. “What is it?!”
You shrunk back from the reeking, evil thing that now lay dead at the hands of your lover.

“Wendigo, probably. Guess ya were right about human legends possibly bein’ true.” He grinned at it and played with the jaw, puppeteering it up and down. “This would look pretty sick hangin’ on the wall, don’tcha think?”

Chapter End Notes

Would you like to talk to Red? Or ask him questions? All you gotta do is visit my Tumblr!

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https://www.tumblr.com/blog/meldaburke
Stars And Cigars

Chapter Notes

You owned a second skin of dirt and ash by the time both of you made it home. Every movement you made caused a disgusting, gritty puff of grime to fly up. While you shuffled around like Pigpen in your cloud of dirt, Red stayed by the edge of the forest and took extra care to burn the body to cinders. You shucked all of your clothes off at the door, took pains to avoid tracking dirt all over the clean floor, and made a beeline for the shower. The water at your feet was black as a pan bottom as you scrubbed yourself clean.

Red, too, ended up smelling as rancid as that thing after he’d finally finished disposing of it. He stayed in the shower for much longer than you did, which gave you ample time to prepare some greatly needed stress-relief and pull on your bathing suit. Luckily, you’d thought to pack some of the left-over vodka for him and the remaining bottle of cream soda for you. And, having spent the majority of the day in the cabin’s fridge, they were ice-cold. A couple of chilled drinks paired with some of Gran’s cookies and left-over cake definitely made for a pick-me-up after having such a bad time.

You put the plated food back in the fridge for a moment, and then went out to inspect the hot tub. It was situated beside the house; the door beside the kitchen led out to a small, raised deck. A wrought-iron frame made space feel a bit more contained, as it supported weather-proof curtains that could be drawn for privacy. The tub was filled, and that got you to wondering about the state of the place. If Hazel didn’t come up often, then why was the tub ready to go?

“She’s got a guy and girl who come up an’ maintain the place.” You flinched in surprise, lost your balance, and narrowly avoided pitching yourself head-first into the water.

“Gosh, I wish you’d stop sneaking up on me!” You glared half-heartedly at Red, who was leaning in the doorway with a pair of towels.

“Wasn’t sneakin’, you’re just hopelessly unobservant.” He dropped the towels at the edge of the tub. He winked and pinched your cheek. “But the way ya get all caught up in yer head is plain adorable.”

“I mixed up a drink for you and cut us up some cake, if you wanna bring it out.” He nodded, and went back inside to get it. You tested the steaming water hesitantly, hoping that Hazel had given enough warning to her caretakers for it to be thoroughly heated by now. It would be nice to relax for a few minutes, even if you couldn’t stay in it for as long as you’d wish to. Pregnancy was a hugely limiting factor in how you could have fun for the next seven months. Sushi, alcohol, cookie dough… oh, gods cookie dough, how you missed cookie dough! And queso! At least, in seven months you could finally get ahold of some, but the fact remained that you wouldn’t be taking a sip of alcohol or a nibble of sashimi for about two years. When I finally can, I’m gonna go to a flipping Hibachi, eat as many rolls as I handle, and drink until Red has to carry me home.

You were deep in mourning the loss of sushi in your life, when you felt something bump your arm. You glanced down to see that Red was back and trying to push your plate onto your lap. “Yer always thinkin’ so hard.” He commented. “Must be some deep thoughts.”

“Oh yeah, if you consider lusting after sushi a deep thought.” You took a little sip of your soda. “So, I wanted to ask something of you.”
“Shoot.” He leaned back on his arms, stretching out contentedly with his feet barely dipping into the water.

“Could…could you please…um…never do something like that again?” You were sure you hadn’t experienced that degree of piss-your-pants dread and terror in your life. “I mean, I know it was kind of necessary, but…I couldn’t really see what was happening because of all the smoke and dirt being kicked up…” You abandoned your rambling, and sighed. “I thought that…well, that you…there was that loud breaking sound a-and you could’ve been…” You couldn’t even say it, and merely thinking about it made your hands start to shake.

“Hey,” He wrapped an arm around you. “Lemme explain a thing or two, a’right? One, I ain’t gonna go dyin’ on ya. Nothin’ short of Asgore an’ my brutha an’ Undyne teamin’ up could kick my ass. Not cuz I’ve got more magic, but because I’ve got a few skills rattlin’ around in my skull. Two, I’m always gonna be throwin’ myself between you an’ danger. Sorry, but it’s just what I do. It’s what I did with Boss, it’s what I’ve done for Frisk, an’ Toriel, Alphys, an’ the Fangs, too. An’ now I’m doin’ it for you because I can handle that shit. It’s my job in this relationship, sugar. I tease ya, crack all the jokes, make the fuckin’ food so ya don’t burn the house down, an’ I beat the shit outta anythin’ or anyone’s stupid enough t’ try anything. Your job is t’ be sexy, smart, an’ keep me in line…an’ t’ be my sugar mama once more of those promotions start rollin’ in.”

“You make more money than me. I’d probably have to get my manager’s position to make what you bring in.” You mumbled back. “And I’m already as high as I could probably go within the company, anyway.”

He poked you hard in the side. “Shut up, yer gonna get another promotion. I’d bet the rest of my teeth ya will. Just a matter of time, trust me.” He tugged gently on a lock of hair that had fallen in your face. “Back t’ what we were talkin’ about before, sugar. Can ya gimme a break on that? I’m tryin’ my damnedest to keep from killin’ every sonuva bitch that looks at you. If we were back in the Underground…Stars, I’d have t’ keep ya in my room 24/7 to protect ya. It wasn’t like it is up here in the free world; if someone looked at you the wrong way an’ I didn’t do anything or if they made a threat an’ I didn’t step up, people would’ve taken it as a sign that they’re free t’ take liberties.”

“I’m not asking you to stop fighting as long as you’re beating up people who deserve it, but maybe next time fight where I can see you, if possible?” You swirled your toe over the water’s surface. “I’m not doubting you. I just…I worry.”

“That’s the understatement of the fuckin’ year.” He took a gulp of his vodka before continuing on. “Yer always worried. But sure, I can do that if it’ll make ya feel better. Surprised ya haven’t actually tried t’ make me stop entirely.”

“At this point, I’ve accepted that you’ll do what you always do, and I’m simply going to have to help you clean up the blood afterward.” You smiled, and scooped up a forkful of icing. “And it is admittedly kind of sexy to watch you fight.”

His face lit up with a sly grin. “Oh, really? Kinda makes me wanna bust up another gang, sugar. You just gotta bring popcorn an’ a vibrator, an’ let the show begin.” He yanked you onto his lap, blatantly groping you as he did so. You didn’t mind how handsy he tended to get; on the contrary, you adored having his hands all over you. You wholeheartedly believed he did it because he knew he could; that he was completely aware his touch was the only one you didn’t simply tolerate, but loved entirely.

Getting situated on his lap while sitting at the edge of the hot tub was difficult and you kept squirming in an attempt to be comfortable, so he finally picked you up, and stepped into the water. The hot tub was, thankfully, equipped with cushioned seat-ledges. Because of your position, your
back was supported by his knees and he was pinned between your legs, you were mostly out of the water. Still, you could enjoy the rising warmth and steam that gathered above it.

He made a lazy gesture with one hand, and the curtains flew closed to create a more private space. He put one hand behind his head, and leaned back. You laid your head on his shoulder, and let his fingers stroke the line of your spine. “This sure is the life.” He twirled a few of your curls around his phalanges. “Just wish I didn’t forget my smokes back home.”

You kissed his collarbone, and smiled. “Actually, I packed a few while you were busy on the phone. I figured you’d want one or two, considering you’ve started smoking a lot more recently. They’re in the smallest pocket of my backpack.”

“Thanks, babe. Yer a lifesaver.” You watched as he opened a warp, stuck his hand in it, and brought out the thickest cigar you'd stuffed into the pocket, as well as his butane lighter and guillotine cutter.

“I’m not trying to bug you, but you usually save those for special occasions or to celebrate.”

He clipped the end of the 60 ring cigar, eyeing you with a smirk. “Every day with you, angel, is a reason t’ celebrate.”

Your jaw dropped like a cartoon character, and it set him to laughing his ass off. “You…you smooth motherfucker.” You sat there, completely dumbfounded, as he toasted his cigar.

“Guilty as charged, sweetheart.” He chuckled and leaned away from you to blow the smoke into the sky. “So…when were ya plannin’ on tellin’ me you have a smokin’ fetish?”

“S-smoking fetish?!” You squeaked like a mouse, and averted your eyes. “I-I don’t know what-”

“Aw, c’mon, sugar.” He cooed playfully. “Yer always watchin’ me when I do it. You get this dreamy, lusty look in your eyes, an’ you’re always extra cuddly after I’ve lit up a few. Makes sense considerin’ the oral fixation thing. There’s nothin’ wrong with it, angel, we just gotta be careful ‘bout the baby.” Smoke leaked from his nose, trailing up his skull, and drifting toward the stars.

“Whatchya like about it, anyway?”

You sighed, defeated. You’d hoped it wasn’t obvious, but the whole ‘packing his cigars for him’ thing must have ultimately given it away. “It shows off your teeth.” You stammered, afraid of sounding as dumb to him as you did to yourself. “A-and…um…the way it curls around your face…” Gods, you were awful at this. “The way you look doing it…I mean, y-you seem so in control, and I-“ I sound completely ridiculous, you scolded yourself, and clenched your hands in his shorts.

He held his cigar between his teeth, and reached up to brush his thumb over your chin. “Hey, gorgeous, look at me.” He caught your eye. “Take off yer top.”

You were quick to obey his order, reaching behind your back to pull at the thin ties that held your bikini top in place. You folded it neatly, and placed it at the edge of the jacuzzi beside the empty plates.

He took a long draw from his cigar, and palmed your left breast. “Beautiful.” He grinned and tweaked your nipple between his thumb and forefinger. “One day, you’re gonna believe that. Don’t care how many times I have t’ say it. One of these days, ya will.” Smoke rolled off his tongue in an avalanche down the mountains of your breasts. It caught the dancing, twinkling starlight, and curled in the air. Adam, his arm outstretched in search of God’s hand, could not have desired more deeply the touch of the heavens above.

The beaming stars watched over you both as tentative, soft touches grew hungry. The blue glow of
the submerged, hot tub lights mixed with the soft glimmer of his scarlet magic served to brighten your skin with a lavender hue. His eyes were affixed on your body, and his cigar was becoming rather chewed up from his gritted teeth. He tried to subtly rock his hips up to press himself closer, but it didn’t escape your notice.

Swirls of lovely gray plumed and fanned around your body, humid with his own breath, and carrying that familiar, black cherry aroma. Flaming, blackened teeth nipped teasingly at your skin from the growing head of ash that threatened to crumble any second. Red tapped it out on his plate, and brought it back to his mouth. “Ya look smokin’ hot, doll.”

“Ash-ually, I was thinking the same thing about you.” If he was going to pun, then you might as well, too.

“Great minds think alike, as they say.” His free hand went rest on your hip, and for a moment you could have sworn he looked unsure. “Angel, you’re…uh…happy, right?”

“I don’t think ‘happy’ does it justice.” You were as exultant as a seraph caught in the golden rays of the first dawn, praising whichever god it was that had shown you this new heaven.

“Ya don’t feel…trapped?”

“Why would I?” Love had put wings on your back, stars in your eyes, and fire in your soul; it was freedom incarnate. If anything, you’d been trapped before; caged by insecurity and fear. Your jailors were your own past demons, patrolling and snarling at you in mocking cadence. “Red, if I wasn’t sure about anything, I wouldn’t have said ‘yes’. I wouldn’t have gone up there, in front of our family, and said ‘I do’. I don’t feel trapped, I feel safe with you, and loved, and I wouldn’t trade our marriage for the world. It happened fast, but since when have you ever moved slow? You’re a speed demon; on the road, in life, and apparently in love, too.” You kissed his forehead. “That’s not a complaint, by the way.”

“You sure?” A shadow passed over his face. “I know I’m not exactly a nice guy. You deserve a nice guy, angel. Someone who isn’t so fucked up, an’ who’d be a good dad-

“You’re going to be the best dad. Sure, you’re definitely not a ‘nice guy’, but I’m not attracted to nice guys.” You sternly prodded his chest with a finger. “Nice guys are boring. Nice guys don’t drive motorcycles or make me laugh hysterically at awful jokes, and they absolutely don’t know how to fuck me like you do.” You rubbed the side of your head with your palm, was it your imagination or was it getting hotter out here? Lightheaded and overly warm, you felt as though you’d suddenly stepped into a sauna.

He seized your shoulders. “Careful, sugar, keep talkin’ like that an’ yer gonna get a rise outta me.”

You had a snappy come-back ready, something along the lines of ‘maybe I’d like that’, however, it never made it out of your mouth. Instead, the world turned fuzzy at the edges, and your thoughts were churned into a mindless slurry by a heated wind determined to cook your body from the inside out. You fell forward, forcing Red to catch your shoulder. “Angel! Hey, what’s wrong?”

“Dizzy.” You mumbled between two, gasping breaths. “Guess this is my cue to get out.”

He cut his half-finished cigar, pulled you out of the water, and quickly wrapped a towel around your shoulders. The curtains yanked themselves open, and cooler, less humid air took the place of the steam in your lungs. You stumbled back into the house, and the wonderful air conditioning drew up goosebumps all over your arms. Water droplets splashed on the floor from the ends of your damp hair as you both scuttled into the bathroom for a cool shower.
Your dizzy spell abated gradually, although you were forced to lean on him for support through most of the shower. He was already dry, dressed, and bringing everything back in by the time you’d regained the necessary balance required for putting on a pair of pajama bottoms.

“Feelin’ better?” He asked, and although you nodded blearily, he insisted on helping you up the stairs.

“I’m so ready for bed now.” The exhaustion hit you like a finishing blow from Mike Tyson as soon as you saw the comfy-looking loft. You hadn’t ventured upstairs until now, and, gods, you were going to have to kiss Hazel’s feet whenever you next saw her. The loft was an open space, populated solely by four twin beds. On the far wall, the foot of the fifth bed proudly projected its presence as the centerpiece of the room. “I feel like Goldilocks, except I know exactly which bed I’m gonna pick.” You sighed and flopped like a boneless fish onto the padded mattress. “I’m gonna sleep like the dead.” You held your arms out, prompting him for cuddles.

The bed sank deeply as he sat down, and you couldn’t stop your body from rolling into his. He curled an arm around your waist, and tucked his chin into the dip of your shoulder. “G’night, babydoll.” He purred into your ear, and that was all you knew before you were out like a snuffed candle.

Chapter End Notes

Did you guys know I have a youtube channel? Well, I do! That is where I will be posting various ‘Ask Red’ compilations (for those of you who don’t follow me on Tumblr), blooper reels, exclusive audio content, and more!

You can find our first vid here, where you will be introduced to Red's voice actor in the upcoming comic dub, and get to hear his hilarious fails ---
>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXJPyIL3eVc&feature=youtu.be
He was cautious as he untangled your body from his early the next day, slipped into some clothes as quietly as he could, and stepped out into the cool, morning air. He’d have to check in with your dad, and let him know he’d taken care of their mutual problems. And, from what he knew of your father, all of that information having been sourced directly from you, was that ol’ Al was an early riser. Now that he was familiar with the location of your childhood home, it took much less effort and concentration to take a shortcut there.

No sooner had he warped in, when he heard a shocked gasp and loud coughing. Your father banged on his chest hard to keep from choking to death on his breakfast. Feeling a bit sorry at having scared him, Red clapped him heavily on the back a few times until Al was able to catch his breath. “My bad, pops.”

“No, no, it’s fine.” Al waved away his apology. “I should get used to that, I suppose.” He sipped on his morning cup of Earl Grey to steady his nerves, and smiled wanly at Red. “Now, how may I help you?”

“I took care of our business.” He took a seat beside his father-in-law, and grinned. “I’ll spare ya the details, but I got ‘em.”

Al’s brown eyes widened. “O-oh, w-well then…good show, m’boy. Um…I assume I won’t have to send in a…er…clean-up team to sweep this under the metaphorical rug ?”

“Told ya, pops. I’m a professional. But, there’s somethin’ that’s been on my mind.” Red rested his head on his fist. “How in the hell did angel come from this-“ He gestured all around him at the expensive paintings, teakwood and leather furnishings, and the scent of wealth that permeated the air. “An’ then get mixed up with nosebleeds like that? I don’t understand it. Can ya maybe shed a little light on that? Cuz I’m pretty damn lost.”

“I do owe you an explanation. I took on that responsibility the moment I wrote those names down for you. I’m afraid it’s a long story, and a sad one.” He rubbed his sweating palms on the knees of his pants. “It started the day her mother died; I was gone on a business trip, and they were at home together. Lizzy was diabetic, and she must not have remembered to test her sugar that day or maybe she didn’t take her insulin. Regardless, she-” He swallowed hard, and blinked hard. “I apologize, I need a moment.” He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket to dab at his eyes. He cleared his throat. “She went into a diabetic coma, and collapsed on the kitchen floor right in front of our nine-year-old little girl. You know my daughter, she’s always been resourceful, so she absolutely knew to call an ambulance. Unfortunately, they didn’t make it here in t-time.” Your father’s fingers dug hard into the arms of his chair, and he tried to hold himself stiff. “Pardon me…it’s…still rather hard to talk about.” He went silent for a time to regain his composure. “I noticed a change from that day on, you know. She wasn’t the same; she stopped talking, she shut herself in her room, and I didn’t know how to handle her grief while I was still processing my own. I went so far as enrolling her in public school because I thought it would help her feel normal.” He let his head fall into his open hands. “It didn’t help, and if anything, it made her worse. I couldn’t bring myself to…to talk to her. My god, this sounds so t-terrible now that I’m saying it, but I just couldn’t. I didn’t know how or where to begin, and by the time she was in her teens, we’d almost completely fallen out.”

“Death is pretty hard on a family.” Red wasn’t sure how to deal with the half-sobbing, elderly man in
front of him. You crying, he could handle that, but he wasn’t as ‘in-touch’ with everyone else’s feelings, so he felt rather awkward. “Uh…buddy, you okay? Pops? Do you…um…need a tissue? A hug, maybe?”

“A-a h-hug would be n-nice.” Al patted his cheeks with his handkerchief.

“Alright, bring it in, dude. Bring it in.” Red held your father while he cried, gently patting his back and drawing on his experiences with you to provide some comfort. He did his best, and it appeared to be working. “Uh…ya any better? Need me t’ go call Alfred or somethin’?”

“N-no, I believe I’m alright.” Al snuffled, wiping his puffy eyes. “Stiff upper lip and all that. You’re a very kind fellow, my friend. I dare say I can be proud of my daughter’s judgment this time around.” He straightened his shoulders. “Now, I promised to tell you the story, and tell you I shall.” He settled back into his chair, cleared his throat, and continued on. “Most of her problems came in high school. She was always a bright child, very drawn to the arts, although there doesn’t really seem to be much monetary appreciation for that skill set these days. Still, she typically made good grades, but she fell into a habit of…well, there’s no nice way of putting it, I guess…but, she couldn’t stop trying to save people. Not just people, but animals, insects…trash, too! Well, ‘trash’ is being a bit harsh. Let’s just say she recycled everything.” He sounded rather frazzled just remembering it all. “She was bullied rather viciously as well. I recall having several conversations with the superintendent about it, but I don’t believe it did much good.”

“What about the people she tried t’ help?”

“Oh, that was worse!” He wrung his hands as he spoke. “She’d bring home all sorts; drop-outs, outcasts, and misfits of all backgrounds. I will say that some of the time, she succeeded in helping, although, there were many rotten apples whom I don’t think she was capable of seeing for what they were; she was blinded by her need to save people.” He nervously ran a hand through his thin hair. “It was, to be frank, fairly frightening. Therefore, I signed her up for a lot of extracurriculars, and put pressure on her to stick to them. My reasoning was that she’d get better if she were forced to spend less time with riff-raff.” A sincere, deeply guilty sigh left his lips. “To my regret, it only added to her stress. Her problems got the better of her, and I had to sign her into a mental hospital because I certainly couldn’t give her the help she needed.”

Red couldn’t imagine you being anything except calm and laid-back. You had your anxiety issues, of course, and the self-esteem problem that he was still trying to help you get over, but it was awfully difficult to visualize you as such a complete wreck.“What the hell happened after that?”

“She came home, and was better for all that I could see. She was taking a few medications, and they appeared to be serving their purpose. However, she just couldn’t break the habit of surrounding herself with these awful, toxic people. At the start of her senior year, things started to take a turn for the worst again.” He pinched his nose hard, as though he was suffering a stress-headache. “She went with that druggie boy for a while, trying to ‘fix’ him, but you know how that turned out. Those other two, unfortunately, were worse than he was.”

“Yeah, I know ‘bout some of that. Only thing is, she’ll never gimme details ‘bout gettin’ kicked outta that car.” Red watched your father’s pleasant features warp into repugnance. “If ya know somethin’, lay it on me, pops.”

“My daughter is naïve. It’s one of her greatest, most self-destructive flaws.” Al tucked his handkerchief into his pocket, and stared solemnly into space. “I tried to tell her he was no good, one could sense the malice radiating off him like stench off of old garbage, but she wouldn’t have none of it. He wasn’t a delinquent, he was ‘misunderstood’.” He let out a little exclamation of vexation. “And then, she starts coming home with bruises and inexplicable cuts. ‘Accidents’, if you catch my
meaning. Moreover, she was staying out later, and it became a rarity for her to sleep at home. Do you know what the police found in his car when they brought him in? A mattress in place of the backseat! I’d bet my best smoking jacket he made her sleep in that car. Mind you, this was in winter; so, you imagine a young girl locked in a car being forced to sleep on a dirty mattress in the cold and damp!” He threw his hands into the air out of exasperation. “And the only way I heard about any of this was from the paramedics and police officers that took her to the ER! I tell you, it’s mind-boggling. And do you know what Christopher is charged with? You’d think it was attempted murder, but no! Aggravated assault with a vehicle. This seventeen-year-old monster, with a record, pleads not guilty and he’s sent to a juvenile facility for a single year! Turns eighteen and he’s out on ‘good behavior’ with four years probation. Oh, if I were a violent person, young man, you’d better believe I’d…humph…anyhow, that’s the long and short of it.”

Magic burned at his fingertips, his palms itching with the need to wrap his hands around a very particular throat. Gasoline had been thrown on a smoldering campfire, and fumes were reaching his head. His mental process was stunted, as concentrated fury purged him of any thoughts except those inclined toward mutilation and murder. “Dead.”

“Pardon?”

“I said, he’s so fuckin’ dead, he won’t be wakin’ up for Gabriel’s trumpet.” He paced the room, planning it out in his head. This time, he’d make sure Chris wouldn’t live to tell the tale. “Why didn’t ya tell me all this in the first goddamned place?! I had him, I coulda-“

Your father cleared his throat. “Because I was sure she’d tell you eventually, but it is obvious to me now that she doesn’t intend to. And, we must consider her feelings. Do you believe she’d want you to go out and kill him? Maimings may be well and good, but I’m not so sure my daughter could get behind a real killing.”

“Pops, ya don’t understand. This is-” Your dad crossed his arms and began tapping his foot in a stern, fatherly fashion. “She’s my-” He wilted under Al’s expectant gaze. “Fine, I’ll ask ‘er first. But,” He held up a finger. “If she lets me do it, I’m gonna paste ‘im. I’m gonna bring in the big guns; all the Fangs. Hell, I’ll bring my fuckin’ bro, too. Pass ‘im around, make sure everyone gets a hit or two in. Sound good t’ ya, pops?” He held out a hand for his father-in-law to shake.

“Very much so, young man.” Your father’s face cracked a small, uncharacteristically malign smile. “Very much so, indeed.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh, look! It's my Tumblr! ^.^ --->https://meldaburke.tumblr.com/
You awoke slowly to the sound of a glass clunking on wood; not long afterward, the soft *fwish* of a lighter met your ears and you could smell the sulfuric odor of butane fluid tainting the air. Your eyes felt weighted by sleep, but you forced them open as curiosity set in; why were you laying in Red’s lap? You distinctly remembered falling asleep in bed, but now you were cradled over his knees with your head nestled into the crook of his arm. “Sleep well, sugar?”

Something was definitely off, you knew it the moment he spoke. His voice was strained, and his hands were tightly clenching the blanket in which he’d wrapped you. You worked your hands free in order to rub the slumber from your eyes. “Yeah,” Your gaze focused on his zippo as he played with the flame. You tried to get up, but his grip constricted and his body tensed. “Red…a-are you alright?”

“Had a talk with yer dad last night, angel. Went over t’ shoot the shit an’ let ‘im know how things were goin’.” You weren’t sure you liked where he was headed with this. “He told me a few things I’ve been wantin’ t’ know for a while.” He flicked his thumb through the flame, and watched as it crawled up his fingerbone.

And then it all clicked into place, and you felt the weight of your past on your shoulders once more. “I’m sorry.” You bowed your head, unable to look him in the eye. You hadn’t lied to him, per se, but you’d purposefully omitted many details. You’d known all along it would hurt him to know everything. He’d criminalize it in his head, and try to blame himself somehow. “I believed it was better to leave the past behind.” You peeked up at his face and saw the turmoil brewing there, the chill of bitter anger mixing with the passion for revenge was stirring up a hurricane of mortal devastation.

“You ain’t got nothin’ t’ be sorry for.” When he spoke again, his words were deadly soft and as fatally calm as the eye of a storm. “Babygirl, holdin’ you is the only thing keepin’ me from committin’ murder right now.” Danger lurked in the shadow of his words. “Shoulda killed ‘im when I had the fuckin’ chance.” He ground his teeth, and crushed you to him. “Ya gotta distract me, sweetheart.”

A joke, yes, a joke, that had to be the best remedy for the situation. Humor was his favorite coping mechanism for stress (sex and junk food being close seconds). So, your mind reeled, working a mile a minute to come up with a witticism he’d enjoy. “W-what do you c-call a zombie who walked out on his family?”

He paused, and flipped the lighter closed. “Dunno.”

“A…um…a *dead-beat* dad!” You smiled weakly. “Ba-dum-tss!” You fluttered your hands about without having any idea of what you were doing. Was it jazz hands? Did you have a muscle spasm? Either way, it worked because your humor had set him to laughing.

“Pretty clever, sweetheart.” His joints popped as he relaxed out of his looming, brooding position into a slight stretch. He twisted his head side to side, earning a series of crackles that put Rice
Crispies to shame, and marginally loosened his locked grip. “How am I gonna zom-beat that?”

“I’m sure you’ll figure out something; you definitely have the brains for it.” He snorted derisively and you blushed in embarrassment. You may not be the ‘funny type’, but at least he was responding to your terrible attempts. “Sorry, that was a pretty rotten joke.” He smirked, bent his head down and lightly bit the end of your nose. It was an affectionate quirk he had; a gesture akin to the way he occasionally pinched your cheeks or squeezed your ass. “Was that helpful?” You asked hopefully.

The edges of his calcified grin twitched upward into a more genuine, relaxed expression. The dark bags which encircled his sockets lightened substantially, and his eye lights’ burning glow settled down into a satiny, scarlet shimmer. “Yer savin’ lives here, babe.”

It might have been that your brain was still sleep-muddled, but you were stunned by the sudden twinge of disappointment at the back of your mind. He quirked an eyebrow back at you, a smirk growing wider as he guessed at your thoughts. “I’m glad you’re feeling better.” You sat up higher in his lap, the blanket falling to drape across your thighs, and pecked him on the cheek.

He winked roguishly and poked you teasingly in the chest. “Still rarin’ t’ kill ‘im, but ya’ve put me in a more generous mood, I’ll admit.” Your silent question prompted a black-hearted chuckle from the depths of his chest. “That is…unless ya want me t’ do it. One word, an’ he’s dead.” He leaned forward and softly purred into your hair. “What’ll it be, angel; forgive his sins or sic yer pet devil on ‘im?”

You couldn’t restrain a giggle. “Pet devil? My god, Red, that has to be the cheesiest thing I’ve ever heard come out of your mouth…and you’ve said some really freaking corny crap before.” You wrapped your arms around his neck, while he snickered right along with you. You sniffed animatedly at his mouth, trying to hold back your giggle fit.

“What the hell’re ya doin’, crazy?” He chortled and leaned back.

“I’m trying to see if I can smell the cheese.” You managed to work your words around a debilitating bout of laughter. It didn’t help you that he broke down into hearty guffaws as soon as the words came out of your mouth.

“Stars, woman, I fuckin’ love you.” He held you tight to him while he snorted and wheezed. It took him a few minutes to catch his second wind after laughing hard enough to make your bones vibrate. Between titters and giggles, you planted kisses up his vertebrae and down his jaw. He turned his head, trapped your bottom lip with his teeth, and lapped at it. Teasing kisses grew deeper, slower, until he was stealing the breath from your body with simple flicks of his tongue. He pulled away from you for a break, looking rather pleased with himself for being responsible for your love-dazed appearance, and rested his head on yours. “Okay.” You pursed your kiss-swollen lips together thoughtfully. He made a confused noise, and you smiled back. “You’re allowed to…to take him out.” After a small amount of deliberation, you’d reached an enlightening conclusion; he needed this. He needed the validation of removing any and all perceived threats, and, if you thought about it, giving into that need wasn’t such a bad thing. He’d shown discrimination and reason; you’d never say he was out for blood just for the sake of violence. “Promise me you’ll be able to keep yourself from getting caught, and I won’t hold you back. Just…erm…one condition—” His eyes were pinned to yours by the intensity of his interest. “It has to wait until after our honeymoon.”

He shrugged. “Done.” His hands wandered down to your hips. “But now I got a little tension I need t’ work out, sugar. Care t’ help me with that?” He snapped his wrist, opening up a tiny shortcut leading back to the apartment bedroom; more specifically, it led into the closet. He stuck his arms inside and lugged out that giant, boiled leather box… you were definitely starting to love that
gorgeously sinful thing. He dropped it into your lap excitedly, clearly struggling to contain his exhilaration, and settled down to wait for you to make a move.

There it was; yet another opportunity to sexually take charge. You weren’t stupid, terribly naïve yes, but not an idiot. The way he was shifting back, letting you lean over him a little as if he were the smaller one at this moment, was less than subtle. He was now the one submissively avoiding eye contact by looking slightly away from you, trying to focus on the ceiling. Beneath you, there was the slightest jerk of a spasm; a familiar tremor between his legs that shifted your heart into fifth gear.

Your high school Theatre teacher would have been proud of your responding performance, although Mr. Renolds probably hadn’t expected his method acting lessons to be put into action in this particular scenario. It took every ounce of your courage and minimal acting skills to sneak your hand up to Red’s collar and yank his head the final few inches to look you in the eye. “Does my puppy wanna play?”

His eye lights dilated until they very nearly filled his sockets, and his tongue slipped over his teeth in a languid slither that left the points glistening in the lamplight. You gave a sharp tug on the collar once more. “When I ask questions, you will answer me.” Playing into the reversal of power was easier on you now than it had been the first time, thankfully.

The timbre of his voice went lower than you’d ever heard it go before, weighted as it was by desire and anticipation. Libidinal shivers, like earthquakes rocking through tectonic plates, bowled through his entire body with terrible power. Quiet, sweet, little rattles came from bone impacting bone, and it summoned to mind the eager expectation which follows the clatters of dice upon a table, as well as a question; where might this new gamble lead? “Yeah…yeah, I do, sug-“

You carefully set the box aside, and then caught his jaw with one hand to make him look at you. “I’m not your ‘sugar’, or your ‘angel’, or whatever else. I’m your queen, and I expect to be treated as such.” You braced your knees on the couch upon both sides, essentially trapping him between your legs, and stared him down.

It took him a moment to regain his proper sense, but a slick, little smirk soon reappeared. “Sure thing…yer highness.”

His mocking tone irked you enough to spark a bit of temper. “Mouthy today, aren’t we?” You snapped back, narrowing your eyes in displeasure. You reached over to pop open the top of the box, rummaging through it until you felt the chilly metal of the leash. You clipped it to his collar, and tugged him up the stairs behind you. “I guess I’m gonna have to teach you some respect.” This all felt a bit weird to you, but judging from the way he was looking at you, he was loving it. That made it easier, in a way, to half-drag him to the foot of the bed. You shoved hard on his sternum, and he went down with the pressure. “Stay.” You firmly ordered. “If you don’t, I’ll add one minute more to your punishment for every foot you’ve moved.”

You tried not to appear rushed as you returned to the living room for his box. You mentally ran through his explanations and a plan bubbled to the surface from your waves of thought. You laid out your chosen tools on the table, and were about to fish for more, when you heard the tell-tale creak of floorboards from overhead. You huffed, grabbed a gag and two lengths of bondage rope, before hurrying back to check on him.

He was leaning against the wall, as calm and cool as a lion in relaxing in the shade, yet perked up when he saw you walk in. “Felt like stretchin’ mah legs.” He still had that cocky smirk plastered all over his face. “Whatchya gonna do ‘bout it?”

“Bed. Now.” He took his sweet time strolling back to the bed as you tapped your foot. “Since you
can’t seem to sit still on your own, I see I’ll have to make you.” Thank the gods your dad had made you be in Girl Scouts, because there was no way Red could feasibly pull apart a bowline knot. You’d also chosen the most uncomfortable-looking gag he owned to keep his mouth shut, and buckled it behind his head at the absolutely smallest width possible.

He growled behind the gag at you, doing his best to shred the bindings. His brow furrowed, until he was clearly straining to break them. “That’s a bowline knot.” You crossed your arms and grinned triumphantly at him. “Unless you can put out more than five thousand pounds of force, you’re stuck, pup.” You snapped your fingers. “Oh, I’ve got another joke for you!” You leaned in with your hands tucked behind your back. “What do you call a muzzled dog?” You traced the line of the gag as it cut across his cheekbone. “A hushpuppy.”

Laughing at your little pun, you left him bound to stew while you prepared; boiling water for your toys of choice to properly sterilize all of the metal bits and bobs you’d be using on him. After boiling them for a while, and then taking them out to cool, you spritzed them with disinfectant before washing your hands thoroughly. It took three fingers over half an hour to get everything ready, and you used the time to flesh out your plan in full.

In spite of your preference in subbing, you found you were kind of enjoying this taste of power. Red deserved the chance to let go once in a while, and you were so happy he trusted you enough to hand over the reigns, or rather, the whips and chains, for tonight. Smiling, you nabbed everything in one hand and picked up the tube of Surgilube with the other. Wonder if he’ll still be smirking when he sees what I’ve got in store for him, you mischievously pondered.

You ascended the stairs ridiculously slowly, and had to withhold a giggle at the half-way point when you heard him frustratedly groan. He was causing the bed to creak with his tosses and turns, however, your knots held him fast. You slipped inside the room and his attempts to free himself ceased immediately as soon as his eyes landed on the objects in your hands. “Don’t look so excited pup, these…” You jingled the metal pieces teasingly. “Are for after your punishment, when you’ve proven you wanna be a good dog.” You carefully untied the knots that bound his legs, and pulled him to his feet. A rough tug on his pants wrenched him closer. You grabbed hard at his bulging crotch and frowned. “You’re not supposed to be enjoying yourself, pet. You’re getting an extra five minutes for this.” You pinched his glans lightly through the soft material, and his knees nearly buckled. He had to catch himself as you smugly stepped back.

Huh, maybe you weren’t so bad at this, after all? “Now, let’s see…” You paced a few steps around him. “Five minutes originally for your backtalk, plus another six for moving from the bed, and then the extra five for popping a boner…that’s sixteen minutes, pup.” He stood there, eyes glazed, but he still managed to make a questioning sound around the ball gag that was currently lodged in his mouth. “Oh? Didn’t I mention what your punishment is?” You feigned forgetfulness with a faint smile. “It’s perfect for a dirty-minded, sex-crazed animal like you…you’re getting a cold shower.” With a swift, downward jerk, you yanked his pants and boxers down his legs to pool on the floor. “Step out of those, and give me your hands.” He obediently kicked his shorts away and presented his bound wrists. A short tug and he was completely freed again, and then led him by his leash to the bathroom.

You didn’t allow him to undress himself the rest of the way, but chose the humiliation of manhandling his clothes off of him, although you did make him keep the ball gag on. “Until you show me that you can watch your tongue, that will stay on.” You sternly informed him before taking a seat atop the sink. You held up your phone, which you’d snagged from the living room on your way to the bathroom. “I’m going to time you. Don’t forget to wash behind your earholes!” You turned the knob to the coldest setting and cheerfully shoved him under the freezing cascade.
As part of your plan, you then cued up a video from RedTube to start at the five-minute mark of his punishment, and set the volume on your phone as high as it could go. The lady in the video moaned lewdly, begging for cock while you sat there watching Red’s shadow on the shower curtain shudder. His hand dared to stray near his crotch, but you tapped the curtain. “I don’t hear you scrubbing! Do you want to earn another five?” You heard him give a grumbly, muffled sigh, followed immediately by a barely audible chuckle.

There was a practical reason behind your ‘punishment’, too, that lurked below the scene the two of you were playing out; he needed to be properly clean to prepare for the activities you had planned. It wasn’t pure sadism, you were fairly sure you weren’t capable of that. It was why you’d chosen this punishment over some form of impact play; you still didn’t feel comfortable with the idea of actually hurting him yet. Although, he’d made it clear over the past few months he was a sadomasochist, you were still working your way up to it. It was a ‘soft limit’ of yours, to use his own phrasing.

You kicked your legs as the time ticked by, and your mind wandered to the toys that lay in wait back in the bedroom. Those were…interesting to you; the metal gleamed and called for your attention. You felt as though the idea of them had been tethered to your thoughts like so many helium balloons from the moment you’d withdrawn them from the box.

The alarm you’d set for him eagerly beeped and broke you from building your strange, new fantasies up brick by brick. “Alright, pup! You’re allowed to come out.” You shoved back the curtain and pushed a towel into his arms.

Now, completely naked and still dripping, you paraded him through the house and back to the bedroom. He lunged for the bed, dragging the leash right out of your hands, and hastily threw back the covers to huddle under them to try to build up some warmth. Your heart tugged a little to see him shivering, so you laid down and cuddled him. His bones were icy, and his shoulders shook hard for a while until your body heat slowly began to help him warm up. His face was pressed into the bend of your neck and shoulder, and his hands clutched needily at your body. “I don’t want to have to punish you, puppy.” You stroked his skull softly. “Don’t ever make me do it to you again, okay?” He mumbled something around the ball gag. “Here, let me get that off.” You worked the buckle loose and dropped it on the bedside table.

“Sorry, queenie. Won’t do it again.” He promised sincerely, but you thought you saw a devilish gleam flash in his eyes before he suddenly buried his chilly face into your chest. The shock of cold made you yelp, and he laughed as he nuzzled your breasts through your thin nightshirt. Once the surprise wore off, you rolled your eyes and kissed the top of his skull.

His bones felt rough and textured under your lips, worn and scarred as they were by both time and violence. You read his hardships easily, for they were scrimshaw etchings that decorated his body in curved gauges, faint lines, and jagged edges. The deeper scars, the ones that ran along his ribs in particular, were more sensitive and his breath quickened as you dipped your head down to kiss them. You glanced up, and his eyes were on the ceiling. He still had difficulties being completely naked around you. “Hey.” You prodded his sternum to get him to look your way. “You aren’t ugly, you’re a survivor. You’re stronger than anyone, or anything, else I know, and I love you for that…I...I don’t care how many times I have to say it.” Your heart swelled to see his expression turn from brooding to content, and he let his sockets slip down.

You traced his scars with your tongue, planted kisses along his vertebrae, and worked your way down to his pelvis. “And you’re not stupid, either. I know you think that sometimes…” You rested your head upon your fist and traced the lines of his pelvic girdle with your fingertip. “You’re a genius when it comes to anything on wheels. I’ve never met, or read about, anyone who is better with tools or an engine.” You peered up at him through your lashes. “Plus, I like that you’re kind of
scary. It wards off the undesirables.”

He scoffed. “Didn’t scare off that Silas kid.”

“Oh, so it only wards off the smart undesirables.” You amended, grinning widely. “There’s no need to beat yourself up, since you’ve already beaten him up over it.” You gently bit down on the flares of bone, and heard him swear viciously under his breath. Magic was beginning to swirl and puddle just below your chin, at the center of his pubic bone, so you naturally dragged your tongue right through it. The noises he made were guttural, instinctive growls that slunk from his throat in bouts of carnal bliss. His magic was growing solid, and becoming more gloopy than foggy as more gathered before your eyes. “Could please you hand me the Gates of Hell and the penis plug, pup?”

“Queenie, I’d hand ya every world in the damn multiverse, just don’t…don’t take your mouth off my cock.” He practically threw the metal gear at you, and you had to hurry to fit everything on. The cage was barely big enough for him, which you supposed was the point, but the plug went in just fine. With a flick of your finger, you popped the securing under his glans and leaned away to admire your work.

“Before we were together, I was kind of expecting you to have some kind of piercing down here.” You ran the flat of your tongue over the cage’s rings, and taking extra care to barely graze his glowing, ectoplasmic flesh.

“Do ya want me to get one?” The unexpected question made you pop your head up from between his legs to properly look at him. His ribcage was heaving with deep, heavy breaths, and his mouth was sagging open. A pearly drop of saliva trickled down his mandible to be absorbed by the pillow tucked under his head. His expression was crazed; his hands were rapidly clenching and unclenching their grip on the comforter and sheets. His entire face was shaded with a deep, crimson blush, and he was looking at you desperately now.

“Some pearling would feel nice…” You didn’t know much about genital piercings, but your familiarity with Japanese culture was a good resource in this regard. You knew of the yakuza, of course, who often used pearling to symbolize an individual’s number of years spent behind bars, and that it had translated into a more…explicit practice as time wore on. “If you want to, that is.”

“Sure…an’ a hafada.” He sucked in another deep, harsh breath. “Baby, I could get a fuckin’ hafada ring, and ya could lead me around by the balls. Fuckin’ hell, that’d be…shit…” His sharp curse was hissed between his teet; his drool bubbled lightly like boiling water between them. “You could just…d-drag me wherever ya wanted.”

You skimmed the length of his dick with the edge of your nail. He was clearly being driven mad by the torturously gentle touches and licks, babbling out snatches of words like ‘more’, and ‘please’. It was enthralling to see the ecstatic faces he made, and knowing that you were the reason for those soft gasps, whines, and pleas. “I never knew my puppy was such a little bitch. You want me to parade you around town, pup? Strip you naked, clip a leash to your nuts, and haul you around like a good fuckin’ show dog?”

“F-fuck, queenie…yes!” Droplets of precum leaked around the plug, which gave you an idea. You snatched the lube up for the second time, coated your fingers, and mercilessly squeezed a generous amount over his tip.

“You’re right, pup, bitches are for fucking. See? I told you…you’re smart.” You unhooked the glans ring that held his plug in place, and proceeded to loop it around your index finger. You shifted your weight to get a proper hold, and that motion made you keenly aware of the growing fire between your legs. Putting your own need aside, you gently twisted the steel plug. He didn’t simply
moan, he **howled**. His noises inspired a happy, lustful shiver to go down your back like a lava flow, slow and hot. The burning shot straight down to your pussy; you rubbed your legs together impatiently, but you continued to draw out the moment. The plug slid effortlessly in and out, and he was making sounds you’d have never before believed he was capable of.

His body grew warmer beneath your caresses and praise, using your words like a burner under a pot to bring his lust to a boil. You knew the signs, he was getting close, so you abandoned the plug, and shoved your pajamas and underwear down. You kicked them off the side of the bed, and crawled up his chest. “No. I cum first, bitch. Put that smart mouth of yours to work, and maybe afterward I’ll let you finish.” You sat on his face, grinding your pussy against his mouth. His hands flew up to your hips to hold you steady.

You rocked your hips, your heartbeat gunned it inside your chest, and you had to brace your hands on the headboard. His tongue worked hard at your clit, curling, swiping, and he even had the gall to **nibble** with the lightest pressure. Your head fell forward, and you saw that there was a twinkle in his eye behind a fog of desire. That cheeky asshole waggled his eyebrows at you before sucking hard on your clit, and you couldn’t even be mad at him because the orgasm that crashed over you made you forget your own name for a full minute.

Your shoulders shook hard as you pulled yourself back. It took a couple of seconds for you to float back to reality. “O-okay, I g-guess you’ve earned it.” Damn, it was hard to retain authority while basking in the afterglow from something like that.

His cock was weeping tears of joy…well, actually it was precum, but it still seemed **very** happy to have your attention again. You worked the tip of your tongue around the rings of the cage, fluttering, teasing, and generally getting him back for that evil little brow-wiggle. His cock was twitching, straining like a nervous horse at the bit, as you played with him. You circled the plug with your tongue, manipulating it with your mouth until you felt him begin to quiver. He came so hard that it stole the sound from his throat. His jaw worked hard to form a scream, but all that came out was a loud, ragged sigh of release. His body tensed rhythmically as splashes of cum landed on your lips, neck, and chest.

A final, weak twitch, and he turned into three hundred and fifty pounds of dead weight. Thankfully, he hadn’t collapsed on you this time, because he was certainly out for the count. You wiped your mouth with the back of your hand, pulled off your shirt to mop up the worst of the mess, and wormed your way under his lifeless arms to lay your head on his chest.

It took him a while to gather himself back together before he could speak. “Arf, arf, muthafucka.”

“Oh my god, Red, **stahp.**” You half-heartedly beat at his chest.

He chuckled and lovingly kissed the top of your head. “Never.”
The time had come. Or, rather, the amount of time before the commencement of his grand plan was insignificant enough to be overlooked. Red smirked at the clock, which read five minutes to midnight, and then glanced at the buzzing cell in his left hand. His brother had done a good job of rounding everyone up. The Fangs, every last member, were waiting patiently at the bar. Hell, from what Boss had said, even some of his own gang had expressed avidity in participating. Red had declined; too many people, especially those who weren’t regulars, would attract too much attention. That was a matter aside from the fact that he’d never been fond of the crowd his bro hung around with in the first place. Regardless, Boss had done his duty, and his newest message gave Red the go-ahead to grab tonight’s star performer.

“Hey, babe, I’mma step out for a smoke before we go.” He called into the cabin’s loft master bedroom. You were packing everything up in preparation for the shortcut home tonight. Your distracted hum of acknowledgment made him smile to himself; you clearly weren’t paying enough attention to hear him warp out. That suited him just fine; he’d have hated to spoil the surprise.

There were two last things to do; grab Pops, and then personally escort the man of the hour to death’s door. In this case, death’s door would mean the threshold of his MC chapter’s bar. He hadn’t originally intended to bring Pops along, but he figured the old man deserved some satisfaction, too. He’d probably get a kick out of watching his son-in-law serve up some classic ‘you-done-fucked-up’ style justice.

He pulled up a warp into Al’s living room, and took a seat in his favorite leather chair. A young man with a rag, clearly in the process of cleaning the room, leaped back with a surprised shout. Red grinned and nodded his way. “‘Sup, kid? Go find the ol’ man. Tell ‘im Red’s here t’ see ‘im.”

Red watched the kid run off, hardly older than sixteen, and a part of him wondered how many Al kept on staff. He’d been here three or four times, and he hadn’t seen the same housekeeper or butler twice. He stretched leisurely in the chair, and entertained himself by imagining little mustaches on all of the pretentious portraits that decorated the walls. He didn’t have to wait terribly long because Al soon came dashing down the stairs with the kid at his heels. “Is something…hoo…s-something wrong?” He leaned on the banister and waved at his face as he wheezed. “Is it –oh my, it isn’t the baby, is it?”

“Whoa, pops, calm down. Nothin’ is wrong, I just wanted t’ extend a little…invite to ya.” He eyed the kid pointedly. Al followed his gaze, and politely dismissed his employee with a quick word. Red rose to his feet and looped an arm around his father-in-law’s thin shoulders. “I asked ‘er.” He lowered his voice. “Got ‘er permission. Kinda last minute, but I figured it’d be cathartic if you got a chance t’ watch.”

Al’s brown eyes crinkled. “Son, I’ll never forget this.” He squeezed Red’s opposite shoulder. “Grant me half a moment to get dressed, and I’d be honored to attend.” He slipped back upstairs, and returned dressed in a handsome, steel-gray button up and slacks. “Alright, let’s be off, then!

Red warped into the bar amongst his road brothers and sisters, who were all keenly waiting for his appearance. “What took ya so long?” Bucky greeted him from one of the barstools. He waved at Al. “¿Qué lo wha? Been a little while, pai…I mean…pops.”
Ducky leaned on the bartop with his elbows. “You’re slipping, Bucky-boy. Gettin’ antsy?” He grinned broadly at his younger twin. Bucky scoffed, rolled his eyes, and muttered an insult under his breath that made Ducky throw his head back and laugh.

“I’m just ready to put the hurt on this fucker. Fuck ‘im…ese mama guevo…I’d love t’ get him by myself an’-” He continued to mutter and growl, his English tangling with venomous insults and threats in his first language. “Me voy a estallar de la risa cuando le rompo la cara, ermano.”

Ducky slapped him on the back with a sympathetic smile. “Don’t mind him. His tongue gets tied up whenever he’s pissed.” He hopped off his stool, grabbed a free chair and presented it to Al. “Here ya go, pops. Front row seat t’ the action.”

“Sans!” Papyrus stormed forth through the small crowd. He’d been keeping relatively quiet up until now, perhaps as a courtesy to Angel’s dad, who didn’t take well to loud noises. He was making a sincere effort to keep his voice at a less than ear-busting level. “There isn’t time to linger and make idle chitchat! Retrieve the ruffian, and my dear sister, and then you may prattle.”

“Awright, awright, I’m goin’! Stars, yer a prick sometimes, ya know that?” He snapped harshly, and rolled his eye lights at his brother’s impatience. Still, Boss had a point. If he took too long, his angel might figure something was up. He wanted to treasure the look on your face when you realized what was going on. “Didn’t even say shit, asshole.” He grumbled before stepping back into the void.

He found Chris lying on a bench in a children’s park. The prick wasn’t homeless, Red knew that from the small amount of detective work he’d had to do to find him the first time, so why the hell was the skinny, blond shit there? In fact, the first place Red had checked was Chris’s shoddy room in a rented-out house. From there, he’d checked the liquor store, the local junkyard, and was on his way to check the local jail when he happened to pass the park.

He put a phalange to his prey’s throat and felt a pulse. Red caught sight of a bottle of half-finished, bottom-shelf vodka; the bastard must’ve passed out. “Heh, I hope I’m the reason you’ve been drinkin’, fuckwad.” He tossed him unceremoniously over his shoulder, opened up a shortcut back to Devil’s Due, and threw him to the floor of the bar. “Grillbz, Boss…” He kicked the unconscious human with the toe of his boot. “Give ‘im somethin’ t’ wake his ass up. Ain’t gonna be fun ‘less he can scream. Speakin’ of which, don’t forget t’ soundproof the bar.”

Unwilling to face another tongue-lashing from Boss, he didn’t stick around to see what they did with him next. Instead, he popped back to the cabin’s front door, as if he’d simply went on the porch for a smoke like he’d said, and stepped inside. Good timing, it seemed, since you were sliding the final items into the packs, and snapping the lids of Granny’s Tupperware closed. “Are you ready to go?”

You tucked an escaped strand of hair back into your ponytail, and smoothed out your clothes. “I’ve missed King so much! I can’t wait to pick him up from Granny tomorrow.”

You took his arm, going on about the mutt and the amount of work that would have surely piled up at your office in your absence, and didn’t even realize where he’d taken you until she caught sight of the neon OPEN sign. “What are we doing here?”

“Remember when ya said t’ wait ‘till after the honeymoon to hunt that shitnugget back down?” He flung the door to the bar wide open, and ushered you inside. “It’s twenty minutes after midnight. Technically, I did wait.” He shut the door behind him, and the common street noises of the city were immediately blocked out.

“Anything to drink, sir?” Manning the bar was a familiar, flame monster. He had addressed your father, who now sat at the bar.
“Only tea, my friend.” Your father’s brown eyes twinkled mischievously. “With a splash of Bailey’s, if you don’t mind.” The flame monster, the true owner of the bar that the Fangs called their chapter base, smirked and nodded. His violet flames crackled softly as he quickly went about his business.

“Oh, and everyone-“ The Fangs turned to regard Grillby. “there won’t be any whiskey for a year if even a speck of that ashend’s blood gets on my bartop.”

“Not a problem, hot stuff.” Ziggy promised with a deep bow in the bartender’s direction.

Red lifted you up and plopped you on one of the available stools. “I don’t suppose you have any popcorn, do you?” You gaped at your father, who chuckled to himself at his little joke. “I jest, but I would very much appreciate a small order of bacon and cheese fries.”

“Dad, why are you here?!”

Red felt a sharp yank on the hood of his jacket, and noticed Boss was tapping his foot. “Sans, the human is temporarily restrained. I’ve given him enough magic to wake him up, but the amount of alcohol he’s ingested is going to make this…less satisfying.”

“Just so long as he’s dead when we’re done.” Hercules chimed in. “Am I right, guys?” He was rewarded with a round of gruff, angry cheers. A chorus of clicks followed as several of them slipped heavy-duty switchblades from their pockets and released the blades.

“Alright, gentlemen.” Zip smirked and twirled his own knife merrily. “Dibs on first punch at the count of three; one…” Red crossed his arms and leaned back on the wall. He’d be a good sport and let his brothers have a go first, and then he’d get his turn. “Two…”Didn’t matter if he got one in first or not, because this was gonna be good either way. “Three!”

“DIBS!” The twins, the quickest of the bunch, aside from himself, vaulted forward, such was the energy of their vengeance. Bucky and Ducky high-fived each other proudly, and wore evil grins as Boss dropped the magically-bound human at their feet.

“Now, remember t’ leave some for the rest of us.” Chuck reminded them jovially.

Boss dissolved his magic, freeing Chris, and tucked his hands behind his back. “Please aim your blows intelligently, we need to make this last. If you’re using a knife, be sure to avoid cutting the neck, wrists, ankles or inner thighs.” He advised -a tad arrogantly in Red’s opinion.

“No worries, mano.” Bucky’s mild accent thickened, and his bright, caramel eyes were burning black with controlled rage. “Slow. We will take our time…muy lentamente.” He smirked at his brother. “¿Si?”

“Oh, yeah. No need t’ rush.” Ducky pulled Chris to his feet. “You first, manito.”

Bucky waggled his finger. “No, no, no, you’ve forgotten; age goes before beauty.” They both laughed as Ducky pushed Chris into Bucky’s grasp. Bucky locked his arms under Chris’s and kept him in place without effort. “Not the chin or temple.” Bucky told his brother while Ducky was deciding on an area to start. “Don’t wanna knock him out again.”

“Wha-…wha th’ fugk?” Chris slurred and squinted in an attempt to focus. “Who the fugk –hick- ‘re you?”

“I’m Batman.” Ducky replied seriously, before falling into a laughing fit. “Nah, but seriously, I’m Donald Rodrigo Esteban Vargas and I’m here to kick your ass, cabrón.” Red smiled to himself as his best friend smashed his fist right into Chris’s nose. The crunch of destroyed cartilage, and a spurt of
gore that splattered over the plastic blinds of the nearby window were particularly pleasing.

Bucky whistled approvingly. “I felt that.” He pushed Chris forward, planted his foot into his back and kicked him into Ducky’s open arms. He cracked his knuckles, and shot you a flirty wink.

“Ángel, watch this, it’s for you.” He hauled back and caught Chris in the throat. Saliva gurgled in his mouth, mixing with the blood pouring from his nose, and his knees buckled. Ducky was forced to hold him up as he gagged and gasped.

“Ey, manito, watch it! ‘Not the chin or temple’, but you go for the throat?” Ducky’s words sounded reproachful, yet he was forcing back laughter. “Dick.”

“Call me manito in front of Ángel again, and I will punch you in the throat.” Bucky threatened back, although his words held no real malice toward his twin. He grabbed Chris by a hank of his blond hair and forced him to stand on his own two feet. Chris’s moaning gasps of air hit Bucky in the face, and his mouth curled in disgust. “Bajo a mierdo, cabrón. Ugh! Gonna have to wash my clothes when I get home.” He presented Chris to his friends. “Who wants to go next?”

Hercules and Zip stepped forward at the same time. “You go ahead, bro. Yer the Road Captain.”

Herc tried to insist, but Zip shook his head. “Nah, man, it’s cool. We’ll all get one in eventually.”

Hercules, who was as tall and as thick in the flesh as Red was in bone, was passed the whimpering, confused drunk without a word. The twins strode back to the bar, and Bucky planted himself in the free seat beside you. “I hope you know you’re painting a very pathetic picture of yourself.” Hercules dropped Chris and took a step back. “I don’t fight a man who isn’t ready for it. Get up and try to put up a little fight, for fuck’s sake.”

Chris sloppily wiped away the drying blood from around his mouth and pinched at his nose until it slowly stopped dripping. “You hall fink you’re so tough. None of you fugks would try this if you didn’t have bagk-up.”

Herc looked around curiously. “Back-up? What back-up? This is an audience. Every man’s fight is his own.” He smiled placidly down at Chris. “If you’re able to talk, you’re able to fight. I’ll make it easy for you; I’ll give ya a freebie. Hit me.”

He opened his arms wide and waited, but Chris hesitated for several seconds before launching his right hook into Herc’s gut. Herc stumbled back, and Chris grinned, thinking he had an edge, however his victory was soured when he realized Hercules wasn’t doubled over in pain, but in mirth. “Did ya hit me or is it just breezy? Heh, my turn, punk.” With fists the size of a pair of small sledgehammers, Herc caught Chris just under the ribs with a solid thunk. Chris sailed backward, the back of his head smacked the wall and left him even more dazed than before. “That was immensely satisfying.” Hercules smiled at you.

Chris held his stomach and used the wall for support, glaring hotly around the room. There was fear in his eyes, too, but it was outweighed by the fury at being outmatched. And, that...that was when he said the stupidest thing that could have ever come out of his mouth. “Ya know she’s trash, right?” The room went deadly quiet, even Grillby’s flames seemed to freeze in the chill that followed that comment. “Sure, you cagn cglean it up, polish it, put a ringk on it...but trash is always gonna be trash.” He smirked and looked Red dead in the eye. “An’ that just magkes you a dumpster diver, don’t it?”

“¡Madres!” Ducky hissed, and caught his brother by the forearm before Bucky could throw himself at Chris.
“¡Rapa tu mai! I’m gonna…I swear –let me go! ¡Voy a matarte!” Bucky tried with all his might to get at Chris, while Red merely quirked an eyebrow and grinned.

“Remember! Not a single drop of viscera on my bartop!” Grillby glanced up from dusting a bottle. “Red, if you’re going to kill him, try not to make it too messy. The health inspectors come in twice as often for monsters, ya know.”

Red slipped off his jacket, and draped it around your shoulders. “Hold this for me, sweetness.” He allowed himself a soft moment and caressed your bottom lip with the tip of his thumb. He helped you off the barstool, and led you behind the bar. “Grillby, take her into the back, an’ lock the door. Play some fuckin’ music. Don’t let ‘er out until I come back there t’ get her, ‘kay?”

Grillby curled an arm around your shoulders and firmly led you into the back room. Moments later, a classic Rob Zombie song was playing at top volume. Red met Ducky’s furious, yet restrained, gaze. “Let ‘im go.”

“James!” Ducky shook his brother’s shoulders. “Get a grip, bro! We’re gonna kill ‘im, but ya gotta calm your shit.”

Bucky sucked in a breath like the hiss of a venomous snake. His eyes were fixated on Chris, and Red truly couldn’t blame him. Hell, he was feeling pretty riled himself, and the feeling was rippling through the rest of his buddies as well. Even Ziggy, who was the calmest and slowest to anger, seemed to be weighing the satisfaction of killing Chris now versus later.

Chris’s triumphant expression was fading as he felt the weight of so many hate-filled eyes. Red took a single step forward, and Chris skittered back to cower against the wall. “No one’s gonna hear ya scream. No one’s gonna care yer gone. We’re the law on this stretch of road, kid. Nobody from my building t’ the intersection of Grant an’ Rose calls the cops if they get trouble from shitstains like you. Nope, they call us.” He took his time crossing the room, but cross it he did. “We’re the best at makin’ problems disappear…just…like- magic.”

It had taken Red ages to perfect this particular attack; he’d had to force his summoned bone swords to break into shards so many hundreds of times before he got it right, before he could do it on a whim. Bone swords were big and scary, sure, but shards? Splinters of bone could wiggle into all of the hard-to-reach places; under the nails, under the eyelids, in the various mucous membranes…all of those places at once, too. He’d made the human in front of him into a writhing pin cushion. “You got a bad habit of makin’ things worse for yerself, pal.” He licked his bared teeth and leaned down close to Chris’s face. “Say hi t’ my ol’ buddy Lucifer. Tell ‘im Red an’ the boys sent ya.”

Red didn’t fancy himself to be a nice guy; nice guys didn’t tend to bury thousands of bone needles into another person’s flesh, nice guys didn’t laugh as their friends carved off slices of skin, and nice guys certainly didn’t do all of that with a smile and a tip of the hat to the ladies. So, sure, he wasn’t a nice guy, but he figured he was a good one at the very least. A good guy to you, his friends, his family, and to anyone else who needed him to be.

He and the Fangs dedicated over two hours to killing Chris. He could’ve drawn it out longer, honestly, but he wanted to have a bit of time with his angel before the daily grind was laid upon their shoulders again. Every few minutes, he’d pull his focus away from his task and make sure the music was still playing. Grillby never let it so much as pause, and he was grateful to his old friend for that. Angels shouldn’t have to witness the toil of devils.

Chris’s back was flayed down to the muscle, which was Chuck’s clever idea. The twins took particular pleasure in breaking his arms and legs, while Zip meticulously shattered the smaller bones. Boss did his part by constantly feeding magic to the dying human, keeping him alive and awake
throughout the entire process, and his features were set into a haughty smirk all the while. There
were many other, tiny things that occurred before Chris wheezed his last fetid breath; brands on the
flesh of his stomach done with hot glasses, boiling water poured into his mouth, and too many other
things to count. The alcohol dulled the pain, unfortunately, but perhaps even people like this
deserved one small mercy.

Two hours, and the latter fifteen minutes was taken up by cleaning. The void was excellent for
disposing of bodies, he’d found this out so early on in his life, as well as for the tools that aided in
Chris’s demise. A mop bucket full of one part bleach to two parts water took care of the rest,
although blood still dotted most of their clothes. “That’s it, then.” Chuck rinsed his hands under the
tap in the bathroom, and splashed his face until the water ran clean. “Tell Angel I did my part, ‘kay?
G’night, Red.”

Several of the others, Ziggy, Hercules, Melody, Chopper, and Birdie, left as well, but Zip, Sly,
Triple Jay, Bomber, and the twins stuck around until Grillby brought you around front again. Your
father didn’t say a word, but rubbed your shoulders comfortingly when you looked at him with
worried eyes. The old man had taken the whole affair well, despite his seemingly fragile personality,
but Red knew better than anyone that the need for vengeance ran deep and cold in one’s soul like a
trench in the seafloor where dark thoughts bred leviathans born of hatred and loss.

Zip, Bomber, Sly, and T-Jay left together soon afterward. Your father shifted nervously as he eyed
the clock. “Thank you, young man.” He murmured as Red walked him back through the void. His
words were muted and soft; he sounded more relaxed than Red could remember him ever being.
“And…thank you again for being the man my daughter needed, and not only the one she wanted.”

“Well, if we’re bein’ sappy, I should thank you for bringin’ my angel into the world, pops.” He
smiled, although he was almost too exhausted by his earlier fury to do even that. “I needed her more
than she ever needed me.”

The old man smiled, a tiny twitch of his wrinkled lips that convinced Red he’d somehow missed a
joke. “I believe it’s time I made a confession, my friend. I’m old, you know, but not nearly as old as I
look. I’m only 56, believe it or not, but I know I look older. Illness takes a lot out of a person, you
see, and hiding it takes even more.” From the pocket of his jacket, he produced a small bottle of pills
and rattled them around. “I’ve got a year, maybe two. It’s why I was so happy to know my daughter
was finally moving forward, even if it happened so suddenly. I thought I’d…” He swallowed with
difficulty. “I thought I’d never see her truly happy again. You did that for her, and…and well, I have
to admit that I always wanted a son.”

“Aw, pops…” Red scratched the back of his neck awkwardly. “You’re…you’re jokin’, right? Yer
not really –“ He gulped at the sadness that played in Al’s eyes. “Shit, I…why the hell didn’t ya tell
me? Don’t ya got doctors? Yer fuckin’ loaded! You can’t just…you can’t just leave.”

“I do have doctors, the very best I could buy, and they have bought me a lot more time than someone
else who was less fortunate. I’m lucky, and I won’t deny it.” He stepped into his living room. “I’m
going to live to see my grandchild be born, and that’s all I wish. I’ve spent the last three days writing
up my will with my lawyer. The both of you will inherit everything; stocks, bonds, this house…all of
it.” He spun on his heel at the base of his stairs. “What I want from you, young man, is to keep my
daughter happy and keep my secret. Don’t let her know I’ve been in pain. Let her think I died of old
age; peacefully in my sleep like every old man hopes to go.” He patted Red’s shoulder. “Hey, chin
up, boy. If it helps at all, I’m going to be with my own angel, my Lizzy. I’ve kept her waiting a very
long time, she’ll probably be terribly cross. She wasn’t a patient woman, in fact…you remind me a
lot of her. It’s funny how the world works, isn’t it?” He chuckled to himself.
Red’s shoulders slumped, he felt like a rug had been yanked out from under him. “But I…I thought…Pops, I never had a dad. Not a real one, y’know, the kind that takes ya out t’ ballgames an’ does all that stupid shit like walk ya t’ school or…I don’t fuckin’ know what I’m even tryna say.” He turned his back on Al to gather his thoughts because, *damn it*, he refused to cry in front of the old man.

A mottled hand squeezed his shoulder. “Even a dying man has time for baseball.”

Red laughed, he didn’t get the joke, but he laughed anyway. “More of a basketball guy, pops.”

“Of course, I should’ve known.” Al replied cheerfully. “But, either way, I’ve got time. A dad is always a dad, no matter what.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm not dead, I promise! For everyone who follows my Tumblr, they'll know the reason I was gone for so long was because my laptop's charging cord broke beyond repair. I couldn't afford a new one until this most recent paycheck, and I despise writing on my phone (phone's nickname is Jerry for a reason lol).

Sorry for the long space between updates, but everything seems to be in working order for now, at least. And I'd like to give a heartfelt thank you to everyone who was concerned.

I know I've been updating more slowly in general, too, and that isn't because of a lack of inspiration or motivation. It's simply because I've acquired a new job, and therefore have less spare time. Don't worry, I'm not giving up on anything!
As much as you’d tried to prepare yourself for the inevitability of this entire affair, you continued to stare at the wall where you’d last seen him, beaten yet alive, in horror. Red was gone, and the air was colder despite the jacket that remained curled around your body. Your gaze refused to leave that spot, and you quivered as your breath came shallow and fast. Seeing him again, even knowing he was soon to be dead this time around, was difficult enough, but then he had to go and use that word.

Trash.

That word encapsulated numerous memories, thoughts, and feelings that dangled like necrotic, mangled threads of skin from the body of your mind. It stole your breath, it chilled you to the bone, and forced your mind to grind to a total halt. For the past two hours, you’d practically been a zombie. Rational thought left you, your mouth dried up, and your throat had locked.

“Angel, you’re white as paper.” Bucky scooted his stool closer to yours. You glanced his way, numbly acknowledging the drying droplets of Chris’s blood on his clothes in the back of your mind. Tiny, brownish-red dots covered his jeans; they could’ve been mistaken for coffee stains to the untrained eye.

“Ah, yes. She gets like this from time to time.” Boss affirmed as he returned from the bathroom. He’d taken his time and done a more thorough washing-up than the rest of the Fangs had bothered with. “I’d stay and help if I were able. Alas, I have a job interview tomorrow and I must have adequate sleep to prepare.” He awkwardly patted your head. “Keep her warm, and administer cuddles if you are comfortable with that. Otherwise, simply continue to talk until my brother returns.”

He slammed the door behind him on his way out. “Is he ever capable of being quiet?” Ducky commented with a chuckle, and ran his hand over his styled hair sheepishly. “So…uh…” He cleared his throat, and pushed his hands into his pockets, although his easygoing grin never left his face. “It’s been pretty stormy out-“

Bucky snorted. “The weather? Seriously? This is why you have the law degree, and I am the ladies’ man.” He tossed his head proudly. “Can you believe this idiot?” He nudged you in the side playfully. He jumped off his seat, scooped you up without warning, and plopped you down in his lap in a booth on the far side of the bar. “This is an improvement.” His smile was warm. You’d never noticed he had dimples. His eyes shifted color with the light, going from toffee to burnt caramel, and he rested his chin on your head. “I apologize you had to see me so angry, Angelita.”

“Don’t be fooled,” Ducky warned you solemnly, though he sported a grin that matched his brother’s. “He’s not sorry at all.”

Bucky smoothly flipped Ducky the bird. “I am!” He zipped up Red’s jacket for you. “I’m happy the filth is gone, but I’d hate to give her the impression that I’m a violent man. None of us are. We fight because we have to, not because we want to. This is one of the safest places in the city, and she needs to know it is this way because we fight.”

“I see your point,” Ducky tapped a finger idly against the scuffed, wooden table. “But, I’d prefer the term ‘assertively advocate’, although that’s probably the lawyer in me.”

“You’re…you don’t act like a lawyer.” You mumbled from the depths of the hoodie.

“No,” His white teeth, bared in a cheeky smirk, contrasted attractively with his gold-toned skin. “I
“Suppose I don’t, do I?” He leaned in closer. “Did Red ever tell you how he met us? How he really met us?”

You wrinkled your nose as you tried your best to recall. “At a race, I think?”

He tapped his nose. “That is only half the story. Red met us while he was going through the immigration process. Now, typically I’m a criminal defense lawyer, but I like to put myself up for consultation work when I have the time. I’ve gone through the cross-training necessary, so it’s no problem.” He shrugged. “It’s mostly court-assigned duties, and Red happened to be assigned to me as a legal consultant when he and his brother were immigrating. Poor guy didn’t even know what a motorcycle was until he saw my cruiser. Love at first sight, as they say.”

“But he said he met you at a race?” You cocked your head to the side.

“Well, he met me through the consultations, and then he met Bucky when I took him to his first race topside. Also, I can’t say I’m the same person when I’m in the monkey suit, y’know? So, it was kind of like he met the real me in the stands that day.” He leaned on his fist. “We both fix up cars and flip them for a profit at the races, but that’s more of a hobby than anything else.”

“I put in a good word for Red at the shop and with the guys here.” Bucky interjected proudly. “You should’ve seen him when we introduced him as a prospect to Zip. He was still wearin’ clothes he’d gotten outta that dump, but Zip took one look at him and-“ He snapped his fingers. “Bam! We’ve got an Enforcer. Needed one for a while, honestly, because we got a lot of trouble from some bangers that used to hang around. Herc, bless ‘im, he’s a big guy and he did his best, but Red…Red’s deadly.”

“I think she knows, bro.” Ducky rolled his eyes. “Normally, prospects stay prospects for a year or so, but these assholes were ridin’ our asses hot an’ hard. Red cleared ‘em out, so he got the spot.” He rubbed at his jaw smugly. “You’ve got a bit of color back. Feelin’ better?”

You bit your lip, forcing your eyes down to focus on the table. “Sorry, I’m…” You coughed nervously. “I don’t…It’s not you, I promise. I adore both of you, truly, but this whole thing with Chris…I don’t feel sorry for him.” You sighed and put a hand to your head. “I’m not articulating myself properly, sorry. What I mean is that I feel a tad guilty for bringing this down on all of you. I don’t care about whatever it is you did to him, but I do feel responsible for upsetting everyone.”

“Aw, no, no, no.” Bucky tutted at you and poked your nose. “Shush, we don’t want to hear that sort of talk. No one is angry with you, everyone is angry for you, understand?” He kept poking your nose until you giggled and batted his hand away. “Ah, see! There it is; that smile that makes the world go ‘round.

“You’re ridiculous.” You stuck your tongue out at him, and he winked right back. “So…James and Donald…huh, it’s so strange to think I hadn’t heard your real names before. Your nicknames suit you better.”

“Ah, yes, that.” Ducky hung his head in mock defeat. “Mai believed her sons would get an edge if we had…acceptable first names.”

You flinched a little. “I…um…I see.” You reached out and touched his arm. “I’m sorry. It shouldn’t be that way.”

He let his shoulders roll without a care. “It’s the way of the world. Too bad, so sad, eh? But, we have our little ways of reclaiming our heritage. This-“ He tugged at his leather jacket with a broad smile. “-the leather, the denim, the hair…” He whipped out a comb to emphasize his point and
brushed a few strands out of his face. “It started with us, you know. Greaser was a word like…uh…” He waved a hand in the air as he searched for the proper description. “Like hobo or redneck for us. Back then, it meant poor. It meant dirty and different. But now? We’ve made it mean music, strength, and pride in the things you build with your own two hands. Times change, people change, and the world moves on.”

A low, rippling buzz announced Red’s return at that moment, and Bucky flicked a two-finger salute at him. “The husband returns!”

Red halted in his tracks, and observed your seating arrangement with great amusement. “Damn, I’m gone for five minutes, and you smooth little fucks’ve already stolen my woman.”

“I-it wasn’t…I mean…” You blushed and scooted off Bucky’s lap and into the corner of the booth. “They were just trying to help.”

Ducky made room for Red on his side of the booth and Red slid in. “I’m teasin’, sweetheart.” He glanced at the clock that ticked away on the far wall. “Work t’morra is gonna be hell.” He groaned, letting his head fall against the tall, wooden back of the booth.

“Yeah, Jerry was annoyed at all the time you’ve taken off.” Bucky snickered. “Said he’s gonna work you like a farm horse for usin’ up all your PTO in one go without any warnin’.”

“He should strike a deal with McDonald’s for all his salt.” Red quipped. He scratched absently at his skull. “I should get some fuckin’ sleep tonight, but I’m not tired.” He raised up his hands defensively as the twins shot him bitter looks. “Hey, it’s not my fault monsters got more energy than humans. Take it up with management, awright? Sheesh.” He motioned Grillby over. “A round of the usuals on me, Grillbz. ‘Cept for the lady. She’s got a bun, so she’ll have a cherry cola.”

“A bun already?” Grillby tipped down his sunglasses to beam at his old friend. “Married with a baby on the way…gotta admit I figured I’d be dust before I saw the day.” He pulled bottles from the top shelf, and before long you were sipping at your soda as you shared laughs with everyone.

“You guys feel like sleepin’? ‘Cuz if ya don’t, it’s been a hot minute since we last hung out.” Red glanced your way and you nodded. You weren’t feeling up to sleeping, either, although you’d probably end up staring at the ceiling until your alarm went off.

The twins shrugged in unison. “Sounds like a plan to me.” Everyone rose to their feet at once, and Red handed his card over to Grillby. “The mutt’s still with Gran, so don’t worry ‘bout him tryna pester ya for attention.”

“I need a dog.” Bucky remarked wistfully as Red opened up a warp to the apartment. “Where’d ya get King? They got more like him where he came from?”

You settled quietly onto Red’s lap, since there wasn’t enough room for all four of you to sit on the couch side by side, and played with the fur of his jacket. “Probably not. They only had a bunch of puppies other than him, and he was gonna be put down soon because he’s part pitbull. You can always try, though.”

“Pfft, he can barely look after himself.” Ducky punched his brother in the shoulder. “I’d end up feedin’, an’ walkin’ the poor bastard if he ever got a dog.” Bucky cuffed him upside the head for that comment, but not hard enough to do so much as ruffle his hair.

Giggles like popping bubbles burst from your lips, and their faces brightened up considerably. “Such
a cute laugh, Ángelita.” Bucky put a hand to his heart. “Is there any way I could convince you to run away with me?”

Ducky let out an animated sigh, and grabbed his twin by the collar. “I’m sorry, sweetheart, is this fool bothering you?”

“No, no, it’s fine.” You beamed at them, and heard Red snort at the idea of you running off. “He’s being sweet, I don’t mind.”

“Aww, did you hear that, mano? I’m sweet.” Bucky was practically preening himself, while his twin groaned loudly in protest. “Oh, shut it. You’re only mad because you’re the ugly twin.”

“You are a hopeless menace.” Ducky turned his face away, playing at being utterly repulsed. “I cannot believe we shared a womb. You probably pissed on my side of the placenta.”

“I’m afraid I can’t recall, but I hope I shit.” Bucky retorted.

Red’s bellowing laughter almost drowned out your voice. “You’re both wonderful, I mean it.” You were about to say more when Bucky reached over and stole you right off Red’s knees.

“Ahh! The ángel is mine now, sir. What do you propose to do about this?” He hooked an arm under your knees and pushed himself off the couch.

Red paused, tapped his distal phalange at the edge of his mouth for a couple moments, and then shrugged. “Share?”

“If-” Ducky cleared his throat pointedly, causing his brother and friend to look his way. “- Ángel doesn’t mind, that is.”

You held up a finger. “Wait, are we talking about seating positions, or are we talking about sex? Because I’m fine with either.”

“Well, I was speaking of sitting, but…” Bucky’s grin nearly touched his earlobes. “I’m not gonna say no if sex is an option.” He caught Red’s eye. “What can I say, man? She’s hot, you’ve got good taste.”

Red held up his hands. “As long as I get it in, too, I’m fine with it, it’s not like we haven’t shared before.”

“Good times.” Ducky nodded in agreement. “I’m game.”

“Why am I not at all surprised you three have gone at it together before?” You raised an eyebrow at your husband, who wore a shameless smirk.

“Truly, Ángel,” Bucky tutted. “what did you expect? Everyone in the club has shared a few times, except for Melody, and she’s asexual.” He shifted your weight in his arms. “God in Heaven, you’re soft. What, are ya made of marshmallow fluff or somethin’?” A small flame burst to life in his eyes, and his voice went deeper. “I’ve always had a sweet tooth, y’know.”

Flirting, a dash of X-rated jokes and jibes, those were things you’d become accustomed to. This, though, was utterly new, not to mention it was difficult to wrap your head around the idea that three men were attracted to you. Come to think of it, ever since Red had hachacha’d his way into your life you’d had more sexual prospects than you would’ve ever believed possible before. Most of the time, the attention was refreshing; you’d spent so much time being overlooked, you couldn’t lie and say you didn’t enjoy being desired.
Sure, this would be stepping out of your comfort zone, but so had been asking Red to kiss you all those months ago. Plus, this definitely didn’t give off the vibe Boss or Silas had; Boss, in his jealous immaturity, and Silas with his arrogance, had merely coveted any attention not directed at themselves. This felt genuine, and it was an exercise in trust more than anything. “There’s…um…that is to say…” You stuttered and stumbled over your words before remembering to take a deep breath and slow down. “There’s always going to be room in my heart for my favorite set of twins.”

“Yes, but is there room between your legs, too?” Bucky touched his nose to yours, his eyes sparkling with mirth.

“You…” You tried so hard not to smile, but found yourself losing the battle. You rebuked him by cuffing his shoulder. “You’re not playing fair!”

“I don’t remember makin’ a promise to do so, sweetheart.” He knew he’d won, and he understood you knew he had, yet he insisted on this relentless teasing. “Regardless, we’ll be needin’ a straight answer; yes or no?”

You dared a tiny peek in Red’s direction; normally, he was all growls and gave off a ‘back the fuck up’ vibe whenever you were propositioned. Did this truly not bother him at all? Perhaps it was because he could be there, watch over and direct if he wanted, in order to ensure your comfort, or maybe it was due to one of the myriads of kinks he harbored. More than likely it was some combination of both, and, if you knew him (and you knew him particularly well), he was enjoying the idea.

After several moments of quiet consideration, you had your answer, and you were promptly, if a bit overenthusiastically, escorted into the bedroom. Ducky slipped out of his shoes first thing, whereas Bucky immediately set himself to the task of undressing.

Bucky undid his belt, button, and zipper to push his jeans past his knees. Between his legs, his skin was darker; his natural bronze tarnished to antique copper. He kicked off his boots and clothes, before tossing his jacket over his brother’s. He was left in naught but a soft, white t-shirt and a smile.

Behind you, Ducky was finally getting around to doing the same. Red, however, chose to only remove his jacket, colors, and boots. Anticipation made your heart race against your speeding, self-conscious thoughts, and you were torn between the embarrassment of undressing and the desire heating your blood.

You fiddled nervously with the edges of your shirt, until another pair of hands pulled yours away. “Lemme help ya with that.” Ducky nudged it up, planting soothing kisses over your stomach until he’d worked it over your head.

Human lips on your skin felt odd, not bad, although you certainly weren’t used to them. His were soft, a tad chapped, and thick enough to give him quite a breathtaking smile. Dimples matching his brother’s appeared to give his face a touch of sweetness. Strangely, his eyes were slightly different than Bucky’s, more amber than caramel, even though they shared the same devilish shine.

He hooked two fingers under the band of your jeans, tossed your shirt into the growing pile of clothes, and swiped your hair to the side. Puffs of warm air hit your skin as he chuckled, leaning down to kiss several fading bruises that dotted your shoulder, neck, chest, and back. “You marked her up good, eh, Rojo Loco?”

Red shrugged with his palms open to the air, and his scarlet magic made the air seem to glimmer and gleam. “She likes it a little rough.” Smoke seeped between his jaws and teeth, out of his sockets, and through his nose. His hands were stuck deep in his pockets, but they were flexing as if he was doing
his best to refrain from touching.

Bucky’d apparently had enough of leering at his brother undressing you, and snatched the chance to unfasten the tiny hooks of your bra. For several seconds, he struggled and glared at the scrap of cloth for defying him. “Stupid, unnecessary thing.” He muttered under his breath before he freed you and shoved the straps forward.

You allowed it to slip down your arms to the floor, took a deep breath for courage, and shimmied out of your jeans. “Hevi nais…” Bucky looked you up and down with approval before his spun on his heel to glare at Red. “Asshole, I hope you know ya’ve got it good.”

“But, wait!” Red held up a hand to stop him in the style of a 90’s As Seen On TV commercial. “There’s more!” He gently pushed you to your knees. “She loves givin’ head. Don’tchy, babygirl?” He grinned widely as you averted your eyes on the floor. “Aw, she’s bein’ shy. Don’t worry, guys, it means she likes ya.” He tilted your chin upward. “Sweetheart, let’s show ‘em a good time, awright?”

He trailed his fingers through your curls, catching them at the ends and tugging playfully. “Never thought I’d be up t’ sharin’ ya, but right now all I can think about is seein’ them fuck you.” He unbuckled his belt, and pushed aside the cloth that barely restrained his erection. “My perfect little angel…open yer mouth for me, honey.” He pressed his thumb hard against his mark, causing you to gasp in surprise and pleasure, which was almost immediately muffled by his cock as he shoved himself deep into your throat.

You gagged at the sudden intrusion, but slowly accustomed to it. He wiped away the tears at the corners of your eyes, and smoothed his hands through your hair. The familiar, and somewhat comforting, weight of his cock in your mouth was a welcome distraction. You couldn’t overthink and re-analyze when your jaw was stretched and pre-cum was leaking down your throat. He set a lazy pace, doing little more than rocking himself back and forth, and gazing down at you with half-closed sockets. Saliva tickled your face as it ran from the corner of your mouth, down the length of your straining throat, and over your breasts. “Straight outta heaven, am I right?” He smirked at the twins as he drew back for a final time. “Thanks for the lube, sweetheart. Bucky, get yer ass over here, she’s all warmed up for ya.”

Lube? You thought as you were unexpectedly pulled to your feet, and barely caught the silent exchange between Red and the twins. They were communicating so clearly to each other, without any need for so much as a hand gesture, what they wished to do. A small, curious voice at the back of your mind wondered how many times they’d done this, how many women they’d ‘shared’, to be this well-practiced. Not that you were jealous, since that was in the past, but because the synchronicity of their actions was impressive. It also made things a lot smoother for you, considering your general inexperience with sex.

Bucky was seated at the edge of the bed now, and Red had pushed you forward into his crotch. He waited, supporting your waist, as Bucky guided your mouth down around his cock. He tasted dissimilar, his flavor being richly aromatic and somewhat bitter in a way that reminded you of black coffee. There yet remained a hint of ash underneath to suggest he, too, was a smoker. Funnily enough, you’d never seen him do it, but now you had a nagging wish to see him light up. There was also a faint trace of iron that both aroused you, as well as made your stomach churn; he still smelled of blood.

His eyes were melted pools of caramel as he brushed a work-roughened thumb over your cheekbone. For half a moment, the mischievous glint faded and was replaced by a rosy bloom dusting his own cheeks. It was bewitching to see him turn into such a puddle, and you suddenly felt a zing of self-satisfaction. Curiosity overtook your good sense, and you used a few newly-learned
tricks Red enjoyed on him. A swirl of your tongue to the tip…a broad stroke along the main vein…a tentative lap near the base as your hand came up to fondle his balls-

You nearly choked as Red, who you’d unfortunately forgotten was behind you, thrust mercilessly inside you without warning. Bucky’s fingertips dug painfully into your scalp as he struggled to maintain control over himself. “I’m still here, darlin’.” Red slowed down, since it seemed his initial fervor was merely a punishment to rectify forgetting his presence. “Sorry, man. She gets a little too caught up in suckin’ cock, sometimes she forgets everythin’ else.”

Ducky, who had been patiently observing the events, brushed his fingers along your bare back. You shivered, and he let out a low, rumbling chortle. “Oh, I see…sensitive here, hm?” He dipped his hand down to your chest and pebbled a nipple between his thumb and forefinger. You instinctively squirmed, but Bucky and Red refused to allow you to move away from the stimulation. Bucky tuck a lock of your hair behind your ear, while Red bent down to kiss your lower back. His hand left your breast and continued down to brush the swell of your stomach. “I’ve always loved the idea of havin’ a pregnant woman.” He said in a voice laced with threads of potent, yet caged, passion. “There’s something primal…something positively bestial about it.” He ground himself lightly into your hip. When he forced himself to withdraw, a large patch of your skin was soaked with pre-cum and it quickly grew cold enough to make you shiver. He swiped a finger through it, before reaching under and slowly rubbing your clit.

Sensation thrummed through your body, and your back arched into Red, who swore and then laughed. He swatted your ass harder than he usually did, hard enough to leave a handprint, before setting a brutally fast rhythm. It forced Bucky’s cock to be driven deeper into your throat than was terribly comfortable, but you didn’t mind it so much. Your moans were halted by Bucky’s dick, although the vibration seemed to please him immensely.

“You’re being selfish, mano.” Ducky remarked. “Switch.”

Bucky groaned, rolled his eyes, and said a few choice words to his twin in Spanish, but relented anyway. You pushed yourself up, and Ducky took his place. Unlike his brother, none of your ministrations broke down his collected nature, which grated on your nerves a bit, especially since you were holding your breath to deep-throat him as long as you could possibly stand. You wanted to see him lose his mind, curse, and call out in his first language to every god he knew. Finally, you’d had enough, and he smiled pensively down at you as if he could read your mind. “Irritated, mi corazón? I’m not so easily won as my brother, nor am I quite so fond of oral as he is. Perhaps, if you could convince Red, we could work out a different arrangement?”

“Ya sneaky bastard, this is why people don’t fuckin’ trust lawyers.” Red griped as he caught on to Ducky’s scheme. “Yer damn lucky I like t’ watch, asshole.” He grumbled, his hand rubbing ruefully at his dick. “Go on, then. You two have yer fuckin’ kicks while I jack off over here in the back… s’not like she’s my wife or anythin’. ” Despite his prickly attitude, a distinct twinkle in his eyes told you wasn’t bothered in the least…well, perhaps a bit put out at stalling his own end, but otherwise he wasn’t upset.

Ducky got his wish, and you felt him run his fingers reverently over your stomach once again. He toyed with you, used his tip to massage achingly light circles around your clit, and made sure to lean down to nip at your back. Every time he did, you twitched as the pain sent a sharp bolt of pleasure up your spine.

Bucky, in the meantime, was louder and more violent with his pleasure. The spice of precum was all you could taste now, and your entire chest was damp from both the exertion as well as the occasional
drips of saliva that coursed down from the corners of your mouth. “Gah!” He paused for a moment to catch his breath, recouping from nearly losing his fight to stave off orgasm. “Dios mío… a man could fall in love.”

You reveled in the way his eyes widened as you took him to the back of your throat without prompting, and your body shook as his twin finally worked his way inside of you. He was longer, although a bit thinner, than Red, and reached new places to hit that made you swallow harder around his brother.

A low, grouchy growl filled the room, and the twins wisely stepped aside. Red scooped you up, threw you on the bed, and knee’d your legs apart. “She’s my wife. I’ll fill her up first.” Having established something of a pecking order, he rutted atop you like a man driven to madness. “Say ya love me, babe.” He muttered in your ear as he smashed his hips into yours. “In front of the guys, say it. Say you need me more, honey. C’mon, say it.” He pinned your arms above your head, and dug his teeth into his mark on your shoulder, and the lightning within the diamond storms of Jupiter couldn’t have bested the electricity that shocked through every nerve in your body.

“God, Red… I—” You gulped down air as he continued to roar and demand. “I love you!”

He didn’t answer, but purred as his tongue lapped at your blood and magic sealed the wound. His thrusts grew faster, and more desperate in his struggle to go deeper. The weak hold you had on your control snapped like a taut rubber band, and you keened for him as you came apart in his arms.

“Holy shit.” You heard one of the twins whisper as you came down from your high. “Did ya see ‘im touch ‘er clit at all?!?”

“Don’t have to.” Red grunted proudly as he neared his own end. “Just gotta work ‘er up t’ it… heh… an’ she’ll cum on ‘er own.” He swore, his mouth twitching into a primal snarl, and ground his cock as deep he could manage before cumming hard. He pressed a hard kiss to your lips and plunged his tongue inside your mouth as aftershocks made his magic manifest into tiny sparks all along his body. “Stars, woman, one of these days mah heart’s gonna stop.”

“You don’t have a heart.” You teased breathlessly, and poked his ribs.

“Aw, shucks, sweetheart. Don’t go sweet-talkin’ me like that in front of the guys, it’s embarrassin’.” He rolled to the side, threaded his fingers through yours, and motioned at the twins. “Awright, Ducky, time t’ step up to the plate.” He winked. “An’ remember, whatever ya do, you’ll just be fuckin’ my cum deeper.”

Ducky snickered and rolled his eyes. “Duly noted, mi pana.” He kissed his way up your hip, and across your stomach. His mouth lingered there, tongue moving sensually over your flesh, until he was satisfied. “I’ll be takin’ my time, though. Maybe she’ll invite us into the marriage bed again if I make this last.” He wiggled his eyebrows at you suggestively. “You’re beautiful, you know. I do prefer my women soft, and your body is particularly breathtaking.”

“Oh… um… t-thank you?” You squeezed Red’s hand tight for reassurance.

He hummed to himself. “Do compliments make you uncomfortable? They shouldn’t, you should hear them shouted from rooftops every morning.”

“Mano, that’s a bit much… even for me.” Bucky eyed his brother warily. “See, this is why you should leave the romance and poetry to me. When I do it, people think it’s charming. When you do it, people think it’s creepy… because it is. It’s terrifying. Stop it now, please.”
Ducky threw a spare pillow at his brother’s head. “I hate you. I hate you so much. Why were you born?” He groaned and gestured at his twin. “You see what I have to put up with? This schmuck always following, always looking like me, making people think I am a hooligan, too…” He was nearly broken down into guffaws as his brother started chucking random objects back. “Whoa, watch it! Those are my good boots! If you scuff them, I’ll-“

“Um…can we please get back to the sex? I was really enjoying that.” At your meek interruption, the twins grinned, and Ducky ducked his head between your legs.

“Of course, Ángelita, of course. I apologize.” He laved at your clit, and held your legs open as your thigh muscles jumped beneath the skin. “You’re barely more than a virgin, aren’t you? Well…” His grin broadened as he caught Red’s sleepy smirk. “We’ll take care of that, won’t we?”

Despite being so much shorter than Red, both twins were by no means small. Both were broad-shouldered, with muscle under a thin layer of fat, which only added to their appeal. Bucky was the stronger of the two, and it showed in his lovemaking, whereas Ducky paid more care to finesse than brawn. Ducky took his time, mapped out every inch to worship and made love properly, whilst his brother…

His brother was a bit of an animal, even compared to Red. His breathing came in ragged huffs in your ear, his hand clamped over your mouth as you whimpered underneath him, and he was snarling rabid words as he had you. Pieces of rapid-fire Spanish, mixed and confused with half-words in English, were hissed between his clenched teeth. “Grita para mi, Ángelita. Tu coño es…fuck, I need this!” He yanked his hand away from your mouth. “Grita pa-…scream! My name…hah…scream my name!”

You came around him before you could choke out his name, so the word became broken on your tongue, but it was more than enough. He gripped your shoulders, and his eyes glazed over with lust. His back curved as he gasped and shook above you. Gradually, the pair of you floated down together and he rested his head on your boobs for a moment. Between panting breaths, he was laughing. “Did we convince you to consider a ‘next time’?”

“Maybe.” He jerked his head up in disbelief, but you smiled back. “Maybe I will… if you can manage round two.”
The following evening, you begrudgingly forced your tired body to walk the extra block to Granny’s apartment. You’d done this to yourself; you’d known full well that you’d be lacking energy today after running on zero sleep. It didn’t help that your feet were starting to suffer from the added weight of the growing baby. Still, past four days had been amazing. Hopefully, the universe didn’t see fit to kick you in the ass over having such a nice time.

“Are you sure he wasn’t a bother, Granny?” You knelt to clip King’s leash securely through the loop on his collar. He’d acted oddly the moment you’d stepped into her cheery, flower-laden apartment. He kept trying to nudge you away from the door and stepping purposefully in the way.

Sure, he’d been terrifically happy to see you when you’d arrived, but leaving was the problem. Poopsie and Lacy were also being strange; Poopsie was pacing through every room in the flat, sniffing suspiciously at doorways and closets, while Lacy was in an alert pose staring out the window. “Not at all.” Granny replied airily, though she paused as she almost stepped on her poor Poopsie. “But, I have to admit, everyone’s been a tad off today. I’d wager there’s a storm coming.” She pushed a plastic slide of the blind down to check the sky. “Dearie, it’s getting dark. You’ll want to be careful on your walk home.”

In your pocket, your phone buzzed for attention, but you ignored it as you were too intent on coercing King into stepping outside. “Come on, boy. It’s alright. We need to get home now.” You scratched behind the scar tissue of his destroyed ear, but he made no move to obey you. “I don’t understand.” You fished a treat out of your pocket. “He’s never like this.”

Granny patted your back gently. “I’m certain I heard something on the news about a thunderstorm. Do you want an umbrella, just in case?”

You shook your head. “Thank you, but we should be fine. Thanks again for giving us more cookies!” You patted the small tub in your pocket. “Red’s addicted to them.”

“You’re welcome, sweetie. Tell your dashing husband Granny said hi!” You had to push King out the door while waving goodbye, and his ears were laid flat against his skull the entire time.

“What’s gotten into you? Do you hate storms?” Lots of dogs did, you knew that for a fact, but you’d never seen him get so worked up over a bit of rain. Thunder rumbled faintly in the distance, coming from the direction of Mount Ebott, and you stared beyond the skyscrapers toward that ominous, rock giant. Its craggy peaks were intermittently lit by flashes of violet and cyan.

The wind wailed, working its way through your coat to chill you to the bone, and it sang sad, ominous songs. The sidewalk was soon dotted with dark dots as a steady drizzle gave way to the heavens opening to release the forbidden second Flood. You hurried your steps, wishing you’d taken Gran up on her offer, and hunched your shoulders as much as you could.

It was later in the evening; your shift always let out long after the typical workday ended. Autumn, too, was on the cusp of replacing those unbearably hot, summer days, so the days were growing shorter. Nature’s heartbeat was the seasons, and they were still felt here in the metropolitan area, even if most natural things seemingly had no place here.

Cars were relatively few, although you could hear the echo of the interstate traffic thanks to the reverb from the buildings surrounding you. Headlights zipped by, and tires hit all of the potholes, which were quickly accumulating water in the torrential downpour. A wave of it washed over your
shoes, soaking your socks, and freezing your feet.

“Spare some change?” You glanced over to see some unfortunate soul with their hand out. Their coat was stuffed with newspaper and plastic, and a shopping bag full of what must be their entire life’s belongings. You didn’t carry cash with you at all, no one did something so stupid as that in a city with a crime rate rivaling New York’s during the Prohibition Era.

“Um…I don’t have any money.” You stammered out sadly, as you watched their face fall. “I do have cookies, if you’d like.” You knew Red wouldn’t mind if you gave a few away. He knew what it was like to be hungry, poor…desperate. You handed over half of Granny’s cookies and smiled.

“Kid, you ain’t goin’ that way, are ya?” The homeless man said around a mouthful of sweetbread, spewing crumbs with every word into his beard.

“I’m afraid I am.” You soothed King as he growled and perked his ear up as something aside from the storm caught his attention.

“I wouldn’t. Some gang is havin’ it out with that motorcycle club. I ran up this way a’fore the storm hit t’ git outta the way.” He shivered and pushed himself closer to the wall as the rain smudged the dirt on his face. ‘Gunshots…murder…no wonder the sky is cryin’.”

Fear seized your heart as your legs wobbled, threatening to give way under your weight. “N-no… that…that’s not..” You yelped as your retreating steps unknowingly put your left heel over the curb, and you threw out your hands to keep your balance just as a car came whizzing by. Shaken, you pressed the rest of the cookies into the man’s hands and took off down the street.

King loped along with you, his long, quick strides drawing the leash taut, and he was the closest to dragging you he’d ever come. He was growling so low in his chest that you couldn’t hear him over the screeching of the wind; you could only feel the weak vibration through the leash and collar. The pair of you dashed along, heeding only street signs and traffic, in your quest to see the truth of the matter.

No gun sounds the same; having grown up in a rural town, you knew that well. An unmodded shotgun makes a soft, smoky pow!, a rifle makes a shrill pop!, and handguns…handguns sound like Satan hurling hailstones at glass houses. There was no mistaking that sound; a high-power semi-automatic was firing off shots wildly. Several high-power semi-matics were being fired recklessly, and you could hear shouts of confusion and terror coming from those caught in the midst.

A handful of people sprinted by you, pushing you out of their way, but you didn’t care. They were trying to survive, and you must have seemed like an idiot for drawing nearer to the noise. Car alarms were going off, glass was being smashed, and there were so many screams for help-

You could see them now, as you dodged and ducked, and glass exploded behind you as a shot shattered a store-front window. Shots ricocheted off a dumpster with screams like a legion of perishing demons. But even through all of that, you could see and hear them. The entire club was weaving through the streets, some on bikes but most not, and fending off a gang with twice their numbers.

They didn’t have guns; they were wielding bats, knives, and their own, gloved hands. Red was there, to your horror, and magic had set his hands ablaze as he battled hard alongside the others. Beside him, Hercules and Zip were disarming a banger in a gray ‘do-rag printed with some symbol you couldn’t discern from this distance.

“¡Ángelita!” You knew that voice.
“Bucky?!” He ran at you full-tilt, pushing you into an alley. He put a finger to his lips, but you grabbed his wrist before he could leave. “Red’s out there!” He bobbed his head, casting a frenzied look over his shoulder.

“Down! You must stay down.” He fumbled with his jacket pocket, procuring a knife and shoved it into your shaking hands. He wrapped your fingers around the handle, kissed your knuckles, and sprang back into the fray without another word.

In this city, these things could happen at the flip of a coin without reason or true consequence. The cops didn’t care, and the hospitals made money off of every gunshot, stabbing, and blunt-force trauma that came staggering in. No one stopped it, and most of those who could were lured into corruption by the almighty dollar. This city was sick, and it was dying.

“It’s a gangrenous infection.” You muttered to yourself. Red would have laughed at that; he had a peculiarly dark sense of humor.

You thought of your wedding, then, and how all of them had come with smiling faces. You remembered that Herc had a young daughter and wife of his own, and how they could possibly get by if he died tonight? What about the twins? They were barely older than you, and they were both so full of life. How could anyone want to take that away?

And for what? Territory? Drugs, and stolen goods? Human lives were traded every day; souls bought, sold, used, and corrupted by the taint of greed. It made you want to scream, cry, and puke your guts up out of disgust. This city was an open, oozing wound full of stagnant pus. It stank to high heaven of sin and human weakness.

You couldn’t let anyone be taken tonight. Beside you, King lunged in an attempt to break free of his leash. The motion jolted your shoulder, but you put aside the tingling pain and scrambled to the entrance of the alley. The fight still raged onward, although the Fangs appeared to be winning solely on account of Red’s deadly-aim and deadlier reflexes. Six of the opposing gang, all of them sporting that atrocious rag, was lying motionless in street.

The revving of motors caught your attention, and you suddenly realized the purpose the bikes served; it was harder to shoot a moving target. Ziggy zipped by, swinging an aluminum bat at a nearby banger and catching him in the shin. The dropped gun went off, and sparks flew as the lead pellet connected with a nearby lamppost. Most of the Fangs were holding their own, but that did nothing to ease your fears.

To your right, you saw Chuck engaged in a bare-knuckle brawl, and your heart nearly stopped as you saw another banger across the street raise his gun. You weren’t sure what came over you at that moment, but all could remember was dropping King’s leash and barrelling straight into the fight. “HEY!” You screamed, high-pitched and broken like the squeak of a skipping record. You just needed his attention, you had to buy Chuck some time to get away-

“No!”

Time passed in a fury of gunsmoke, rainwater, and blood. Blood sprayed like wet paint across the pavement as you were tackled to the ground. Your right shoulder took the brunt of the fall, and you felt a sickening crack that rippled in waves of pain through your arm, shoulder, and chest. The body atop you grunted in pain, and you forced your eyes open.

Bucky was smiling weakly down at you, blood from his split lip dribbling down his chin, and his eyes were unfocused. “Told ya…told ya to stay down, Ángelita.” He’d landed hard on his hands and knees, trying to prevent himself from squishing you and the baby in the process of throwing you to
the ground. “Agh, the kid better call me tío for this.”

All around you, shots continued to ring out, but no one was paying attention to neither you nor Bucky. You gripped Bucky’s arms hard, and twisted your neck to see what was going on. Chuck, it seemed, had taken advantage of the time you’d gifted him and was now straddling the back of Ziggy’s bike.

Melody and Birdie were fighting back to back, using their smaller size to their advantage to get in small, vital strikes and backing up before their bigger, slower opponents could aim properly. That was, apparently, the main source of the frantic barrage of bullets. You strained to see beyond them, and managed to get a glimpse of Chopper, Sly, and Triple Jay fending off two bangers each.

“We’re winning.” Bucky’s voice was hoarse, which grabbed your attention immediately. Your left hand felt sticky as you pulled it away from his jacket; blood was bubbling up from a severe, diagonal gash running the length of his bicep. He laughed and grabbed your bloodied hand. “Just a scratch.” He touched his forehead to yours reassuringly. “Honest, Ángelita, it’s from the glass.”

“You’re…y-you’re not-“

“No.” He cleared his throat harshly. “I’m fine, but I need to go.” He glanced up quickly to scan the area to see if anyone else had noticed them yet. “Promise me you’ll stay down this time? It’s not just your own life you’re risking if you don’t.” His hair, the gel washed out by the rain and thoroughly disheveled, tickled your cheek as he spoke.

You reached up to smooth it back as best you could, and dabbed away the blood with your sleeve. “Keep him safe.”

He nodded quickly, and shifted to get up, then hesitated. “Before I go-“ He murmured, seemingly talking more to himself than to you. “Te quiero, Ángelita. Stay safe.” He gritted his teeth, and, sucking in a pained breath, he forced himself to stand.

“Bucky, please I-…” You cut yourself off, tugging at the front of his jacket. “Don’t die.”

“That’s the plan!” He ripped a strip from his undershirt and tied it swiftly around his arm before he ran to his friends’ aid.

The gunshots were dying down as the bangers were gradually overwhelmed by a combination Red’s own magical, bone projectiles, the surprising agility and skill the bikers possessed in street fighting, and even King’s escape had assisted in rebuffing the random attack. He was limping a little, but his head was held victoriously high. His muzzle was bloody, and he was bleeding from one paw where he’d lost a nail, but he was otherwise unhurt.

As soon as the brief, yet ruthlessly savage, street battle was over, Red was at your side. The entire club was battered and bruised, although everyone was thankfully alive. Chuck gently lowered hands on your shoulders. “Ya saved my fuckin’ life, sweetheart! I owe ya big time.”

“Surviving that mess is enough of a thank you.” You rubbed hard at a bit of dried blood on Red’s cheek. “How did it all start?!“

Red cupped his hand over yours. “Dropped by the bar on my way back from work. Glad I did, too, ‘cuz that buncha idiots figured they’d use the storm t’ get the drop on us. Probably figured it’d be confusing as hell tryna run ‘em down in the rain. Smart idea, but-“ He grinned and propped his boot up on the back of one of the unconscious bangers. “-not smart enough. Came close t’ getting Chuck, but that’s just ‘cuz this ol’ bastards gettin’ fat an’ slow.”
“Who you callin’ ‘ol’ bastard’, ya sack-of-shit?’” Chuck glowered at Red. “Yer lucky you didn’t get blasted. They were probably so fuckin’ surprised by yer ugly mug, they couldn’t think t’ shoot!”

“So, what’re we gonna do with all of ‘em?” Bucky asked, using a brick wall to support himself. He was pale and sweating bullets, but was thankfully alright.

“Same thing we do every night, Pinky; strip ‘em naked an’ cart ‘em down t’ the station.” Zip kicked the last banger into the pile, dusted his hands, and stood arms akimbo with pride in his eyes. “Boys, I think we’ve earned ourselves a drink.”
Grillby was less than pleased to see everyone tracking gore across his freshly-mopped floor, but his grumpiness was dampened once the drinks hit the counter. “Yo, can I get a few ice cubes over here?” Herc held his hand up to the flaming barkeep. “Not for my drink, it’s for Zip. He’s got himself a real shiner.” He took the ice, thoughtfully wrapped in a clean rag, from Grillby to give to the battered Road Captain.

“Anyone got any duct tape?” Birdie called across the bar in earnest. “Melody’s full of glass an’ I ain’t got no tweezers.”

Red had one of Bucky’s arms slung over his shoulders to support him as he walked. You trotted behind them, nervously clutching his jacket cuff. Together, you both managed to help Bucky remove his jacket and clean the majority of the blood away from the gash. “Guys, Bucky’s losing a lot of blood!” You untied his makeshift bandage to fasten it tighter above the laceration. “We’re gonna need to take him to the hospital if it doesn’t stop.”

“Hospitals are for the weak…and for those lucky shits with good healthcare.” Ziggy deadpanned as he stepped up behind Sly to assist Triple Jay in reducing Sly’s dislocated shoulder. “On the count of three, awright? One…”

You had to look away from it, but Sly’s muffled groan was enough to make your heart ache. “We need to call Hazel. I’m sure we could work something out.” You had your phone out and had already sent a text to Boss before any of the bull-headed bikers could protest. “Shush, I’m calling her now. You’ll all thank me when none of you exsanguinate.”

Within the time it took Red to summon a warp to get ahold of Boss and Hazel, the entire club was chugging down alcohol like it was going out of style. Some were dampening bar cloths and paper towels with straight vodka to disinfect wounds. “Really now, I have a medical kit in the kitchen.” Grillby frowned, disapproval over the waste of good alcohol.

“I’m pretty sure –please don’t take this as concrete fact since I’ve only ever taken one First Aid class in my life- but I’m certain this is a bad idea.” Your jaw ached from the tension in your body, but so did everything else. Your entire body was sore, especially the joints, and you were feeling a stress headache coming on. “Alcohol is kinda…well, it’s like sucking water out of your body.”

“Good.” Ziggy took a long swig from his own glass. “It’ll slow the bleedin’. Alcohol is nature’s nurse.”

“Um…n-no…that isn’t what I-“ You held up a hand to stop him before he could order another, but let your hand fall to your side. “Erm…can we maybe wait until we have Hazel’s professional opin-“

“Oh my god, what the hell are you all doing?!” Hazel scrambled out of the warp, completely horrified. “Why are you bleeding?! WHY ARE YOU DRINKING WHILE BLEEDING? STOP!” She lunged for the glass in Bucky’s shaking hand to shove it far out of his reach.

“What’s up, doc?” Zip raised his snifter to her in greeting.

“Nurse practitioner.” She corrected with a grumble as she set about inspecting Bucky’s cut. “What
“Well…uh…” You wrung your hands worriedly. “I wasn’t there for all of it, but basically a bunch of gangsters tried to ambush them. We…uh…we won, thank goodness.” You dug your fingers into your scalp as you dragged them through your hair. “It’s mostly bruises, but-“

“Well, actually, Gabriel over here got stabbed.” Hercules mentioned, gesturing casually over the bar. “He’s hidin’ back here ’cuz he said Hazel would kill ‘im.”

“You blinked at the mention of an unknown. True, there had been a few random people fighting with the club, but Red and the Fangs’ safety had been your main concern. You hadn’t even seen anyone else come back to bar with them.

“A friend of my family.” Bucky explained, wincing as Hazel started to thread up a needle. “Aw, come now, amorcita, no stitches. I am fine! I can walk, and talk-“ He tried to stand, but his face went green the moment he did. “-and puke. Somebody get me a bucket.”

“Not on my floor, asshole!” Grillby practically threw a tiny bucket partially filled with potato peels his way.

“Gabriel?” Boss pushed up the slat of bartop that separated Grillby’s side of the bar from the public. He reached down and hauled a very pale, terribly bloody, Latino man to his feet. “So, this is where you have been for the past few hours.”

“Heh…yeah, Boss.” Gabriel could barely stand on his own. Compared to him, Bucky was as healthy as a horse. “Whuzz..whuzz up, Hazel?”

“What’s up? WHAT’S UP?!” Her voice reached levels of screechy that would have deafened a Banshee. “My foot up your ass, that’s ‘what’s up’!” You watched in awe as she marched up, grabbed him right out of Boss’s hands, and half-dragged, half-carried him to a booth. She carefully cut his shirt open with medical scissors and set to work.

“Whenever yer done with him, Angel took a bad fall-“ Bucky’s golden skin looked washed-out and greasy, and he was breathing heavily while clutching the small, tin bucket Grillby had so kindly given him. He swallowed with great difficulty before resuming. “Can ya check ’er out?”

“You fell?!” Red’s sockets went wide. A feeling similar to a full-body static shock struck your body; he was Checking you. “Yer down t’ 1 HP!” He put a hand to your stomach. “How did ya land? I can still feel the baby’s Soul, but-“ His hands were cold on your bare skin, and you shivered, which forced a muffled whine to escape your lips.

“Pretty hard on my left shoulder and upper back.” You admitted softly.

“You fell?! Red’s sockets went wide. A feeling similar to a full-body static shock struck your body; he was Checking you. “Yer down t’ 1 HP!” He put a hand to your stomach. “How did ya land? I can still feel the baby’s Soul, but-“ His hands were cold on your bare skin, and you shivered, which forced a muffled whine to escape your lips.

“An’ ya didn’t think t’ mention it before now?! Fuckin’ hell…Nurse! You done with Boss’s buddy yet? We need ya over here!” He shoved your shirt collar to the side to examine it as best he could. “Boss, yer better at this shit than I am, all I can tell is she ain’t got no broken bones.”

The soft, electrical zap of being Checked was harsher when it came from Papyrus. His fingers were sharp as they poked and prodded over your shirt, and wisps of rusty smoke seeped through the fabric into your flesh. “Your deduction was correct, brother. She hasn’t broken anything, but she has torn a few muscle fibers and there is significant, deep bruising.” He rubbed his hands together quickly, working up a lather of magic before laying hands on you again. “Undyne used to do this for me after particularly rigorous training sessions.”
Red’s browbone came together anxiously. “She’s gonna be okay, right?” His eye lights were pinned to his brother’s hands, intently watching the magic working its way into your body to monumentally speed up the healing process.

“She’s fine.” Hazel said from across the room without even looking up from her urgent work on Gabriel’s stab wound. “She’s the best off out of all of you.” She caught Chuck trying to sneak a sip of beer, narrowed her eyes sternly at him, and nodded approvingly when he immediately put it down.

Hazel worked hastily; mumbling, muttering, and going through two rolls of gauze and medical tape to attend to those with the worst wounds. Hercules was the worst for bruises; he was a sickly purple from head to toe, a bullet had grazed Sly’s calf, and then there was Melody, whose entire back was a mess of glass splinters, took most of her time. She poured over every cut with a magnifying glass, while Zip hovered over her shoulder with a flashlight angled to catch each glinty piece. “The duct tape was actually a good idea.” She confessed after picking out the umpteenth shard and tapping it into a spare, clean ashtray. After nearly an hour, she’d managed to pick out the pesky slivers and it was a simple matter for her to seal up the multitude of shallow cuts. “If you weren’t wearing that leather jacket, all of these could have gone so much deeper.”

“Gotta love leather; it’s sexy and useful.” Zip clicked off the flashlight and held out a hand for her to shake. “Thanks for fixin’ up mah boys, sweetheart. Don’t be a stranger, yer always welcome here.” He shoved his hand into his back pocket for his wallet. “Is $600 enough? If not, we can all pitch in to-”

Flustered, she shook her head. “No! Absolutely not, I can’t accept that. You were out there protecting people…it wouldn’t be right. I make more than enough on my own.”

Stunned, the Road Captain tucked his wallet back into his pants. “Well, awright then, but we gotta pay ya back somehow. Wouldn’t feel right ‘bout it, otherwise.”

“You can pay me back by promising to take it slow with the drinking until you’re all completely healed up.” Her nippy answer garnered a handful of chuckles from the crew. She pushed her hair out of her face, wearing a tired smile, and that was when you noticed a glint of gold hanging from her wrist. It was a type of locket with a chain so thin and small, you knew it had to have been made for a child.

“Instead of the money, maybe I could…uh…fix that for you?” You shyly motioned at the heart-shaped trinket. The bit of jewelry was obviously sentimental, as she clearly hadn’t trusted the work to a jeweler. “I can lengthen the chain, buff out the scratches-” You took her wrist to get a closer look at the petite pendant. “-oh, and these hinges have a bit of dirt stuck in them.”

Hazel’s jaw dropped. “You can do that?!?”

You chewed on your lip, and blushed. “Well, yes. I kinda make jewelry and stuff as a hobby. I-I’m not a professional!” You added quickly, in case she got a grandiose idea of your abilities. “But cleaning this up and making the chain longer is easy enough.” You shoved your hand into your purse and pulled a satiny, drawstring jewelry bag from within. You always carried a few of them around since your colleagues at the office would often pay you a few dollars to clean or fix their own jewelry. “I’ll take good care of it, I promise.” You didn’t miss the moment of hesitation before she handed the locket over to your care. “It’ll be good as new. It was well-made in the first place; all it really needs is a few extra links and some elbow grease.” You beamed at her, drew the bag closed, and tucked it safely away in your purse.

She remained there for quite a while longer, fussing over and healing the most minor of contusions,
while everyone rested up from the fight. Despite not being a vet, she also insisted on taking a quick look at King. While waiting for her to finish with him, you, Red, and Bucky shared a booth; you massaged Bucky’s shoulders as he miserably laid his head on the table. He’d lost enough blood to completely sap him of energy. It was painful to see him drawn and sickly; he was a ghost of his usual self. “Is Ducky gonna be home tonight?” Red asked. “Someone’s gotta look after ya, pal. Ya ain’t lookin’ so hot.”

“He’s stayin’ late at the firm.” Bucky groaned into the table. “I’ll be-“

“No, you won’t.” You cut in firmly, and threaded your arm through his. “You’re coming home with us.” He opened his mouth to protest. “No ‘but’s, you’re coming and that’s final.” You helped him up, while Red smirked and opened up a shortcut. “We’ve got a spare bed.”

Hazel stopped the three of you from leaving, rushing through a list of symptoms that should be watched for in case of hypovolemic shock, and gifting Bucky with a light boost of magic. It wouldn’t replace the blood he’d lost, however, it did a lot to ease his nausea and dizziness. He stumbled along, doing his best to keep from leaning on you.

King, upon stepping out of the void, immediately trotted to his bed and curled up with a massive yawn. “Mutt, yer speakin’ my lingo. I’m dead tired, heh.” Red flopped on the couch with an exhausted groan. You, on the other hand, set to work wrapping Bucky in your blanket and giving him warm cocoa to drink.

“My dad always said hot chocolate could cure anything.” You told him, pushing the steamy mug into his hands. “At the very least, it’ll help settle your stomach.”

His eyes were glassy, and baby hairs along his forehead were plastered to his skin by sweat, but his breathing had slowed considerably. “Thanks.” His voice was roughened, burnt by stomach acid and dried out by gasping breaths. You reached down to touch his wrist just like Hazel had shown you, and frowned. His heart was still beating much too fast, although it had slowed considerably after her treatment.

You got up, seeking Red out where he’d collapsed on the couch. He opened one socket as soon as he heard you return. “Ready for bed?”

You glanced over your shoulder, twisting your hands over and over. “I…I can’t.” Bucky’s condition was wrenching your heartstrings. “What if he goes into shock while we’re asleep?” You kept your voice low, hoping Bucky wouldn’t overhear.

Red sighed, stretched, and rose. “Aright, how ‘bout he sleeps with us, then? Just for tonight.” He strode into your room, and slung Bucky’s arm over his shoulder. “C’mon, bud.” He walked him into the bedroom and deposited his friend on the bed without another word.

Bucky sat on the edge clutching his hot chocolate with clammy, shaky hands. “Was Angelita lookin’ for a round three?” He joked. “I’m sorry, sweetheart, but I’m tapped out.”

Red raised an eyebrow at him. “Nah, this is just t’ make sure ya don’t check out on us in the middle of the fuckin’ night like a dick. Now scoot yer ass over t’ the fuckin’ wall.” Bucky laughed quietly into his cup, then finished his drink in a few gulps before doing as he was told.

You slid in next to him. “Don’t lay on your arm.” You chastised. He’d tried to lay down facing the wall, but it was clearly uncomfortable for him. He settled on his other side, facing your back, while you cuddled up to Red. It was close quarters, the bed definitely wasn’t made with three people in mind, but not uncomfortable. You could feel Bucky’s breathing slow down to a deep, even rhythm.
Satisfied with his safety, you patted his mussed hair out of his face and sighed contentedly.

Hopefully, tomorrow morning would be the dawn of a better day.

Chapter End Notes

This came about from a convo with MsMk. I wonder how she'll write Nurse's pov of this?

IN OTHER WORDS
Go check out her companion story Fight Me!
An irritating bleeping brought you the gift of wakefulness the next morning. Reluctant to leave the cozy warmth of bed, you pulled the covers higher and wiggled further into Red’s embrace. His arms tightened, which meant he was awake as well and just as unwilling to confront the new day. You lifted your head far enough from your pillow to kiss his mandible before settling back in.

Behind you, there was a slight stirring and you froze in fear for half a second until your sleep-addled brain finally caught up to you. You registered also that there was a hand resting atop your hip. Bucky’s thumb grazed your hip in lazy, repeated strokes right up until Red finally had enough of the obnoxious bleeping and slammed his hand on the alarm to turn it off.

His nasal bone whistled a little under the burden of a heavy sigh, and he heaved himself out of bed with a mighty yawn. “Is he awake yet?” He kept his voice low, and his eye lights outlined his skull in a soft, scarlet light as his magic slowly woke with the rest of his body.

You shook your head. “Could you call in for him? He’s in no shape to work.” Carefully, you slipped from under Bucky’s hand, immediately putting a pillow beside him so that he wouldn’t roll out, and got up. “I’ll make sure he eats before I leave.”

Red yanked on a pair of pants and the uniform shirt he always wore to the shop. He laced up his boots while you scurried around the kitchen in a hurry to make breakfast and pack his lunch. A couple of toaster waffles for him to gulp down in the void, and a cold-cut sandwich slathered with mustard went into his heavy-duty cooler. The coffee timer went off in the nick of time, and you hissed as you sloshed fresh, black java over your fingers in your haste to fill up his thermos. You thrust your hand under cold water for a couple of seconds before grabbing a quick drink of orange juice from the fridge.

“I’ll let Jerry know.” He came up behind you, hands resting on your hips, and pecked your cheek. “Don’t worry so much. Bucky’s had worse happen; he’ll be fine.” You didn’t miss the tiny hitch in his voice that betrayed his own concern or the way his eyes kept drifting back to his bedroom door.

“I’ll leave my phone with him, just in case.” You pressed your back into his chest for comfort. “I love you, and try to refrain from murdering anyone on your way to work; it wouldn’t look good if you were late on your first day back.”

He spun you around, swiped his tongue over your lips, and cupped the back of your head as he kissed you. He wished he could stay, you knew that from the lingering touches and the hesitation in his eyes. The honeymoon hadn’t been long enough; you could spend forever and a day like this and it would never, ever be enough. Too soon, it was over and he took your breath with him the moment he left.

“Well, that was hot.” Bucky’s eyes were ringed with heavy bags, and his honey-gold skin remained pale. Despite that, he was smirking back at you from the bedroom doorway. “Do I get a goodbye kiss, too? I almost died, y’know, I think I earned it.”

“You don’t ever stop, do you?” You grinned and tossed a waffle at his face, which he deftly plucked out of the air and began to munch. “How are you feeling?”

“Mmph, better.” He ravenously swallowed down another huge bite of breakfast pastry. “Starvin’ and tired, and kinda cold, but it’s fine. I should get goin’ or I’ll be late.”
“Red is gonna tell your boss what happened.” You popped another waffle into the toaster for him. “You’re staying here for the day to rest up. You shouldn’t strain yourself right after losing so much blood; it could make everything worse.”

“No, no, I’m fine.” He stumbled over his own feet as he tried to walk too quickly into the kitchen, and ended up grabbing the counter for support. “Aright, I’m not fine, but—” He grinned at you sheepishly. “—I’m also not dead yet. I can handle—“

You pinched your nose frustratedly. “I’m not saying you can’t, I’m saying you shouldn’t. You can barely walk straight, so if you can tell me how you’d be able to hold a ten-pound power tool steady without losing a finger I will gladly call you an Uber.” You dropped several more waffles onto a plate and plopped it onto the coffee table along with a full cup of orange juice. “Otherwise, you’re staying here. We have Netflix, and you’re welcome to anything in the fridge except the Talisker. I’m gonna leave my phone.” You held out your cell for him to take. “To open it, the code is 7295 and the wifi password is jesuspeen, all lowercase.” He raised an eyebrow at the password, and you rolled your eyes. “Red set it, don’t ask me why, but that’s what it is. Anyway, do you need anything else at all before I jump in the shower?”

He was about to reply, but seemed to stop himself and smile. “Nah, I’m good.”

You had over two hours to get ready, but you liked to take your time with it. It was a good thing you worked so close to home because the extra time afforded you the luxury of gradually waking up, taking a long shower, and putting together an outfit at a leisurely pace. That, and it was especially handy in this circumstance because you could keep an eye on Bucky to make sure he actually had improved with a good night’s sleep.

You peeked into the living room a few times and he was apparently content. He’d sprawled out on the couch, one hand idly scratching at King’s scarred head, and the other helping him through the short stack of syrup-laden waffles. He flipped on some random show from Netflix while you were putting the finishing touches on your makeup, and was deeply invested by the time you’d snatched up your purse and packed your own midday meal.

“If you need anything, call Granny. She was a nurse at one point, so she’ll at least be able to tell if you need to go to the hospital.” You paused, your hand on the knob, and bit your lip. “Are you sure you feel well enough to be by yourself?”

“Aw, ya worry too much, Ángelita.” He put your fears to bed with a wave of his hand. “C’mere,” He welcomed you into his arms. “I promise I’ll call if I start t’ feel worse, okay? A man’s only as good as his word, and ya got mine. If I died from a pussy little cut like this, I’d have t’ hope there ain’t a God or an afterlife, ‘cuz you’d better believe I’d get cussed out by the guys when we meet back up in hell.”

You tucked your face into his neck. “I’m sorry, I just can’t stand the idea of losing any one of you. I almost had a heart attack when I saw that asshole point his gun at Chuck and…” A powerful shudder shook your entire body upon recalling it. “You can’t die, you’re not allowed.”

“Oh, I’m not allowed t’ die?” He laughed, tugging on a few loose strands of your hair. “I think that’s one rule I don’t have a problem followin’ to the letter.” He patted your back. “You should go now. Te quiero, Ángelita.”

Smiling, you stepped out of the hug. “I remember you saying that yesterday. What does it mean?”

His grin faltered a little, and he shoved his hands deep into his pockets. “Oh, just tellin’ ya to stay safe. Don’t worry ‘bout it.”
You cocked your head to the side. “Huh, it sounds so nice. I always wanted to learn another language, maybe you could teach me a little Spanish and we could tease Red with it.” You could only imagine Red’ reaction to being left out of the conversation; he’d probably get all huffy and adorably jealous. “Well, te quiero to you, too!”

Your day went moderately well; your manager handed you a huge stack of paperwork, which took most of the day to categorize and file. The other half was spent between a two-hour meeting with the owners of a small-time vegan cosmetics supplier to discuss the possibility of their products being sold under your company’s name, and another two hours on the computer doing heavy background research into the aforementioned suppliers. It wasn’t terribly demanding work, but when the clock finally read 7:00 pm your back was aching from staying still for so long and your wrists throbbed angrily from the repetitive stress of typing.

Most people would say an eight-hour shift was long enough, but your company so often required (volun-told, as many around the office loved to joke) mandatory overtime that you never expected to pull anything shorter than ten. It was a good thing they’d given you a dollar raise and that promotion because you would have otherwise been tempted to seek out something else. At least they still paid their employees time and a half, so that kinda made up for the personal time you often lost out on.

The highlight of this long day would come home to see Bucky, hopefully healthier than you’d left him, and cuddle up to Red for a relaxing evening. You daydreamed about it, your tired feet dragging you ever onward toward your goal of snuggles and a warm bed, and wondered if he would feel like queuing up a movie before taking Bucky home. You were still unwilling to concede that Bucky was well enough to return home and watching a movie with both of them would give you ample time to decide rather or not to insist he stay yet another night.

Red and blue lights, accompanied by harsh, skull-shattering sirens, shook you from your longing. A police car zoomed by, which was odd enough since the cops rarely patrolled through here, but then two more came whizzing after the first with the same urgency. “Huh, weird…” You muttered, and you were about to fall back into your fantasy when you noticed them screech to a halt in front of your building.

The heavy, clicking thuds of car doors being slammed open and shut met your ears, and it wasn’t long before the host of Ebott City’s ‘finest’ were running inside. You followed them closely, and noticed that this sudden intervention had intrigued a few of the other residents from neighboring apartments. In fact, a small crowd was gathering at a respectful distance to pay witness to the ruckus. Amongst them, a squat figure was darting around, and occasionally something in his hands would go off with a silver flash.

You stopped short of the apartment doors. Was there a bomb threat or did someone possibly set a fire? You remembered the police being called out to deal with an evictee a while back who’d tried to set the building afame by tossing a lit match into a wastebasket, but that was the only time they’d been called in the entire time you’d lived there. Curious, you flashed your apartment badge to the door scanner, and pushed through the revolving doors. There were two policemen guarding the elevator, presumably so that whomever they were after didn’t try to get out that way, and thusly blocking that way.

You dashed upstairs, taking them two or three at a time, and had to dodge the unusual amount of foot-traffic that now clogged them due to the out-of-service lifts. You reached your floor, shoved your arm into the release bar to get into the hallway, glanced toward your apartment-

-and stopped dead in your tracks. Two officers were grappling Red to the ground, while a third had a threatening hand hovering over his holster. Red wasn’t struggling at all; he was calm and his hands
were placed flat on his skull. Beside him, Bucky was being forced to the ground roughly with his hands already handcuffed. He was protesting, but doing nothing physical to impede the process. “What happened?!?” You tried to take a step forward, but your arm was roughly seized by one of the arresting officers.

“Excuse me, ma’am, but-“

“Ey!” Red snapped his head to the side, finally showing a bit of fight. “Leave ‘er outta this. She ain’t got nuthin’ t’ do with it.”

“Stay down or I will be forced to tase you!” Cried one of the cops that he allowed to hold him down.

“Look, I ain’t movin’, a’ight? Just let –fuckin’ ouch, be careful where ya shove that, will ya?” He shifted away from the business end of the taser, which the cop was now prodding him with. “Just let ‘er be. She’s pregnant for fuck sake, okay? She don’t need ya jerkin’ ‘er around like that.”

You turned to the officer who was restraining you. “Will someone please explain to me what’s happening?”

“Hell if I know.” Red scoffed from his kneeling position. “Sweetheart, don’t worry. I’m gonna go, but ya gotta call Ducky. He’ll know what t’ do.”

“Is he another one of your accomplices, monster?!” Taser-happy McAssface asked demandingly.

“Accomp- what the actual fuck? Nah, he’s my lawyer, jackass! Looks like I’m gonna fuckin’ need ‘im, too ‘cuz if ya keep tryna shove that taser up my ass I’m gonna sue you for everythin’ down t’ the fuckin’ donuts for police brutality.”

You barely had time to process the arrest before Red was forced downstairs and shoved into the back of a cop car. You were firmly, yet more gently, led back down to the lobby. A crowd of your fellow residents ogled the scene with a grotesque level of interest while you were questioned. After determining that you weren’t of use to him, the officer tucked his pad and pen back into his breast pocket and sighed. “Ma’am, you may inquire about your husband back at the station. This matter isn’t appropriate to discuss in public, and I honestly don’t wish any further stress on you, especially in your condition. I can’t guarantee you’ll be able to visit him, but you should be allowed an update on the situation.” He pulled a key from his pocket, released Bucky’s cuffs, and sighed. “I apologize, we mistook your place in all of this.”

Bucky narrowed his eyes. “Yeah? Shoulda said somethin’ to yer buddies in the beginning. I wish I had enough green t’ take yer ass t’ court.”

The officer, officer Higgens according to his nametag, wiped his hand over his brow. “You have every right to feel that way, but I’d suggest keeping that spicy mouth of yours to yourself around the rest of us.”

“Spicy? I’ll give ya fuckin’ ‘spicy’-“ You laid a hand on Bucky’s shoulder and shook your head. Now wasn’t the time, and he knew it, too, although he was understandably tetchy about all of it.

“Bucky, go home and get your brother.” You told him as soon as officer Higgens took his leave. “I’m going to go check on King, and then head down to see about Red, alright? Then, we can all figure this out together.”

“Be careful.” He warned, shooting a look at the cops as they filed back out to their vehicles. “I smell a rat. Mark my words, someone with a fat wad of cash has their hand in this.”
Perhaps, but why? You pondered as he took off. There wasn’t a motive; Red kept his head down. Sure, he’d taken out Chris and all, but he was good at that. He was careful; he knew how to avoid all those stupid mistakes that trip up most everyone else. Could it have been because of the incident with the gang yesterday? Possibly, but that was definitely self-defense and none of the opposing gang had actually been killed. They’d knocked all of them out and dropped them off at the police station precisely as Zip had said.

Your answer met you half-way across the lobby, when a grubby hand snagged yours and you were forced to turn around. In front of you, there stood a maggot in coke-bottle glasses. “You?!”

A slimy, knowing smirk spread like an evil fungus across the journalist’s face, his flash blinding you as he chuckled. “Smile for the camera!”
Nothing Really Rocks

How could this much go so wrong so painfully quickly? You backed away from the flashing camera, yet he pressed forth and followed. From all around, you heard people muttering resentfully with comments that seared your ears worse than pouring pepper juice on an open wound. They wouldn’t help you, that much was certain, and Bucky was long gone. You were backed up into a corner, half-blind both from the constant flares and your own suffering, and there was no one else.

The journalist boldly snatched at your clothes in an attempt to get a shot of your stomach, and you were fairly sure there was an audible snap as the last band of sanity you possessed was broken. One hand guarded your belly, while the other smacked his camera to the side. You caught him by complete surprise and the blow sent the hated thing flying across the room. Before he could reach it, you ran to it.

The plastic body gave way under repeated stoms. “I. Hate. This. FUCKING CAMERA!” You jumped on it with both feet, crushing it and grinding its mechanical guts into the tile-topped, concrete floor. “I hate you, and I hate this fucking thing, and I hope there’s a special place in hell for people like you!” You snatched a handful of smashed, bent plastic and threw it at his head. “If you take a step closer, I’m gonna shove it down your throat!”

“Y-you’re going to pay for that!” He shouted back furiously.

Your chest heaving, and your eyes filled with tears, you weren’t sure who you were anymore. This was too much; you’d had the world, and all your joy, cruelly stolen out of your hands. Was the universe laughing now; having repossessed your fairy tale, was it satisfied? “No, I’m going to make you pay.” You shoved a finger into his chest. “I’ve had enough! I’M NOT A FUCKING SIDESHOW ACT! I am not a doormat, and I refuse to let you, or anyone else, wipe your dirty feet on me. I’m better.” You stopped mid-sentence as the weight of what you were saying fell upon you. “I…I’m better than that.”

Plastic crunched sadly underfoot as your spark of temper died a swift death, and you stepped away from the destroyed pile. “I’m better than all of this.” You mumbled, easily pushing your way past the stammering reporter, and ran for the stairs.

If Red were here, he’d probably have pissed himself laughing, and the thought made you smile through the tears. Right now, though, he wasn’t here and it was your turn to carry the household. You had a duty to him and to the life inside you; you were going to fight to get him back. You couldn’t stand back while Red’s future was endangered by someone so despicable, so disgusting, so…so…

You shook your head to free your thoughts of that maggot, and slammed your door open so hard that it bounced off the door-stop. You caught the edge of it before it could hit you in the face, and flung it carelessly shut behind you. You hit the apartment like a tropical storm does the mainland; wet, violent, and with many flying objects.

You dumped food and water into King’s bowl, not bothering to pick up the handful of scattered kibble, and all but tore your work clothes off. You wiggled into a decently comfortable outfit before ringing up the twins. “Hey, I’m on my way.”

The conversation with Ducky was informative, if cut short by your arrival at the station, and you came armed with a list of confident questions on a quest to save your husband. A crusader seeking the spear or grail couldn’t have been more determined than you were when you marched through
those doors.

The entryway was cramped, lined with benches on which sat numerous accused with their heads hung low. Above your head, the eye-scorching lights buzzed away like a hive of angry, glowing bees. That hallway bled into a small lobby with branching paths, where you could clearly see people pacing swiftly from room to room.

The desk was manned by two people; a young man tagged as Roderick and an elderly lady with artificial, bubble-gum pink nails. Roderick sucked in a breath as soon as he took note of your approach. “Hello, ma’am, how may I help you?”

“Yes, I was wondering if my husband has been-“

“GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME, YOU IDIOT!” You revolved on the spot to face the hallway you’d just left and were shocked to see Boss being forced down on a bench to wait his turn for booking. He was putting up a decent fight for being handcuffed, although you noticed he was refraining from using magical force to free himself. Instead, he was using his innate intimidation in an attempt to stare the cops into doing his bidding.

“Ma’am?” Roderick’s voice yanked you straight back to earth.

“Sorry, I just need to know a few things about why my husband was arrested.” You tightened your hold on your purse as an officer brusquely side-stepped you in order to go through a set of re-enforced security doors. “And…um..if you can tell me how to proceed with…like…bail, I guess…that would be wonderful, thanks.”

“May I have an I.D. or a marriage certificate to prove you’re family?” He stated with a calm smile.

“We-we were married a few days ago. I haven’t received the certificate in the mail yet. It should be in any court documentation, though.” You stammered, your hope dying within seconds. You hadn’t even had a chance to change your name. How could you help Red when you couldn’t even get past the front desk?!

His smile thinned, sympathy in his eyes, and he leaned forward. “Okay, I’m going to help you, but you need to take a deep breath, alright? No one is going to ship your husband off to prison without so much as a ‘by your leave’. There’s a process for a reason.” He reached under the desk for a pen and pad of paper. “First, he’s gonna be booked. I’m sure you’ve seen all the crime shows where they bring the person in, fingerprints are taken, yadda yadda yadda, right?” You nodded. “Then, we’re going to place him in holding. We have a few cells in the back where he’ll stay until you two can schedule a bail hearing.” He scribbled a few notes down for you as he spoke. “Usually, that happens within a day or two, but it depends on the situation. Depending on the charges, he can be released on bail. However, if it’s something serious, he’ll probably stay in jail until he can be arraigned.”

“Arraigned?” You asked, uncertain what he meant.

He gave a curt nod. “That’s the formal hearing, the one where he’ll be presented with his charges and the opportunity to plead guilty or not guilty. What I suggest to you is to get in contact with his lawyer. If he doesn’t have one, then you will have to wait until a public defender is assigned to his case, which would be after his bail hearing. After the arraignment, he’ll need to attend several conferences with his lawyer, and then he will be required to attend a pre-trial hearing. It’s completely normal to experience a time lapse between the pre-trial and the trial. I can’t give you a time frame, but I can tell you it depends on what docket-“ He stopped himself upon noting your confusion. “-docket basically means category- such as civil or criminal, that the court is currently in. You might have to wait until the appropriate docket comes around again. It also depends on the number of cases
ahead of yours, the priority is age-based and in-custody versus out on bail. If your husband is kept in custody, then he would be more likely to be prioritized, but it’s not rare for some people to wait a couple of months or more to have their case go to trial.” He jotted down a few words, and a number, which he used the point of his pen to direct your attention to. “This is our station’s contact information. All inmates are automatically approved for four hours of in-person visitation per month while he stays here, and he isn’t allowed any outside food, clothing, or items. No exceptions, except in matters of religion.”

Your mind was doing cartwheels, flipping end over end, trying to process this mass of information, but everything ground to a stop. “Four hours?” Your stomach hit the floor, while your heart smashed into your throat like a ball into a bell at a carnival game.

“I understand it’s not much, but it’s still something. We also offer video visitation.” He suggested empathetically, and slid a pamphlet over the counter. “Video visitation doesn’t count toward the four-hour limit.” He tore off his notes and pressed them gently into your hands. “Our station has a designated visitation room, and, depending on the severity of his charges, we have the option of secure visitor/inmate separation as well as supervised visitation.”

“So, you’re telling me I might, or might not, only be able to talk to my husband through plate glass.” You stated in monotone, emotionally numbed by shock. “And it’ll be only four hours out of a month unless I pay-“ You checked the prices on the pamphlet. “-23.99 per 20 minutes for video visitation.”

He bobbed his head, sad lines creasing the corners of his mouth and eyes as he did, and sighed. “Yes, that is correct. It’s a federal regulation, ma’am.”

“And long as he has provided his lawyer’s contact information to us, yes.” He answered confidently. “One last thing, ma’am. Once your marriage certificate comes, please bring that in along with two valid forms of I.D., as you’ll need that to be screened in for visitation. Your husband will need to fill out his half of a visitation approval form, which will be mailed out for you to complete, and you will need to get the completed form in to us before you’re able to take advantage of in-person visitation. Video visitation will require only up-to-date information such as your driver’s license identification number, your social security number, and your date of birth.”

“Right.” You shoved his notes into your purse. However depressive and heavy this may be, there was no reason to take your feelings out on this poor man. “Thanks again. Have a good night, sir.”

The worst part was having to walk past Boss on your way out. His jaw dropped as soon as he laid eyes on you, but there was an officer keeping a close eye on everyone going in and out. Left without another choice, you sped through an explanation under your breath, slowing your steps to get every word in with the knowledge that his superior hearing could everything you said.

Walking out those revolving doors, all the while bearing this new burden, made every step feel as though you were treading through waist-deep cow shit in only a pair of wellington boots and an umbrella. Tears threatened to fall down your cheeks and you didn’t care enough to hide them anymore; instead, you meandered along with your head hung low and stared at the black splotches of gum and discarded cigarette butts that littered the sidewalk.

The spluttering roars of a pair of motorcycles pulling up to the curb tore you momentarily out of your depression. You already knew who it was, and there was true comfort in seeing the twins hopping off their bikes. “What did they say?” Ducky was admirably collected as he ever was, although he’d adopted a tone of seriousness you’d never heard from him before.
“Nothing about his charges to me, but the guy at the desk gave me an idea on the process. This isn’t something that will go away in a few weeks.” You glumly acknowledged. “He’s still being booked as far as I know. They’ll try to get ahold of you as soon as he’s done.”

“I can tell you the charges.” Bucky growled out. “Thirty counts of murder, thirty counts of assault with a deadly weapon, one of breaking and entering, one count of arson, and public endangerment. I heard it while they were puttin’ the cuffs on us.”

Oh…oh no. You were terrified you knew exactly what this was about. You fearfully met Ducky’s steady gaze. He tucked his hands behind his back. “As a lawyer, I like to operate on the idea that my clients are completely innocent.” You could read it in his eyes; he knew you knew Red was guilty. He’d be legally obligated to report your knowledge of the crime if you spoke up and that would only force Red deeper into this legal pit.

You fully understood his silent communication; he was counseling you to keep it to yourself. “That’s a good policy, really. It’s great that you try to see it that way…I-I mean…it probably helps.” You swallowed around the growing lump in your throat. “Is there anything else we can do?”

“We can only wait.” Ducky’s words incited his brother to curse and furiously kick the building. Ducky touched your shoulder. “Go home, get as much rest as you can, and I’ll call you in the morning. I’m going to handle this, Ánglita. I will fight for him, I promise.” He turned to his twin, silenced him with a sharp order in Spanish, and you were promptly deposited on the back of Bucky’s bike.

It was kind of them to drive you home, and Bucky even offered to stay another night for moral support. You refused; you couldn’t handle being around people right now. Your stomach was snarling furiously, your skull felt like you’d been sucker punched by Apollo Creed, and you were wiped out by the waves of emotions that washed over you in bouts of panic, dread, and anger. No one else should have to deal with you right now. Heck, you didn’t want to deal with you right now.

You watched with dead eyes as they drove away, and then made your way up to your cold, empty apartment.

The only sounds were yours; you shuffling like a zombie around the kitchen to make a meal of comfort food, the sound of you gulping down a glass of water, and the jingle of your purse as you threw it across the room. The low drone of the heater kicked on at some point, and you flinched hard as your eyes went to the door. The sound was painfully close to one of Red’s warps being opened, but…no. It wasn’t him.

For a year, a whole year and some change, you hadn’t spent a single night without him. Both before your relationship commenced and after, he’d always been a nighttime comfort. And, even when he worked through the meat of the night at the nightclub, he’d slept beside you in the hours between the end of one shift and the start of the next.

You tried to sleep, but the dark was suffocating you. Without him, every shadow seemed a threat. The normally cheery glow of his lava lamp seemed dull, as if even the mindless appliance was stricken with depression by his absence. You flicked the light on, smiling ruefully through tears as the overhead revealed the mess he’d left behind. Keeping his room clean was a task unending, but it wasn’t a bother to you now. You spied a discarded shirt of his, which had been bunched up carelessly and thrown atop the dresser, and took it back to bed with you.

It was pathetic, you knew, but you stuffed a pillow inside the shirt and tucked it into bed on his side. Breathing in his scent wasn’t a cure to your heart’s burning turmoil, however it did help your body instinctively relax a little. You stared at the dull glimmer of his lamp until you were seeing spots, but couldn’t look away.
The door creaked open and you saw King creep in out of the corner of your eye. A part of you registered that this was odd behavior for him, typically he slept in his bed in the living room, but now he was curled into a giant ball on the floor. You stretched out a hand to stroke his muzzle, and he pushed his head under it with a whine. Eventually, you fell into a fitful sleep with one hand still hanging over the side of the bed and wet eyes.

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Meanwhile…

The cell was as cold, white, and as sterile as a hospital room, but the air here was nearly poisonous. Its energy felt gagged; bound by the thousands of troubled or downright evil people who had passed through it. Behind him, the heavy-duty metal frame of the door slid shut, and he glanced over his shoulder to see the female officer who’d booked him. She met his eyes, and he could see conflicting emotions behind the emotionless mask she’d fronted for professionalism’s sake. She pressed a button next to the door, and the speaker on his end allowed him to hear her. “Don’t make me regret letting you keep it.” He heard her let out a heavy sigh. “Breakfast is at six, Lunch is at twelve, and supper is given at eight. Try to get some sleep, you’ll need it.” She left it at that; the subtle hint that he was going to be interrogated tomorrow didn’t pass him. He was thankful for the warning, though, as he would need some time to prepare.

Once she was gone, he took in his surroundings curiously. His bed was a ledge built into the wall with a thin mattress sheathed in blue, rip-resistant plastic, which was pretty much just a tarp stitched around a bunch of padding and cheap, metal springs. A flat pillow crowned the head of the bed, and was dressed in a similar fashion to the mattress. His bathroom was hidden into a tiny alcove and consisted of a stainless steel, single-piece sink/toilet.

He threw his scratchy, thin blanket over the sad excuse for a bed, and ripped open the hygiene packet he’d been given after they’d relieved him of his belongings. Once he’d brushed his teeth, and splashed a bit of water on his face, he was feeling a bit more in control of his situation. He flopped on the bed, and allowed the delusion that he’d be able to get sleep tonight float away into the aether. A blaring, horn-like noise sounded, and the light inside the cell was shut off, with the single exception being a caged nightlight near the ceiling in his toilet corner.

The square, brick-like pillow wasn’t comfortable at all, but he made do. He rolled to lay on his right side, and hugged it to his chest, curling one arm above and one arm under, and squeezed his sockets shut. He didn’t have the best imagination, his being a mind meant for logic and material presence, however, he did his best to pretend the stiff, unyielding pillow was you. He brought his left hand close to his face, kissed his wedding ring, and mumbled into the dark. “Love ya, sweetheart.”
A week passed. Red’s bail was posted at just under two hundred thousand dollars, although it could’ve been heart-stoppingly higher if not for his squeaky-clean record and a low flight risk. At least, that was how Ducky explained it all to you. You weren’t sure what you would have done without him; perhaps, you’d have caved and called your father.

On the other hand, you were greatly resisting the urge to bring him into the mess. For certainly this was a mess and things were rapidly deteriorating seemingly in the blink of an eye. It didn’t sit right with you, either, since he’d raised you to be self-sufficient. ‘Throwing money at a problem doesn’t solve the problem. It may make it go away for a while, but it does not solve the underlying cause.’ For all of the rockiness of your relationship, you still put faith in his experience and intelligence.

At the moment, you were listlessly staring at the tv, but paying little attention to what was going on. King plodded by you to get a quick drink, and returned to his seat by the door. He’d done this every single day; he’d faithfully observe the door, never wavering and never taking his eyes away for longer than it took for him to eat or drink. He’d even had an accident on the carpet because he’d taken to refusing to go out on walks in favor of watching the door. It was obvious what he was doing, and it shattered your heart into dust.

It didn’t help that the baby, while not yet at the point where they were making movements you could feel, was making things worse for you. Your morning sickness worsened to the point where you were unable to keep anything down. For the past two days, you’d eaten nothing except a half a packet of saltines and a few tablespoons of applesauce. Even if you felt like eating, it wouldn’t be more than fifteen minutes before you would be tossing cookies, so it was better to nibble what you could. Your pre-natal supplements were pretty much the only real nutrition you were getting now, but that couldn’t be helped.

Ducky had mentioned your haggard appearance the last time he was here. He’d even threatened to bring Hazel over, although that was less of a true threat and more of a promise. Granny, too, had been by with a ridiculous amount of chicken soup…and then held your hair back as you promptly threw it all up. The rest of the Fangs would drop by once or twice a day to check in. Today, it had been Sly. He’d stayed for around an hour, and basically upheld a one-sided conversation about anything and everything. You felt awful about it, but you also couldn’t bring yourself to be invested in entertaining guests. You’d never say anything, of course, because you knew they were trying to show you they cared in their own way.

Your co-workers had noticed, too. In fact, you were supposed to be at work right now, but your manager had made you leave after you nearly collapsed while leaving the restroom. You wicked away a bead of sweat from your forehead and huddled further into your blanket burrito. Hot and cold flashes came with pregnancy, but you were cycling through them so rapidly that you couldn’t be bothered to do so much as kick off your blanket. It didn’t matter because, in just a few minutes, you’d feel like you’d got caught naked in a Canadian snowstorm.

So, of course, with all of this going on in your head, you didn’t notice the insanely quiet knock at the door. It was barely more than a tap, but what you did notice was King leaping up and nosing the doorknob urgently. “It’s open.” You called out. It was probably Granny again, or maybe even the twins. There was a moment of silence, perhaps hesitation, before the knob began to turn and the door opened.

An unpleasantly familiar head of ginger curls poked through the gap. “Uh…hi.” You shot up as Silas sheepishly smiled. “So, I-“
“What the hell are you doing here?” You struggled to throw off the blanket, to find something to arm yourself, because there was no way this creep would have the nerve to come back other than to get some kind of twisted revenge. Since Red had nearly killed him, he was likely to be out for blood. “Stay away from me! Did you not learn your lesson the first time?!”

“Look, sugarti— I mean, uh…” He stepped partially inside, and your mouth gaped open at the fact that King let him come in. King simply sniffed at Silas’s shoes, gave him a warning snort, and trotted off to his bed. “Right… I know we got off on the wrong foot, but in light of everythin’ that’s happened… I wanted to, you know, a-apologize.” He edged a bit further in the door, clearly taking the fact that nothing sharp was being brandished his way as a good sign. “For… well… for everything, I guess. For grabbin’ ya, for not takin’ ‘no’ as an answer, and being an all-around asshole.” He closed the door behind him with a soft click and was finally able to get a good look at you. “H-holy shit, you look like hell warmed over!”

You wiped a hand over your sweaty, greasy face, and there was acid in your smile. “Thanks.”

He paled a little. “Sorry… I just… I wasn’t prepared t’ see ya like this. Last time I saw you, you were… sorry for being blunt, but you didn’t look like a fuckin’ corpse.”

You raised your shoulders in a careless shrug. “Yeah, well… you know. Anyway, you’ve apologized. You can go now.”

“Hey now, hold on.” He held up a hand to stop you from curling miserably back up in your blanket. “Hazel sent me to check up on you. She can’t come right now, she got called in the hospital for an emergency, but she told me to stay here until she can stop by herself. Apparently, one of your friends stopped in and told her he was worried ‘boutchya.” He frowned. “An’ I guess I can see why.”

“She couldn’t have sent— I dunno… literally anyone else.” You groaned and turned to bury your face in the couch cushion.

“I know I was an asshole, and I said I’m sorry.” He snapped back. “Don’t be a bitch t’ me when I’m tryin’ t’ do the right thing.”

You sat back up, glaring. “I’m sorry I’m hesitant to forgive the guy who pretty much tried to have his friends kidnap me.” You hissed waspishly. “I’m sorry I’m feeling a bit on edge because I haven’t been able to eat enough food in the past two days to keep a fucking mouse alive. I’m sorry I’m irritable because I can’t sleep because the fucking heartburn is keeping me up, and my feet are killing me, and I feel like I need to piss every ten minutes. I’m sorry I can’t be a perky little princess when my husband is being charged with mass murder, alright?!”

He pinched the bridge of his freckled nose. “You know what? You’re right, sorry. I’m still working on the temper and empathy bits of this whole ‘turning over a new leaf’ thing. I shouldn’t have called ya a bitch, that was outta line. You have no reason t’ trust me, I get that, but at least let me start t’ try to prove I’m workin’ on being better, okay?”

Your shoulders drooped, and you felt your heart drop. You were supposed to be the understanding one, you were supposed to be the one who always tried to see things from another point of view; that was what the people around you relied on you for, and you’d failed him. Of course, he’d be upset. Maybe, if you weren’t so selfishly caught up in your own panic and depression, you’d have realized that sooner. “N-no, you’re right. I’m stressed out, but I shouldn’t have taken that out on you.” You moved your feet off the couch to make room. “You’re probably tired from the long walk, too.”

He sat down, taking care to put as much distance between the two of you as possible, and shook his head. His curls were growing back, but there were still some thin spots on his scalp where puckered
pink scars marred the skin. “I’m still working on gettin’ on without the crutches.” He admitted. “I’m always sore.”

“I… I’m sorry.”

He shrugged. “Nah, I deserved it. If it wasn’t Red, it woulda been someone else. Kinda glad it was Red, t’ be honest. Most people I’ve talked to seem to think he’s a good guy, not that I’d want to go try being buddy-buddy with ‘im, but that’s probably my bias.” He tapped the side of his scarred face with a grin. “An’ I can admit, he’s got good taste in women.”

You scoffed, but the compliment still brought a blush to your cheeks. “Don’t let him catch you saying that.”

He threw up his hands. “Nope, nope! I’ve learned my lesson, I swear. You’re off-limits….doesn’t mean I can’t say I’m still a little jealous. Hard to find girls or guys as good as you, sweetheart.”

You blinked, trying to process what he’d just said, and your mouth fell open in surprise. “You?! No way, I can’t believe-”

He winked. “What did you think the guy upstairs would want me to keep this gorgeous face only for the ladies?” He waved a hand in the air. “I belong to everyone, lady, an’ that’s a fact.”

You scratched your eyes. “I’m starting to think you haven’t learned your lesson at all.”

He rolled his eyes. “Yeah, well, old habits die hard.” He let his eyes stray to the tv. “Whatchya watchin’?”

“Honestly, I have no idea. I wasn’t paying attention.” You grabbed the controller from the coffee table an offered it to him. “Knowing Hazel, you might be here for a while do you want to-“ The controller slipped from your hands as a sudden, sharp pain in your abdomen made you gasp for air.

He jumped up, terror flashing in his blue eyes, and put both hands on your shoulders. “What’s wrong?!”

You doubled over, both hands now clutching your stomach, and tears welling at the corners of your eyes. “I don’t –ah!- I don’t know!” It felt like the worst kind of period cramps. “I’m –oh- I’m not due for another six months!” Your heart was beating wildly in your chest, and the two of you looked at each other in utter horror. “No, no, no, please no.”

“I’m calling 911.” He hesitated with his fingers on the green ‘call’ button, while you let out a pained moan. “Strike that, I’m calling Hazel and then I’m calling 911. Just… just hold on, okay?” You clutched your stomach, praying with every ounce of strength you had left that this wasn’t what you thought it was, and listened as he stuttered through an explanation to Hazel. “Is she what?” His voice went an octave higher, and he glanced your way. “No, I’m not doing that. He’d kill me.” He listened to Hazel, who from you could hear was practically screaming in his ear, and then motioned to you. “Alright, alright! Sweetheart, can you check…er…down there and tell me if there’s blood?”

You turned away from him to check. “N-no, is that good or bad?!”

“No blood.” He relayed to Hazel, and he visibly relaxed. “Okay, right. Of course, I’m gonna make sure she comes to the hospital! I’m an asshole, but I’m not an idiot. Jesus, woman!” He ended the call in the middle of Hazel’s snappy retort, and called for an ambulance.

Forty-five minutes later, you were laid out on a hospital cot and Hazel’s hands laid over your stomach. She was looking much worse for the wear, but thankfully not nearly as bad off as you
were. After several minutes, she let out a sigh of great relief. “You’re both fine. It’s just a bunch of Braxton Hicks. You probably felt them come on more strongly because you’re dehydrated from the morning sickness. I’m going to prescribe you some stronger medications for that, and a mild sedative to help you sleep. It won’t harm the baby, don’t worry, it’s magic-based.” She reassured you. “I know that this is hard for someone with anxiety issues, but please try not to work yourself up too much.”

“I’m sorry, I’ve been trying!” You countered. “I’ve done everything; aromatherapy, warm baths, meditation, special pills, all the diets…nothing works for me. The only time I’m able to relax is with Red! I don’t know why, maybe it’s something to do with his magic, but he is literally the only thing keeping me sane sometimes.”

Hazel’s magic slowly evaporated from her palms, and seeped into the air as an emerald smoke before dissipating. “I’m going to see what I can do about getting a medical order to give you more time with him. Obviously, this is a huge risk to not only your baby, but to you as well. This baby’s soul is currently linked to yours, it’s deriving all of its energy from you, and if that connection is severed or hindered in any way…” She trailed off. “Monsters are extremely fragile when it comes to emotions; things that humans can endure in mere misery, such as depression, can kill them—“

“I know, believe me, I know.”

She rubbed her temples ruefully. “Okay, so we need to prove that an exception must be made for you. First, I’ll need to gather up a few articles to educate them, and then we’ll probably need to provide proof of your struggles with mental health – actually, you know what would be easier?”

You let your head roll to the side. “I’m too exhausted to guess. If you have a plan, please tell me. I’m kind of out of options right now.”

“Do you know how much his bail is? I was going to go down for Papyrus today, anyway, so I can just do both of them.”

You struggled to sit up in the plastic-lined bed. “Oh no, I-I couldn’t ask that of you!”

She smiled and pushed you back down. “You’re not asking. I’m offering. It’s really nothing. How much is it?”

“One hundred and fifty thousand dollars.” You gritted your teeth as another false contraction pulsed through your lower body. “Red wouldn’t want me to let you…it’d be too much.”

“Well, then I’ll just see what I can do about getting that medical order.” She put her fingers to your wrist. “Hm, your heart is still going a bit fast. I’m going to give you a dose of that sedative while you’re here. It should also help a bit with the pain, since it acts as a muscle relaxer, too. Also, I’m going to have Kevin bring you a couple of water bottles, and I promise I won’t let you leave this hospital until you’ve drunk them both.”

She pushed your hair out of your eyes. “Everything will turn out well in the end, you’ll see.

You wanted to believe her, you truly did, but it seemed like there were leagues of hardship for you yet to cross. Bills, conferences, pre-trials, and mountains of red tape and legal jargon to traverse—it all seemed like a most miserable journey with no true end in sight. And if you couldn’t see the end, you couldn’t believe it actually existed at all.
“What do you mean ‘you can’t make an exception’?!” Hazel’s grip on the medical articles, as well as your own mental health history, threatened to rip the stack of paper in half. “Did you hear me? Monsters can die from this shit!” She puffed a heated breath of air through her nose like a pissed-off, cartoon bull.

Officer Roderick was clearly struggling to keep the pleasant smile on his face. “Ma’am, I understand that, but federal regulations were set with humans in mind. There are so many laws to change in order to accommodate monsters, it may take a decade or more for everything to be properly amended. As of right now, though, all I can do is recommend that you send a letter to our senator about your concerns.”

“Hazel, it’s not his fault. He didn’t make the rules, but it’s his job to follow them.” Officer Roderick shot you an intensely grateful smile, which immediately disappeared as Hazel threw the impressive stack on his side of the counter.

“I know for a fact that your sister station allows in-person visitation for inmates as often as four half-hour sessions per week.” She informed him with a smug smile. She’d clearly done her research over the past day and a half, although this new information left you speechless. “Now, I’ve never been awesome at math, but I’m pretty sure that adds up to way more than just four hours per month.”

“Yes, ma’am.” His Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed. “The harsher limit was set due to the severity of Mr. Osseus’s charges.”

“Excuse me, but that’s bullshit and you know it.” She hissed back.

“Hazel, regardless of whether it is or not, we can’t fight their system.” Defeated, you slid your marriage certificate over the counter. “Here, I’d like to start the process of in-person visit paperwork today.” He tried to give you a clipboard to fill in your information, but Hazel stayed your hand.

“Honey, does this man even know who your father is?! You have money…I have money. You can fight them on this!” She reminded you with a gleam of defiance in her bright eyes. “Look, this is-“

“I don’t want to bring my father or my family’s financial situation into this.” You interrupted, straightening up and lifting your chin proudly. “If I buy Red out, that doesn’t prove his innocence to the public.” Despite the fact that he was technically guilty, those assholes he’d murdered were barely human in the first place. He didn’t deserve to rot in jail; that wasn’t true justice. “We’re going to muddle through this mess, and we’re going to do it properly.”

Hazel stared at you, jaw open wide enough to catch flies, and blinked repeatedly out of disbelief. “Are you serious?

“Deadly so.” You bobbed your head. “We have a lawyer, and the only thing I’m going to ask my dad for help with are the fees and court costs. Red wouldn’t want me to bail him out, and he definitely wouldn’t want us to try to use my family’s influence to make them do anything. If they want to try to bully us, fine, but I won’t stoop to their level. We’ll play their game and win.” You were past the point of freaking out. You’d hit rock bottom, but you were gonna climb out of this hole no matter what. Red was depending on you, as were the baby and King, and you would have to be the grounding element until this storm blew over. You had to show Red he didn’t have to worry about you if…if the worst happened.
“You’re…you’re giving up?”

“No.” You sighed, flipping the paper over to fill out the back. “I’m going to pay for the video calls.” You glanced over at officer Roderick, who was looking sickly pale and watching Hazel with fearful eyes, and cleared your throat to regain his attention. “You told me yesterday those won’t count toward the limit. Does that still apply today? Will it change at the station’s discretion?”

“Um…yes, that’s…yes ma’am you’re absolutely correct. It will not change.” Curious, you followed his gaze and noted with bitter amusement that Hazel’s clenched fists were spitting emerald sparks.

“How many am I allowed per day?”

“O-one, ma’am.” He took a subtle, small step away from the desk.

“Yes, but is that one lasting twenty minutes or one extended call?” You inquired, secretly harboring a touch of envy toward Hazel. You were never able to intimidate people, even if you threw an angry fit, and she didn’t need to yell to make this guy cower.

“One extended, but n-no more than an hour long.” He answered quickly. “Is that everything?” He flinched as you shoved the paperwork to his side of the counter. In your opinion, it served him right for acting so deceitfully helpful and falsely sympathetic last week.

“Am I allowed to call him today?” You inquired curtly, keeping your voice calm and your point clear, although your insides were a frothy, bubbling mess of anxiety.

“Yes…um…I can say that is…erm…y-yes.” His hairline was glossed by perspiration.

“Then I’m going to do just that.” You were going for a dignified exit, so you tensed your muscles stiffly to stave off the nervous tremors, spun on your heel, and walked right out of the station.

Hazel, however, paused before the revolving door. Her eyes glinted brilliantly as princess-cut emeralds for only half a second, and then all at once the papers, folders, and various objects on officer Roderick’s desk went flying in all directions. A suspiciously satisfied smirk curved her lips upon stepping out onto the crumbly, aged sidewalk. “I hope you know what you’re doing.”

“Not a clue, I’m afraid.” You let out a tiny, insane giggle. “As Red would say, I’m just gonna have to wing it.” You cackled hard and loud, self-control was thrown out the window, and static prickled along your skin. You felt jittery and your movements were jerky like a puppet being pulled along. Your own sheer determination was forcing you along, yanking and plucking at your strings, while your rational mind was nearly shut down.

“Are you…are you alright?” Hazel placed a guiding hand on the small of your back. “Angel, sweetie, I think we need to get you home. You’re manic again, and that’s not a good sign.” She led you firmly, yet gently straight back to your apartment.

You couldn’t sit still. You hadn’t slept well or eaten much in so long, and the nausea medication hadn’t kicked in, but your body was suddenly in overdrive. Stomach acid clawed at your throat, your body protesting the smell of the honeyed oatmeal Hazel was preparing for you, as you paced the length of the living room. You picked up and re-organized things, and ran the vacuum just for something to keep your shaking hands busy. You scrubbed the bathroom spotless, did the laundry, and even dusted.

Meanwhile, Hazel looked on without a word. She called you into the kitchen, but wasn’t surprised when you barely touched the small bowl of food she’d prepared. “Still feeling sick?”
You poked the steamy mound of mush with the tip of your spoon. “Not terribly. I know I should eat, but I’ve got this weird…I dunno how to describe it, but I guess it kinda feels like I drank a bottle of straight vodka on an empty stomach and then chased it with a couple of Monsters.” You brought the spoon tip up to your mouth, chewed slowly, and swallowed with a grimace. “Sorry.”

“I just want to make sure you’re alright before I leave to bail out Papyrus.” She rinsed out the pot she’d used to boil the oats, and put it into the dish rack to dry. “Are you going to call Red after I go?”

“Yeah.” You forced down another mouthful of oatmeal. Typically, you didn’t mind the stuff, but your current state made it taste like bland slime. “At this rate, I’m surprised they will let him speak with me at all.”

“I’m pretty sure that would be illegal.”

You shrugged. “And them practically isolating him isn’t? You know as well as I do why he’s being treated like this, and it has nothing to do with the charges he’s facing.” You pinned her with a knowing look. “It’s not just that, either. It’s this whole fucking city, Hazel! Murder, theft, rape… hundreds of people that the system loves to ignore or abuse…constant gang wars…” You shoved the bowl away from you so hard it skidded and nearly tipped over onto the floor. “If my entire life wasn’t here -you, Red, Boss, the Fangs, and Granny- I’d have convinced myself to give up living in this cesspool after a few months.” You got up, and the chair slid back with a deafening squeal. “How am I supposed to raise a child in a place like this?! Should I just be okay with the fact that a bullet could come flying through my wall at any moment?” You pinched your nose and gritted your teeth.

“You said you were going to fight.” She reminded you calmly.

“And I meant it!” You shot back. “But that doesn’t mean I can change everything!”

“Why not?” She leaned back against the sink. “There are thousands of people who feel the same way. The real problem is that everyone has lived this way for so long, it has become normal. We need to shock them out of it. Wasn’t it Eisenhower who said the best way to solve a problem is to make it bigger?” She reached out to pick up your bowl and scraped the remains into a Tupperware for later. “Talk to Red, don’t mention anything to him, but I’ve got a few ideas, alright?”

“Okay…” You scrunched your brow up in confusion. “Do you mean we’re going to print out flyers or something? March around in a circle on Rose and Main?”

“Or something.” She smiled mysteriously, tucking her purse under her arm, and stepped past King on her way to the door. “By the way, do you know if David is still staying with Granny?”
You glared at the revolving circle on your blacked-out, phone screen. You’d been waiting on the video equivalent of hold for the past ten minutes while whatever had to be done to get Red on the line was happening. You weren’t entirely sure how these video calls worked, although maybe it was similar to how prisoners sometimes went to booths with phones to speak to their loved ones; only this might be a booth full of shitty, low-tech tablets specifically used for these types of calls. At least, that’s what you imagined while you waited for that darn circle to go away.

“Babe?” You heard his voice several seconds before the pixelated video loaded, but it hit you like a truck to the chest. “Hey, is this fuckin’ thing workin’ or—holy fuckin’ hell on a hotcake, what the fuck happened t’ ya?” The lighting on his side of the screen was blindingly white, reflecting off of snow-white walls to create a lens glare that left him partially shadowed by comparison.

“I’m fine, don’t worry about me.” You touched the screen and traced the outline of his face. He shifted slightly forward on instinct, and then seemed to recall the reality of the situation. “It’s morning sickness. I’m going through a rough patch with it, but Hazel has me on some meds and prescription-strength vitamins to help. What about you? Have you been able to talk to Ducky?”

“Yeah, I have. We got this under control, me an’ him, so don’t go fussin’ about it. I’ll be out in no time, sweetheart.” The glow of his eye lights pulsed and shimmered softly. “Stars, you look like hell, but yer still gorgeous. Ya know I can get mail, right? Did they tell ya that?”

“Um…no.” You shook your head as a surge of temper reared its snake-like head inside your heart. “God-fucking-damnit, they barely told me anything. They said I’m hardly allowed to see you, that I have to pay out the ass for these shitty calls—”

“Hey, sugar, don’t waste yer energy gettin’ upset with these bastards, awright?” He chuckled a little to himself. “Kinda hot t’ hear ya curse like that, though.” A slick grin spread over his face.

“You’re incorrigible.” You rolled your eyes, yet you could restrain a giggle. “How are they treating you?”

“Three squares a day, my own cell, and a bed, so it could be way worse.” He shrugged, seemingly unaffected. “Only thing wrong is yer not here an’ it’s drivin’ me up the fuckin’ wall. Mating instincts, ya know? Kills me that yer all alone in the fuckin’ apartment. Keep havin’ these goddamn ‘what if’ kinda thoughts and you know I ain’t the type t’ worry, but all this shit has got me on edge.”

“What do you mean?” You asked, puzzled. He was definitely not one to get nervous; you’d seen him literally laugh in the face of danger, so what had him stressed besides the obvious?

“Ya ain’t heard? Oh shit, that’s right, you hate watchin’ the news…CNN is ‘bout the only thing they ever have on in the cafeteria here.” He rubbed his forehead wearily. “You know the gang that runs the area down by the park?” Youbobbedyourheadaffirmatively. “Yeah, so ‘parently, they’re pretty bad for break-ins an’ burglaries, and they been lookin’ t’ expand up through Busch Avenue with their ‘business’ lately. Lots of places been robbed in the past couple of days, and it’s all happenin’ dangerously close t’ our street. The club already knows, I checked with Ducky on that, and they’re gonna be comin’ around a helluva lot t’ make sure nuthin’ happens.”

“What about Granny, though?!” The elderly lady may be capable of taking care of herself, but realistically she wasn’t a match for ruthless, armed bangers fifty years her junior.
“Yeah, they’ll be comin’ t’ check on her, too, no worries.” He reassured you. “Wish I could fuckin’ be there. It’s drivin’ me nuts, sugar, I need t’ be with ya. My magic’s been goin’ fuckin’ haywire all week, probably ‘cause you’ve been sick. Felt like ya were in a lotta pain a couple days ago, what was that all about?”

“Braxton-Hicks contractions.” You explained, wincing a bit at the memory. “Hazel said they’re typically a lot less intense, but the morning sickness made them worse.” You’d answered so automatically, you didn’t even stop to think about his question. “Wait…wait, you could feel them?”

“The bond, sweetheart, I got a bit of yer Soul inside me.” He stated this fact with a hint of pride. “But that ain’t enough.” He reached out toward the screen, dragging the sharpened tips of his phalanges across it lovingly. “I’m supposed t’ be there for this. I know it’s kinda strange from a human’s perspective, but monsters…just trust me, it ain’t pleasant for me t’ be locked away from ya right now. It’s wearin’ on my fuckin’ nerves an’ if I don’t get some face-time with you before the end of the fuckin’ week I swear I’m gonna-“

“Red, these calls are recorded.” You murmured. “Best not say things that might get held against you, okay?”

He groaned and narrowed his eyes. “I’m tryin’, sweetheart.” He crossed his arms, leaning back in the ugly, gray plastic chair to glare at something off-camera. “Listen, I left a present for ya before all this bullshit started.” He said the words slowly, his attention re-focusing on you as he slid the chair closer and leaned into the screen. “Look under the bed.”

“Red, you’re not making any sense.” Still, you looked down out of reflex and jumped so hard you nearly dropped the phone.

A warp…he’d opened up a tiny warp. Through it, you could see only a few things; dingy floor tiles, the gray overhang of a desk, and a familiar pair of legs. “Sorry, s’not much. Just something I threw together last minute. Better than nuthin’, right?” You tore your eyes away from the warp and he was smiling broadly. On screen, he slipped one hand out of view as he reached through the warp. You slipped your hand into his without a thought, squeezing hard and feeling relief when he squeezed back. “This place is pretty secure, ya know, even kinda good at containing monsters, too. Some of the guards are half-decent mages, none of ‘em quite as good as our Hazel, though, still it’s enough t’ keep me from…well, you know.” He said conversationally. “‘Sides that, it’s pretty hard t’ find places that afford a bit of privacy, especially with the overload of people they got runnin’ through at all hours, but nighttime is the slowest and fewer assholes are payin’ real attention. Not allowed t’ have cameras in the bathrooms, either, so there’s a few nice places and times of day t’ get some personal time.”

“Well, at least you can peacefully take a shit.” You remarked sarcastically, even as you pondered the meaning of this sudden change in his demeanor. He was so oddly casual and calm as he leaned back with one arm draped around the back of the creaky, plastic seat.

“Anyway, looks like our time is almost up, sweetness. Ring me up t’morra, awright?” His phalanges flexed around yours one last time, opened your palm up and stroked all the way down to the pads of your own fingers before finally releasing his grip. “Oh, an’ gorgeous?” You searched his sockets for answers, but he kept his thoughts carefully hidden behind that well-constructed facade of calm. “Take better care of yerself. I’ll wantchya lookin’ yer finest when I come home.”

You nodded numbly, biting your lip as you glanced down at your crumpled clothes. You didn’t look presentable at all, and you didn’t want him to worry. “Love you, I’ll see you soon.”

He winked conspiratorially at you. “Time flies, sweetheart. It’ll be sooner than ya think.” The timer
on the video blinked red and his screen froze on that audacious wink as an audible message played in a female, computerized voice.

“Your original call has timed out. To extend this call, tap the green EXTEND button. To end this call, please tap the red END button.” You smashed the red button fiercely, threw the phone aside, and jumped into the shower; you had only a few minutes to prepare.

Clothes first, and then gulping down the remainder of the oatmeal snowcone Hazel’s food had become, you grabbed everything you needed before dialing her number. She picked up without hesitation. “I was just about to call you.” You could hear the smile in her voice. “Get over to Granny’s. We’re about to throw some gasoline on this bonfire.”

It took all of twenty minutes to get to Gran’s apartment, half of it being time spent on convincing King to abandon his station at the door, to find a small circle of your fellows lounging about with expectant looks. All of the Fangs, and a few others you didn’t recognize, as well as Granny, the DJ from your wedding (you thought his name might have been Victor, but you weren’t entirely sure), Silas, and David. You took special note of the voice recorder David held and the expensive, professional camera that hung from a strap around his neck. “So, what’s the plan?”

“Like I said.” David handed Hazel the voice recorder, and she held it out in front of your mouth. “We’re adding fuel to the fire. Tell David everything, don’t leave out a single detail, and when you’re done…” She grinned at the Fangs. “Well, that’s where everyone else comes in.” She twitched her fingers at Silas, motioning him to come closer. “Show her.”

Silas ran a hand through his short, frizzy curls, his fingers rubbing at the puckered scars along his scalp, while the other dug in the deep pockets of his dirty mechanic’s jumper. After a minute, he tossed a cheap, dime store mask on the coffee table. There lay, grinning up at you with a latex smirk, a skeleton mask. It was old; the white ‘bones’ were yellowed with age and dirt, and the neckline was frayed by the stretch of being yanked over heads for years.

You stared at it blankly, mind working through every conceivable meaning to the creepy thing, until Silas waved a hand in front of your face. “’Ey, earth t’ Angel?” You looked up to find him appearing prouder than you’d ever seen him. “The night before Red’s trial, we’re gonna light a fire under a few asses, and this-“ He shook the mask pointedly. “-this is Red’s Get Out of Jail card. Everyone’s gonna get all gussied up in these babies an’ take this to every single major gang in the city. Pretty hard t’ tell a mask from a monster from a distance, y’ know?”

“A…a riot? We’re going to start a-“ Low chuckles from around the room cut you off. Hazel pushed the voice recorder into your hands. “Who’s idea was this?!?”

“Mine.” Silas proudly replied. “Makin’ a stink is what I’m best at. Figured I might as well do it for the right side.” He glanced around the room. “Everyone here is a friend; a friend of mine, of yours, or Hazel’s. There’s forty fuckin’ people in this apartment an’ every single one of ’em is sick and goddamn tired.” He crossed his arms and straightened his posture. He made an impressive figure; his flaming hair flipped about with every passionate toss of his head, and his muscles strained under the stress of his own conviction. “Ain’t none of us gonna sit the hell back while our friends, our families, are in danger. And, no matter how much bullshit the cops and the government feeds us, they are in danger. There ain’t no one safe while these gangs run the streets, so this is our breaking point.” He motioned at one of his pals, one of the few whose face you hadn’t recognized, and a handgun joined the mask on the table. “Now, I never paid much attention in school-“ Hazel scoffed at that, and he smoothly flipped her the bird. “-but, somethin’ that stuck with me was this; ‘When governments fear the people, there is liberty. When people fear the government, there is tyranny’. Some people like to say that’s a bullshit quote, but I ain’t never bothered with technicalities an’ I ain’t gonna start now.
Whoever the hell said it, for whatever the fuck reason, what stands as truth is this; we’re not gonna take it anymore. We’re done puttin’ lives in the hands of people who treat us like puppets and piggy banks.”

A bag of costumes, bought from second-hand stores and .99 cent shops, was tossed on the table. “Bought with cash by kids from the slums with no connection to us. They know what we’re doing there, Boss’s friends’ve already passed it around. Lots of ‘em have lost family t’ the gangs, an’ we wouldn’t ask ‘em t’ fight with us, but they wanted to do something. Mothers and fathers, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, second cousins twice-removed…they bought a fuckton of these things. Other costumes, too, and never more than one or two at a time so it wouldn’t look suspicious.” Hercules explained.

“We’re not going to use guns. They’re trained to piece that kind of evidence together an’ we ain’t got the time to make any of it untraceable or the funds to buy enough anyway.” Zip chimed in. “We gotta use unconventional shit.”

“Which is where I come in.” Your head shot up in surprise as your father wiggled his way through the crowded apartment to stand beside you. “No one would take a second glance if a commercial farmer ordered gardening tools and generic fertilizer in bulk, would they?” He smiled placidly. “Daughter, were you aware that, in the Vietnam war, supplies were often so short on hand we were forced to learn how to build and repair our own weapons?” He hooked an arm around your shoulders. “Including, mind you, our own explosives?” He kissed your head. “To answer the question you didn’t ask, Donald called me.”

“Told ya, pops, just call me Ducky when I’m outta the suit.” He popped his collar to add a dramatic flair.

“Ah yes, pardon me.” Your father beamed warmly back. “So, my boys and girls, first young David writes his article, and then you all start making tiny attacks on the gangs; attrition warfare, only enough to gather the attention of those whose interests are invested in this. Let people know who we are and what we stand for, so they may be more inclined to stand with us.”

“And on the night of the trial…Judgement Day?”

“No.” David corrected Granny as he pulled a paper pad and pen from his pocket. “Firelight Night.”
The Seeds of Discord

In these modern, more civilized times, it wouldn’t be amiss to expect fair treatment and humanity from your fellow people. Looking around, you see countless charities and acts of goodwill from everyday people: small acts which depict our resilience and true nature as a species. When you witness these things, does it not warm your heart?

And yet...and yet, right here in our good city, there are those who thrive on misery and feast on the spilled lifeblood of innocents. In fact, I would chance it to say there are more of those willing to do violence than there are those of us willing to stand against it. That, my dearest readers, is where our city has failed us; where we have failed ourselves and our children. And what would you say, if you were to know the truth? How those who do right, or whose only crime is being different, are being punished for upholding noble values? Wouldn’t you be, and rightly so, ready to petition for justice?

Such is the case of one Sans ‘Red’ Osseus, a man like you or I, a devoted husband and father-to-be, and an upstanding member of our community. Perhaps more upstanding than, dare I claim it, some amongst Ebott City’s finest, although I shall merely leave that particular subject for a separate article. Of course, I digress, and shall return to the point at hand; Sans Osseus was arrested, allegedly on a gratuitous number of felony charges, at 9:58 pm on the night of September 23.

Mr. Osseus was resting at his neat apartment, merely enjoying a night of friendly company, when the Ebott City police broke in and forced him, and his companion, down. According to both his companion, one James Vargas, as well as Mr. Osseus’s wife, both Mr. Vargas and Mr. Osseus complied with the entire affair. Despite this, they were battered and threatened, while his wife was unprofessionally manhandled away from the incident and interrogated. And no, my dear readers, she was certainly not making a scene or interfering. (If I may make a small interjection, please let it be known that Mrs. Osseus was then allowed to be subjected to harassment by an associate of the Lincoln Testimonial Press within full view of said police officers, and who went so far as to attempt to assault her. My condolences go to this poor woman, who shouldn’t have ever experienced such a thing, and especially not whilst pregnant.)

“Where is the evidence?” You may ask.

And I applaud you for believing first the best of our honored officers, however, I can merely direct you to the footage from Mr. Osseus’s apartment building. All that you would need to do is type the link at the bottom of this article to watch police both enter the building, break into Mr. Osseus’s apartment (without a warrant, if I may so add), and force our good neighbors to their knees.

Now, our dear friend and neighbor is residing in Ebott City Police Department’s holding cells whilst he awaits his trial. Due to the assortment and degree of charges, he may not taste freedom for many months, and if he is found guilty by some failure of our justice system, then he may never do so at all. Sadly, this could mean he will miss the birth of his child, nor be there to comfort his wife. And, if I may add, it seems that the justice system has taken the idea of “guilty by association” to heart and applied similar charges to his younger brother.

Now, tell me, does this sit right with you? Does it settle well into your heart of hearts considering – nay, knowing! - that such a thing may happen to you? To your son? To your daughter, mother, sister, or brother? Or...even, heavens forbid it, to yourself? Truly, what has our beautiful city become, when an innocent man is abused and arrested, his wife treated without care, and all of this done without heed to the legal procedure?

A monster Mr. Osseus may be, but is it possible that Ebott City Police are the real evil on this day? I
leave it to you to form your opinions, as it is merely my duty to report the facts. Unlike many of those of us alive today, I can proudly say that I, for one, am without negative bias.

~This article was written and submitted to The Ebott Post by Mr. David H. Steel.

“This is amazing, David.” You folded the newspaper up and laid it back down on Granny’s table. You were there again today, it was the fourth time in the two weeks since Silas and Hazel had outlined the plans for Firelight Night, and you were not at all disappointed by the progress so far. The article had made it to the second page, which wasn’t exactly a headliner, but it was better than anything they could have hoped for. “You’ve got talent.”

“Yeah, well, I couldn’t have written it if I didn’t have your testimony.” A shy smile brightened his face. “I showed our initial interview to the editor-in-chief at The Ebbot Post, and he’s paid me for a typed-up, word-by-word version of it to publish tomorrow. Apparently, this month’s copy is selling like hotcakes on a cold morning.” He took a long sip of his coffee. “And, let me tell you, it isn’t because of that bullshit, placating headliner about the mayor visiting Ebott Mercy.”

“I am still not happy about shaking that man’s hand.” Hazel grimaced. “I couldn’t wash my hands enough to get that politician’s grease off my skin.”

“Shit, Hazel, I don’t envy ya, but we still gotta at least act like we’re playing their game.” Silas, chocolate chip cookie in hand, yanked open the fridge and poured himself a giant glass of milk. “They’re playing football and we’re playin’ soccer, but we only win if they think it’s the same thing.”

“That’s actually an intelligent analogy.” Hazel observed, surprised.

Silas chugged his milk. “Y’know, you’re actually a massive bitch today. Did ya know? Or has hanging out with our sweet, little Angel got you spoiled?” He grinned as she chucked one of Granny’s handmade, embroidered couch pillows at his head. He dodged easily enough and winked. “Too slow, sweetheart.”

“She’s not a bitch, Silas. She’s…erm…assertive and mildly abrasive when she isn’t feeling up to socialization.” You rebuked him lightly with a worried glance in Hazel’s direction. She’d been splitting herself between the plans for Red’s trial and her work, and you had a feeling she was missing out on sleep again. Sometimes, you wondered if she slept at all, or if she’d resigned herself to running on coffee and willpower like some kind of magical, Energizer Bunny.


The door slammed open and the twins stepped inside. They were both swinging discreet, paper grocery bags flecked with wet spots of what you could reasonably guess was blood. “Ragged Angels this time.” Bucky said, by way of explanation. “We picked off one or two. Got ‘em in the head with a couple of pitchforks during a drug deal.”

“Did anyone see you?” You asked hopefully.

“The shitfaced buyer did, but nobody else. There ain’t a lot of people in a Burger King parking lot at three am, y’know.” Ducky flopped on to Granny’s couch beside Hazel. “Got a call from Zip and Chuck. They had more luck. They paid one of Sugar Mama’s brothels a visit, got all the girls out, and shot the guards. Sugar Mama wasn’t there, but she’s sure as hell gonna be mad enough t’ show her ugly face eventually. When we do, we’ll make damn certain she won’t even have a face t’ show anymore.”
Granny shuffled into the room, dragging a load of laundry consisting of mostly black spandex and latex masks now clean of gore. “Alrighty, dears, you know the drill. Dump the clothes in the laundry room and I’ll take care of it.”

“Gran, any more of those bangin’ cookies left? Or did fatass over there gobble ‘em all up?” Bucky stretched out and yawned. “Damn, all this midnight vigilante shit is fuckin’ exhaustin’. How the hell does Batman do it?”

“He’s a billionaire, that’s how. He doesn’t have t’ bash people’s brains out all night, and then come in all smiles for a twelve-hour shift at work.” Ducky retorted and cufféd his brother on the shoulder. “An’ that’s not how ya ask for food, jackass. Please and thank yous. I swear, it’s like I’m raising my own child.” He rolled his eyes and shook his head in mock disgust.

“How the hell does Batman do it?”

“Hah, your kid would be lucky t’ be half as handsome as me, mano. You should pray for it.” Bucky folded his arms behind his head with a cocky smirk. “Speakin’ of manners, ya ain’t said hello t’ the beautiful ladies yet, and you call me rude?” He paused and offered his hand to Hazel. “Good morning, amorcita, how are you today? Still as lovely as a spring flower, yes?” He kissed her hand while she spluttered out a flustered greeting. “Wonderful.”

“An’ that’s not how ya ask for food, jackass. Please and thank yous. I swear, it’s like I’m raising my own child.” He rolled his eyes and shook his head in mock disgust.

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“At least someone is in a good mood around here.” You plodded out of the kitchen to join the company in the living room. “Do you guys want some coffee? There’s still half a pot left.”

“You should pray for it.” Bucky folded his arms behind his head with a cocky smirk. “Speakin’ of manners, ya ain’t said hello t’ the beautiful ladies yet, and you call me rude?” He paused and offered his hand to Hazel. “Good morning, amorcita, how are you today? Still as lovely as a spring flower, yes?” He kissed her hand while she spluttered out a flustered greeting. “Wonderful.”

“Ángelita, you are a godsend.” Bucky praised. “One packet of sugar for the lesser clone of me my madre graced with a name, but I shall have four sugars and a splash of cream…please.” He rose from the couch with renewed energy.

You left for a moment to attend to the task, and he followed you into the kitchen. “David, I read your article. Good work, jack.” He clapped him on the back. “They ran that article so fast, their heels musta lit on fire. Now, while everyone’s got this on their front burner we gotta make sure we’re pickin’ up speed an’ ferocity. Anyone with an ear to the ground is hearin’ whispers ‘bout our operation. They don’t got a name for us yet an’ that makes us a damn sight scarier t’ the assholes out there.”

“Nothing is scarier than the unknown and the unpredictable.” You tore open and emptied the last packet of sugar into the swirling, warm brew. You thoughtfully swirled a spoon through the liquid as you spoke. “I’ve heard a few things at work, by the way. The raids are making people uneasy. They’re not sure if we’re just another gang looking to make a power play, but it’s only the gang members who’re dying. Once they notice the pattern, they might realize we’re the good guys.”

“Maybe we need to help that along.” Silas pitched in. “I’ve been thinkin’ on publicity, and I say we need to make our intentions a little clearer. Otherwise-“ He lifted his glass in your direction. “-they’re not gonna be hep enough t’ support us when the time comes.”

“Well, out with it.” Bucky accepted his mug from you with a broad grin.

“I want all of our people here first.” Silas shook his head. “I wanna make sure everyone knows our next step. If somebody’s out of the loop, then our team isn’t a proper team anymore. We don’t make decisions until everyone is with it.”

“I’ll call up the Fangs, then.” Ducky said, stepping into the kitchen doorway. “I’ll ask Hazel to get in touch with Boss’s people, too. Where we gonna meet up this time?”

“The bar.” You advised as you handed him his own cup. “We haven’t been there in a couple of days, plus it has more room. We can spend more time there, get more in-depth information from the
others, and have a real congregation. These brief visits to my apartment, and Gran’s, aren’t doing enough to keep each other truly up-to-date with everyone’s movements.” You leaned back on the fridge wearily, the early morning finally catching up with you, and closed your eyes. “Remember to tell them to arrive in small groups over the course of an hour. Flying under the radar is imperative to preserving our end goal.”

“We know, Ángelita, do not worry so much.” Bucky rubbed a thumb over your cheek fondly. “You’re worse than Hazel sometimes, you know this?”

You responded by grabbing his arm and inspecting it. It was still scabby, but the skin was healing well thanks to the precise, neat stitches Hazel had put in nearly three weeks ago. It was still bumpy, despite the fact that the stitches were removed a while back, and the skin was shiny with scar tissue. “Have you been cleaning this properly as Hazel told you to?”

“Yeah, yeah.” He raised an eyebrow at you and leaned closer. “I told ya not t’ worry about me, mi corazón. It doesn’t even hurt anymore.”

“Am I not allowed to worry about my friends?” You let your hand slide down to his and squeezed it tight with a smile.

He played with one of your curls, wrapping it around his index finger, and tugged gently. “Never.” His answer was quiet, reserved, yet his eyes were alight with life and cheer. How could he do that? Be happy, smile and laugh without a care when the world around was such a shitshow. It was admirable and painfully beautiful, so that touching him was like caressing fire itself. Sure, he was handsome, but this imperishable flame of happiness was more attractive than a simple face could ever be. “What is that look about?” He asked, pulling back and breaking your trance.

“Nothing…um…I just…I miss him.” Without thinking, your hand went to your stomach. It was something you did often these days; the baby was the closest connection to him you had right now. "They weren’t just a memory or a shirt tugged over a pillow. “You had a cigarette before you came in.”

He furrowed his brow and sniffed at his shirt self-consciously. “Yeah, sorry. I know most people think it-”

“No, it’s not bad. I don’t mind.” You swallowed back the sad reminder. “It makes you smell like him…just a little, I mean.”

An odd, and slightly pained, expression crossed his face before he covered it with a grin and a chuckle. “Well, I think it’s time we got goin’. I’ll give the guys a ring an’ we’ll meet up tonight.” He turned on his heel and walked away. He gave Granny a one-armed hug before weaving his way around Silas and past his brother to stand by the door. Ducky followed with a grateful nod at Gran, but they were only halfway out the door when Bucky chose to stick his head back in and motioned you over. With a heavy sigh, he braced his hands on your shoulders and looked into your eyes. “Never forget, Ángelita...te quiero.”

Over his shoulder, you heard Ducky suck in a sharp breath and you glanced at him out of confusion. He was staring at his twin as if Bucky’d suddenly grown a third eye. “You have to stay safe, too.” You put a hand on his chest. “Don’t take any unnecessary risks.”

Bucky’s eyes sparkled mischievously. “Oh, beautiful, you say that like you don’t know us.”
Days bled into weeks and with time, the streets were imbued with an electric tension. The slightest brush against the taut wires of power made the struggle more evident in the poorer areas of town. Even the slums were usually quiet as an unofficial curfew had settled into place; no one dared venture out later than eleven at night. Every single set of drapes was drawn promptly at eight, and nary a peep was heard until morning. That is...except for one sound.

The sound of motorcycles revving cut through the night air, a howl from some mechanical demon devouring fire and spitting out smoke, and the braver citizens pushed down their blinds to watch the patrols. The bikes displayed no plates and their riders were ghastly figures in grinning, boney masks.

The Latinx population was the first to grant them their name, which was spoken in hushed tones and never around the children, because they weren’t entirely sure these riders were amongst the living. They called them Los Muertos, The Dead Ones, for they were harbingers of death and bringers of doom upon the heads of the evildoers who stalked the night.

For those among them who knew, who had bought the spandex and the latex, and who had experienced the embitterment of loss, the roar of a motorcycle brought peace to their hearts. They slept with smiles on their faces, and carried no sorrows. As long as Los Muertos rode the streets of Ebott City, hearts were lighter and the days were brighter. While the moon burned the night sky in pale rays from cold flames, Los Muertos hunted and feasted on the souls of the damned.

Authorities attempted to thwart them, to question them, but were always outmaneuvered. The bikes could weave through traffic, dodge and zip across lanes, and would be gone like ghosts with the wind. Some entertained the idea that they were ghosts; true phantoms, spirits drawn out of an unearthly plane to throw Hell’s shackles upon the wicked. These superstitions simply grew as Halloween drew nearer and many more of the city’s children would be going as skeletons this year.

Gang members, both notorious and not, were turning up dead. Sugar Mama, one of the Ebott City’s most infamous bordello madames, a figure who had her many-ringed fingers clenched tightly around the red-light district’s inhabitants, was one of many victims. She was found impaled on a PVC pipe stuck in the sand of the local beach; autopsies revealed she was still alive when the pipe was inserted. Few, especially not her former employees, were sorry to hear it. It seemed fitting, although most had the sense not to say it aloud. Everyone knew Lost Muertos had claimed yet another blackened soul.

The chief of police made speech after speech, declaring war on these ‘murderers’, but not a thing could be done. Los Muertos had become an immortal idea, an indomitable ray of hope in a dark world, and it could be neither captured nor fought. People spray painted laughing skulls on walls, kids wore skeleton stockings and gloves, and Spooky Scary Skeletons was regular request in nightclubs all over town.

Your boys came home every night, blood-splattered and so tired their legs shook when they tried to walk, but their eyes were bright and clear. Granny washed the blood from the costumes, your father honed their tools, Hazel tended their wounds, Silas plotted their next moves, and you...well, you kept both Red and Boss sane in their confinement.

Which, unsurprisingly, was an arduous task to undertake. “Human sister, you must return to the store immediately.” Boss demanded crossly. “You bought 1% milk when I specifically requested whole! Gah, I cannot bake under these conditions!”

“Boss, the store was out!” You were about ready to tear your hair out. How did Red put up with
Boss for so long without going coo-coo for cocoa puffs? Scratch that, how had Hazel not gone mad with him in the house?! “I’m not going to walk ten blocks away just to get you whole milk. I’m sure, if you took the time to search it, there is absolutely a way to substitute something for it.”

Boss huffed through his nasal cavity and shook a batter-covered spoon under your nose. “Human, you are incredibly lucky. If you’d have known me in the Underground, you wouldn’t dare disobey. You would have walked twenty…no…THIRTY blocks to get me whole milk if I so asked.”

Victor poked his head around the corner. “Dude, you can totally substitute 1% for the whole as long as you add butter to balance out the fat.”

“I never knew you cooked.” Boss cocked his head curiously to the side.

“I don’t. I googled it while you were busy screaming at poor Angel.” Victor waved his phone in the air. “Which isn’t cool, just so you know, ’cuz I could hear it over my music.”

“Hm, what a brilliant idea—“

Really? That’s exactly what you told him to do, but it’s suddenly ‘brilliant’ when Victor suggested it? You were done with this house for the night. “Okay, I think it’s best if I go home now.” You sighed, grabbing your things. Honestly, you were supposed to have been home two hours ago, but Boss had kept you there with his insistence that you stay to sample his hazardous waste...erm...cooking.

“What? Who said you could leave? In my brother’s absence, I am the acting double Alpha in your life, and as such you will defer to me for protection, permission, as well as informed decision-making.” Boss waved his spoon around, splattering both you and the walls with chunky batter. “As a double-Beta, your place is by my side 24/7 at my beck and call.” His eye lights shifted to the window. “Aside from that…it is now dark out, you are soft, squishy and you simply screech ‘PLEASE ROB AND MURDER ME AND LEAVE MY LIFELESS BODY IN A DITCH TO ROT’.”

You blinked slowly, utterly astonished at his words, while he stared you down with a grumpy scowl. “You’re...concerned about my safety? Weren’t you trying to make me walk all the way back to the fricking store before?”

“I was going to have Victor go with you.” Boss sniffed and turned back to the simmering pot of… whatever he was making...as a subtle hint to drop the subject. “The fact remains that, with my brother incarcerated, you report to me.”

“Report to you?” You parroted back. “I’m not a soldier!”

“Perhaps not, but your A/B/K Multi-Designation, your pregnancy, and your status as a relative require I maintain your health and safety.” He threw a dash of pepper into the witch’s brew he deemed food, and rested his hands on the counter. His back was still to you, so you couldn’t see his face. “I...worry when you leave. Worrying takes up valuable time and energy; therefore, it is in my best interest for you to stay under my care unless I see you are being escorted by one of those filthy hooligans you surround yourself with.”

“Wow...” And here you thought Red was emotionally constipated, but Boss? He was stoppered up tighter than a hibernating bear. “Um...so...I guess I’ll stay the night, then? If Hazel doesn’t mind, I mean, I’d obviously have to ask her first—“

“No worries, I already texted her, you’re good.” Victor shot you a thumbs up before retreating to his
room once more.

“There are extra blankets in the hallway closet. You may sleep wherever you like or even on the floor, so long as you do not make yourself a tripping hazard.” However, before you’d had the thought to move, he was already making you a nest on the couch. “On second thought, you are not allowed to sleep on the floor.” He tromped to the bedroom, grabbed several pillows, and laid one on the arm, while the others were fluffed and lined up atop the couch cushions. “You will go to sleep in one hour. I advise you make the most of your hour as I will not provide an extension.”

“Boss, you’re acting –I mean, are you alright?” You reached out to put a hand on his shoulder. “You’re all over the place tonight.” As much as he tried to hide it, you could feel a slight shiver run through him. He wasn’t even pretending to stir his pot of nuclear sludge any longer.

“I am fine.” He growled through gritted teeth. “It is not as if I am frustrated with being cooped up, forced to read of my friends’ exploits, nor is it as if I am sick of being on the sidelines in a fight that is rightfully mine as well. No, no, I am fine. It’s not as if I’d prefer to be ripping out throats with my teeth in a quest for vengeance alongside seasoned fighters such as myself. Not at all.” He suddenly whirled around, picked you up, and deposited you on the couch. “I changed my mind. Go to sleep. If anyone barges in, I will murder them without hesitation.”

You struggled to situate yourself on the poof of the massive amount of pillows and covers, until he made a small groan, and pushed you back down. He shoved the edges of the blankets roughly under your body, starting with your shoulders all the way to your toes, essentially mummifying you in bedclothes. “Are you tucking me in?” You tried to keep the giggles at bay. He wasn’t acting this way because he was angry; he was, in a roundabout way, trying to comfort and protect you. “Look, Boss…uh…Papyrus–”

He froze in the middle of tucking you in. “I don’t believe I gave you permission to use my real name.” He gruffly replied before he resumed his forceful tucking.

“Well, technically, I’m your sister now and I’m kinda pregnant with your nephew or niece, so doesn’t it seem a little silly to avoid saying it? Anyway, if you feel like talking about all of this, I’ve got a spare shoulder for you.” You tried to wiggle out of the blanket prison, but it was to no avail. “Anyway, Papyrus, I know you’re probably chomping at the bit to do something…to contribute…a-and…you just need to let the energy out. So, how about you help me with something?”

He turned to look at you with his unscathed socket, feigned disinterest poorly concealing a fleeting flare of eager delight, and made a perch out of the armrest. He reminded you faintly of a skeletal, menacing crow. “Go on.”

“Silas has been working on something big.” He snorted dismissively at that, however, you chose to ignore that performance of distaste. “He’s thought up a few stunts, things that would put our operation in the spotlight, and he needs me to put them together…literally.” You continued to struggle, despite the futility, to give him a clue to your discomfort. “Given how great you are, and I don’t say that lightly because I think you’re pretty okay when you’re having a good day, I figured you could…ah…you know…help me?”

You squeaked in fear as his fist smashed down on the table. “Sister, this is why I tolerate you; you’re intelligent enough to come to me for aid. I applaud this foresight, as you surely wouldn’t be capable of completing this task, whatever it is, alone!” He jerked the blankets away with such force that you were propelled an inch or so off the pillow mound.

“Have you ever seen fireworks, Boss?” You sat up, pulled a pillow out from under your behind and shoved all of the bedding to the far side of the couch. “We need to make some. We can’t buy them;
that would be too easy for the police to trace back to us. The problem is I’m crap with tools. Sure, I can wield a pair of jewelry pliers with the best of them, but power tools, wrenches, or screwdrivers? I’m practically hopeless with those. Did Red ever tell you I once broke a finger trying to put an Ikea desk together?” You showed him your left pinky. “It’s a little crooked now, and I hate it. I’d like to keep my remaining digits intact and straight, so…” You shrugged, choosing to leave your sentence open-ended.

“What exactly are we creating?”

“Two hundred 5-shot fiberglass mortars, and two hundred smoke bombs. Every time we hit a gang, we’re gonna set one off, so we need to have plenty of extras. My father bought all the potassium nitrate we could ever need, as well as the tools and wood, and I bought some organic dye with cash from a privately-owned crafts store. Other than that, all we need is some baking soda, sugar, and a few other things. Everything we need is back at my apartment and I can have one of the Fangs drop some of it off here. Only enough to fit in one or two backpacks per night, of course, so it’ll be slow going to avoid drawing attention to ourselves.” It was fairly fortunate how useful your family’s business was as a cover. Potassium nitrate was a commodity found in the shed of any gardener worth his salt(peter), after all. You had a burlap sack of nails, a drill, OBE, not to mention you’d saved up a ton of paper towel rolls and duck tape from your friends for all this time.

“Scare tactics…” Boss mused, tapping the clawed tip of one finger against his teeth. “Hm, even idiots like him may have an intelligent thought once in a great while, I suppose. Very well, I shall assist you.” He dropped your phone in your lap.

You hastily tapped out a text to Bucky, and not even twenty minutes passed before he was at the door. He dropped two packs on the floor, opened his arms and strode forward to greet you with a bear hug. “Ah, sweetheart, it’s been too long!”

“You saw me yesterday.” You grinned into the creases of his leather jacket. He truly was ridiculous sometimes, but you adored him for it.

He raised you off the floor and spun you around. “As I said before, it’s been too long.” He held out a hand to Boss, who did nothing more than sneer at it. “Well, it’s no RV in the desert, but it’ll have t’ do. Let’s get crackin’, eh?” He side-stepped Boss, took an experimental sniff at the troll snot simmering on the stove, and flinched back from the reeking mess. He waved a hand in front of his face. “Dude, that pot is not salvageable. Did Dr. Frankenstien give ya cookin’ lessons?”

You hastily clapped a hand over Boss’s mouth to muffle his insulted retort. “Oh, you’re helping, too? Wonderful, it’ll go three times as fast.” You shut the door, and lugged the bulging pack into the kitchen. “You’re probably the best with tools out of all of us – oh, don’t look so put-out, Boss, he works with power tools all the time. You and I can make the bombs, and he’ll handle the mortars.”

Placated, Boss allowed you to drag him into the process. You didn’t let him so much as eyeball the sugar as it melted because, as horrid as you may be in the kitchen, Boss’s cooking was an assault on the senses. You did, however, allow him to mix in the baking soda and dye. As per the instructions Silas had given you (you honestly didn’t want to know why he knew how to make them), you stuck pencils through the cylinders and left the half-finished bombs to harden. By the time you ran out of supplies, the first batch was ready to be strung with fuses, and taped up.

Meanwhile, Bucky was slotting the mortars into the ten racks he’d managed to pump out over the past two hours. “Aren’t you supposed to be on patrol?” Boss meticulously wrapped the finished bombs you’d threaded.

“My shift was over at midnight, pal.” Bucky strode aimlessly around the apartment. “Man, Hazel has
some cool digs. If I had the cash, I’d live like this.”

“Where do you live, Bucky?” You inquired as you stuffed cotton balls alongside the fuses in each bomb.

He turned away from the myriad of pictures that decorated the walls, eyes shining like stars and enough energy radiating from him as to make a Geiger counter tick. “Wanna find out? You’re more than welcome to come back with me. Ducky’s out with the others, but he’ll be back in a couple of hours. You’re always extendin’ perfect hospitality to us, we might as well do the same for once.”

Boss let out a quiet sigh before slamming his roll of duct tape back on the counter and storming out of the room. Torn between going with Bucky and keeping your poor, frustrated brother-in-law happy, you simply stood there gnawing your lip. “Oh, Boss, I’ve been here every night for the past week. I’ve never been to Bucky’s apartment before, and I feel like I should check in with Ducky, too, once he gets back. I haven’t had the chance to ask him about the defense he’s building for both of you. It’s important, you know I wouldn’t just up and leave on a whim.” He remained completely silent, although you heard the muffled click of the lock. “Boss, I know you can hear me.”

“Leave, then! Go on!” Boss’s voice was strained. “I don’t give a damn what you do.”

“…I’m not leaving because I don’t care.” You puckered your lips, blinking hard to force away the tears. “I know you want to help, but I know you miss Red, too. Whatever Ducky tells me, I promise I’ll let you know first, alright?” You jiggled the door handle a little. “Please don’t be mad, big brother.”

“What did you call me?!” His question was sharp and harsh, disbelief punched through anger like an awl through the toughest leather. The lock turned, the door was flung open, and he was suddenly glaring down at you with such ferocity that you jumped back half a step.

“I…I…big brother?” You squeaked out. In spite of everything, you were still a tiny bit afraid of him. His moods swung like pendulums, back and forth, and there was always an edge that you only ever seemed to dodge by a hair. He was terrifying, more than twice your height and louder than was particularly comfortable. More than the fear, though, you loved him as family.

You weren’t sure how long he stood there glowering down at you, but you were frozen in the moment. You didn’t even see the move until he was already smothering the life out of you in a spine-bending, chest-crushing hug. “I swear on my Soul I will protect you from this world, you disgustingly sweet creature.” He patted your head, leaving you dazed from this unforeseen turnabout, before dropping you. “I expect a text when you get home. If I do not receive one, I am leaving this house, ankle monitor or not, and I am hunting you down…and then I will tell Hazel about your thoughtlessness. End of discussion.” He retreated back into the bowls of his lair, shut the door with magic, and left you to your business.

Bucky whistled. “Dude, an’ I thought I had issues.”

You shook your head, speech all but impossible for you after such a display, and then grabbed up the backpack. The both of you were halfway to his bike by the time you could speak. “He’s not really…he doesn’t usually do that.” Your face was aching, a protest held against the gigantic smile you now wore. “Do you think he likes me?”

“Angelita, he adores you.” Bucky looped an arm around your shoulders. “We all do.” He reminded you softly. “I understand that there is this little voice in your head whispering lies to you, but—“ He squeezed you tighter for a second before releasing to mount up. “- it’s our job to make sure that little voice gets smaller every day. Now hold on tight, sweetheart. We’re gonna burn some rubber.”
The twins lived near Granny, right along the self-same strip of run-down buildings and smack-dab in the middle of the poorest section. Bucky rolled his bike into an empty space in the gravel lot reserved for residents, locked it to a loop of pipe sticking out of the ground, and threw a tarp over it. He kicked a discarded beer bottle out of your way. “It ain’t much, but the cockroaches are good company and the rats are polite.” He pulled his keys from his jacket pocket. “Ducky’s still payin’ off his school bills from the University of Virginia. It eats into the bills, can’t really afford nice shit right now, but he’s gonna take off someday. Mai always said he was her little scholar.” His smile lost a hint of its shine. “And then, she’d say ‘James, my little carajito, are you suspended again?’.” He twisted the knob, but the door didn’t open. He frowned and rammed it open with his shoulder. “The wood expands in bad weather and makes it stick.” He explained apologetically before beckoning you inside with a flourish of his hand. “Welcome to our pad. Don’t bother takin’ off yer shoes.”

It was clean, although a sad, little plug-in air freshener did its best to cover an undercurrent of mildew. Whiffs of cigarette smoke, too, scented the air, though that was a more welcome odor in your opinion. The carpet was worn thin in some places, right down to the rubber backing and tacks that held it down, and the white walls were stained yellow like coffee-ruined teeth. The living room had no overhead light, the only sources of illumination being a dusty, salmon-colored lamp on a side table and the window facing the street.

The room was mostly bare, with the exception of a Walmart-quality tv stand supporting the weight of an ancient boobtube, a desk and its chair shoved into the corner by the window, and a shredded leather loveseat covered by handmade-quilts. Bucky crossed the room to the kitchen, which was little more than a linoleum-floored nook with a mini-fridge and a toaster oven precariously perched on the limited space beside the sink. “Anything to drink? Water? Kool-aid, maybe?” He took a beer for himself and drew a clean cup out of the cupboard above the toaster oven.

“Just water is fine, thank you.”

“Well, don’t just stand there, darlin’. Have a seat!” He handed you the glass with a wink. “Whatchya frownin’ for? Chin up, babydoll, yer chillin’ with a cat who knows where it’s at.” He flopped on the couch, flicked the tv on, and handed you the remote. “Twenty-seven channels and nothin’ t’ watch except your face. You pick the show, while I enjoy the view.”

“Bucky…” He arched an eyebrow at your tentative tone. “Um…you don’t actually have cockroaches, do you?”

“Nah, I was jus’ jokin.” He took a swig of his beer. “We won the war with the sonsabitches after we moved in and I still keep up with it every month. It’s that flower stuff, the organic crap ya spray in corners and under the cabinets…pie…pie-somethin’.”

“Pyrethrin?” You hazarded a guess.

He snapped his fingers. “That’s the one!” He scratched the evening scruff that had sprouted along his jaw. “How you holdin’ up, Ángelita? You seem better these days.”

You swirled the water around, the weight of the world dropping down on you once again, and closed your eyes in thought. “I’m not, Bucky. I’m really, really not, but I have to look like I am.” You curled on arm over your stomach protectively. “Everyone is already under enough stress, they don’t need me adding to it. So,” You glumly traced the rim of the glass. “I take the meds, and the prenatals, and eat humble pie while the people who locked the love of my life up are sleeping soundly next to their spouses and playing with their own children. I keep my head up, I move one foot at a time, and I just…”

“Keep on keepin’ on? Yeah, I get it.” He set his beer down on the side table and stretched his legs
out. “You ever wanna be out there with us? I know Boss wants it, Hazel’s been askin’, too.”

“I think about it, but I’m not entirely sure I could do it. The idea of revenge is appealing, but I’d probably hesitate and get someone killed.” You doodled a smiley face into the condensation. “I’d look at one of these ruthless bastards on the streets and think about their family. I’d wonder what drove them to it, and I’d get to asking myself if the person I’m about to hurt is worth saving…like Silas is worth it or Boss.”

Bucky rolled his eyes. “Silas is an asshole,” Then he smirked and added, “but at least he’s a good guy asshole this time around. I still remember runnin’ his drunk ass off you, Big Red standin’ behind him just waitin’ t’ put the beat-down on his sorry head…ahh, good memories.” He picked his beer up for a toast and took a healthy swallow. “You been to another race yet? I know we got a lot goin’ on, but bikers got a saying; ‘We don’t need therapy, we’ve got a full tank and the open road.’”

“No.” You shifted uncomfortably, trying to avoid the broken spring currently digging into your butt. “I tend to wallow in my misery like a hippo in the mud.”

He threw his head back and laughed until tears came to the corners of his eyes. “We need to get you out sometime. We were thinkin’ of going this weekend, if ya feel up to it. Ducky won’t care, he almost never bothers with the racing. He prefers to sweet talk buyers down on the lot, he’s always been the details-guy.”

“Now, that’s one thing I never got to do with Red.” You admitted. “I’ve always wanted to get him to teach me a bit. I mean, I know a little-”

“You know cars?!” Bucky leaned forward, equal parts impressed and enthused.

“Nothing like him.” You smiled dreamily. “But I can do a few things. I learned from…” You stopped yourself from saying his name, and dropped your eyes to the ground. “Well, let’s just say I have a type.”

“Car guys?” Bucky shot you a knowing look over the mouth of his bottle. “I can’t blame you, sweetheart, we’re pretty damn awesome.”

You slugged him in the shoulder, giggling. “Shut up -you’re right- but shut up.” All of a sudden, you felt a painful twinge run up your backside and you flinched away from the pinchy sensation.

“Oh, sorry, I forget that side has a loose spring. It can be a bit pokey.” He got up, pulled the quilt off his side, folded it up, and put it over your spot. “That should take care of it.”

“Thanks.” You rubbed your sore tush before daring to sit back down. “Who made these? They’re beautiful.”

“Mai did. She was a crafter as a hobby, and a tailor by profession.”

“Was?” You didn’t miss the way the edges of his smile twitched down for a moment, nor the way his eyes grew foggy with memory.

“Was.” He confirmed. “Turns out fabric dyes in the eighties were full of carcinogens, but she got to see Ducky graduate college. Knowing her, I believe she refused t’ die until she saw him take that diploma. She was strong, funny, and smoked two packs a day.” He withdrew a pack of Camels from his jacket. “He is the best of her and, as for myself…I try.” He lifted a cigarette to his mouth and sucked thoughtfully on the filter.

“My mom’s gone, too.” You put a hand over his. “She was diabetic and there were complications.
She didn’t get help in time…I was nine.”

“I’m sorry.” He let his head fall back and stared at the splotchy, brown designs on the ceiling left by the artistic brush of water damage. “I’m not either, ya know.” You watched his smile droop a little. “’Okay’, I mean. We’re all fucked up in our own, special little ways. What matters is how we deal with it. I laugh, and I smile, and I make sure beautiful women know they’re beautiful. That is how I deal.” He let his eyes drift closed. “You’re still learning how you deal, but there’s nothing wrong with that. I’m glad I’m here to see it. Life is one big struggle, baby, but there’s always a light. Right now, that’s what you are; a light in the tunnel.”

“Dios mio, Bucky, what the hell do ya think yer doin’?” You whipped your head to see Ducky standing in the doorway. His eyes were narrowed to slits, his knuckles going white around the handle of his briefcase, and a stray lock of hair had fallen out of place. He swore again, this time in Spanish, and his voice rose with every word. Ducky seized his twin by the shoulder and hauled him into the lot, and shook him hard.

You stood there blankly, bewildered and terrified. You’d never seen Ducky angry, you’d never seen him lose his cool at all; not during sex, not during a fight, and definitely never with his brother. The pair of them argued, the tension rising with their volume until they were shouting vehemently back and forth. Ducky pointed at you, and then snarled something to Bucky that made him lose the light in his eyes. He wilted at that point, his eyes moving to yours, and then away as Ducky continued to rant.

“What are you doing?!” You grabbed the back of his suit jacket in a sad attempt to end the conflict.

Ducky paused, screwed his eyes shut, and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Go back inside, Ángelita. I will call you a cab when we’re done here.”

“No, you’re already done.” You yanked on his lapels angrily. “What is this all about? Is this how you treat him whenever everyone else isn’t around?! What’s wrong with you? He wasn’t doing anything, we were just talking and then you come barging in like a bull elephant—…you’d better have a good explanation, or …or I’m going to have to punch you in the face!”

He laughed, a bitter sound. “James, this is your mess.” He gently pried your fingers off his jacket. “I can’t believe ya’d pull this kinda shit, especially not while Red’s in the slammer. You’ve done some shit, James, but this…this is probably the worst. Look at ‘er, she don’t have a fuckin’ clue!” He spun you around to face his twin.

“What does he mean? You didn’t do anything.” You glared up at Ducky. “He’s the one being an asshole.”

Bucky spat out his smoke and ground it into the gravel with his heel. He couldn’t seem to look you in the eye. “I wasn’t gonna do shit with her, Donald. We were talkin’, that’s all.” He shook his head. “Listen, ya know me better, mano. I just…I needed something, awright? We all know I’m the weak one here, so forgive me, oh holy Saint Donald, for wantin’ some time with her.” He poked a finger into his brother’s face. “And if you tell her, so help me I will fuckin’—“

“Stop it!”

Bucky’s accusing hand dropped and he blinked like he was coming out of a daze. “Ángelita, please go back inside for me, eh? I’ll drive ya home later, promise. Watch some Friends re-runs or somethin’—go play with the rats, I don’t care…just put it on loud and don’t come out until I come for you.”
“I’ve had it up to here with this bullshit.” Ducky pulled you behind his back. “She deserves to know and you’re going to tell her. She doesn’t need ya droppin’ hints or playin’ stupid games when all this shit’s fallin’ down around our ears!”

Fury flashed like lightning in Bucky’s eyes. “I wasn’t doin’ it t’ play games, jackass. The first time was an accident! I figured…I thought if I said it a few times, she might not…she might not hate me.”

“What are you two talking about?” You demanded. “I refuse to be talked about when I’m standing right here!”

“Fine.” Bucky’s eyes were hardened by resolve. “I’ll tell ‘er. I’ll tell her I love her more than I thought I coulda ever loved at all. I’ll tell her I’ve loved her for months and I’ll tell her I wish every day I could have found her first, but ya know what? I’m also gonna tell ‘er I’m not gonna make a move. I’m not gonna pull any shit because I love her. She’s happy with Red, an’ I can live with that. I can die knowin’ that, but I ain’t gonna apologize for lovin’ ‘er. She ain’t mine, but she’s happy and that’s how I want it to be.” He smiled sadly at you. “I’m sorry, Ángelita, for lyin’. Te quiero? It means ‘I love you’. Never meant t’ say it out loud. I didn’t wanna cause trouble, sweetheart, but once I said it, I didn’t wanna stop.”
Sometimes, when old computers would get overheated, they’d start pouring out this ozone-esque stink and the internal fans would kick in with a terrible vengeance. Standing there in that lot, processing Bucky’s confession, you felt sort of like one of those ancient desktop models; overheated, pouring out smoke from between your ears, and buzzing as your internal processes tried hard to keep you from an Error 404. You realized both of them were holding their breath, dreading your reaction and craving it at the same time, but it was too much all at once.

The laughter came first, and their confusion somehow made this whole debacle more hilarious. “That’s what this is about?!” You braced your hands on your knees, practically sobbing at the sheer hilarity of it all. You were choking and hacking, and still giggling, before you could finally gather enough breath to speak again. “After all of this, after everything we’ve done together, how could you think I’d hate you for loving me? It’s so stupid and sweet, and I…my god-” You clapped your hand over your mouth to muffle the snickers. “Bucky, all you had to do was say something…well, actually, I guess you did say something, but it should have preferably been in a language I understand.”

“That…was…that wasn’t the reaction I was expectin’.” Bucky’s bewildered expression was replaced with the dawn of hope. “I didn’t wanna mess things up between you an’ Red. Didn’t wanna make ya think I’m some kind of home-wrecker. He’s my bro, it didn’t seem right-”

“There’s nothing wrong about love, if it’s real. So, our logical next step is to tell Red.” He went as white as liquid paper. “It’s okay! Really! Sure, he might be a giant, grumpy cactus about it, but I’m sure he’ll come around. We’ll call him tomorrow, ask him what he thinks, and figure out where to go from there.” You threw up your hands. “But first, Ducky, you need to apologize to your brother for making a mountain out of a molehill.”

Ducky was looking just as confused as Bucky was, and, for once, you seemed to have caught him off-guard. “You’re not serious.”

“I am as serious as the plague. This is a complete non-issue. I’m totally cool with it.” You shrugged nonchalantly. “Why? Should I extend you an invitation into my harem, too?” You paused, thinking hard for a few seconds. “I’m gonna need a bigger bed.”

Ducky chuckled, visibly unnerved. “Nah, nah, yer firmly in the ‘friends with the occasional benefits’ category with me, toots.” He smacked his twin upside the head. “I’m sorry yer an idiot, manito.”

“If I am an idiot, then you are blind.” Bucky put a hand over his heart and sighed. “How could you not love that face?”

Ducky didn’t bother acknowledging his brother’s jibe; instead he appeared to be pondering the situation over. When he finally spoke, he still sounded unsure. “It isn’t just up t’ Red, ya know. Do you feel anything for my brother?”

It wasn’t a simple question to answer. Being with Red had helped you figure a great deal about yourself as a person, it was one of the reasons you loved him so much, but you still weren’t as experienced as anyone else in your circle. Could you really trust yourself to make an informed decision? Part of you wanted to default to Red’s position on the matter, yet you recognized doing such a thing was an unhealthy avoidance behavior.

On the other hand, Bucky lived up to, and exceeded, your standards and preferences in a person. He
was incredibly similar to Red, yet not in a way that made him a replacement of any sort. He was interesting, compelling to listen to, with a great sense of humor, and possessed an appealing personality. “Well, you’re already attractive to me and that’s a start. I do love you, too. I’m simply not in love with you yet. Does that make sense?” You reached out to touch his arm. “If Red says he’s okay with it, I wouldn’t mind figuring out a poly-type situation. It’s not that I’m defaulting to Red’s position on this, I just want to make sure we’re all on the same page. It’s going to be a little strange,” You grinned up at him. “I’ve thought of you more as family than anything, but I’m definitely eager to give it a go. And, if it works for the three of us, the baby will have two badass dads! Plus, the three of us sharing income would make it so much easier to maintain a household. Oh, and if Red isn’t feeling up to going out on a date, I could go with you or vice versa! As long as we’re all reasonable and we communicate well, I don’t see why it should be a problem at all.”

“You aren’t a real person. You don’t exist.” Ducky shook his head incredulously.

“I’m being reasonable and open to new things.” You argued. You grabbed Bucky’s hand and draped it over your shoulders like a mink stole. “I love Red. He knows that for a fact, and it doesn’t mean I’ll love him any less if I learn to love someone else, too. There’s not enough love in the world, I think we can all agree on that, so why not give it a go?”

Your phone buzzed against your thigh, and you beamed at the caller id. “It’s Boss. He’s probably on the verge of taking a pair of bolt cutters to his ankle monitor.” You accepted the call and prepared yourself for the scolding of a lifetime. “Hi, Boss! Ducky just got here, so I might stay for a while longer and then I’ll head home.”

“It’s been over an hour!” Boss snapped like an angry dog. “Don’t stay out too long or you’ll end up exhausting yourself like an idiot.” He didn’t sound truly vexed, more mildly annoyed than anything, and hung up after lecturing you on unhealthy impacts of poor sleep hygiene for several more minutes.

“So, are you two cool now? It’s kinda chilly standing around outside.” You rubbed at your upper arms. Fall had folded like a blanket over Ebott city, the sweet scent of dying leaves floated on the breeze, and the air itself carried winter’s phantom kiss.

Silent communication passed between the twins, their eyes met and held as you looked on until their discourse passed, and then they smiled brightly. The past ten minutes were entirely forgiven and forgotten without question. Ducky made no mention of how his brother’s hands strayed up occasionally to touch your face or hair or arms, and, in return, Bucky kept his touches light and friendly. Fortunately, for all that you’d feared Ducky’s sudden flash of temper; it seemed he was as quick to forgive as he was slow to anger.

While Bucky kept you on his lap to protect you from that evil, offending spring, Ducky drew out a stack of notes he’d drafted on his defense. “It’s all pretty straightforward.” He tapped the paper with the end of his pen. “They don’t have much to go on, as far as I know they have only one witness. You’ve got your friend from the Lincoln Testimonial Press t’ thank for that.” He chuckled at your hissed curse. “Most of this is coincidental evidence, fortunately, ‘specially if they think there’s a gang runnin’ around dressed like skeletons takin’ down other gangs. If we pull the security videos from your apartment, we should have enough evidence of his harassment to convince the judge Red’s bein’ framed.”

“Well, that little jerk did say he was gonna ‘get’ Red when we refused to give him an interview.” You recalled, frowning at the disturbing memory.

Ducky pointed at you with the pen’s tip. “There we go! No witnesses t’ that conversation, it’ll be a ‘he-said-she-said’ thing, but it’s still somethin’ t’ make the jury think.” He scribbled that down at the
bottom of the stack. “Next thing is, we’re gonna have t’ address Boss’s involvement in capturin’ humans for Asgore, and his history of gang violence. No matter what, his past is gonna reflect poorly on ‘im in court. Red’s squeaky clean, an’ as ironic as it might be he could possibly have an easier time of it than his bro.” He scratched at his sideburns idly as he considered his work. “Now, we could say his debilitating injury kept ‘im down an’ out when all this with the Hounds happened. Monsters are still a bit of a mystery to humans, an’ if ya get Hazel t’ explain the basic ins and outs of his condition at the time, he could have an alibi. We can put in a request for check in/check out paperwork, and get camera footage if we have to.”

“Is there anything else we can do?” You were desperate, and as of right now it seemed like there was a 50/50 chance of things turning for the worst.

Ducky chewed his thumbnail thoughtfully. “Hm, I did get a phone call today from some kid. Thought it was a prank, t’ be honest, but I could give ‘im a call back to check. Wouldn’t hurt t’ cover all the bases. He said somethin’ ‘bout bein’ there when it all went down, but that’s fucked up if he was. He sounded young, maybe thirteen or fourteen? I dunno—”

You sat ram-rod straight up in Bucky’s lap. “Yes! Call him back! I know—” Ducky cleared his throat loudly to remind you of his position, and you paused to turn your sentence back around. “Clearly, if he’s seeking you out he’s on our side, and we need him!” Your heart thundered in your chest as your excitement rose. “This could make a huge difference!”

“Awright, I’ll ring ‘im up tomorrow.” Ducky pledged. “All in all, I’d say things are lookin’ up. These are a fuckton of charges, but life ain’t worth living if it ain’t a challenge.” He smirked, shuffled through his papers, and spun his chair around to face you properly. “I told you I’m gonna spring Big Red an’ that’s a fact. Manita, we’re family. When we say in the MC ‘brother’, we mean it. Any of us would drop dead for the other, an’ I’ll be damned before I’ll let my brother rot in jail for doin’ what most other sonuvabitches were too pussy t’ do.”

So, there it was; Ducky knew, as if it weren’t plain as day to him already, Red was guilty. You just couldn’t point it out to him already, Red was guilty. You just couldn’t point it out to him. Of course, he’d have probably done the same thing if he were in Red’s shoes, albeit it would have probably been much more quietly handled. “Ducky, I have no idea how to thank you, I—”

Ducky arched an eyebrow. “Keep my brothers happy. I don’t want any money, I don’t need any glowin’ reviews on Yelp or anythin’, but—“ He winked. “-that would be nice. If you keep Red an’ Bucky grinning like a couple of love-struck idiots, we’re square.”

“I thought greasers hated being square.” You teased. You felt lighter than you had in days; you could suddenly breathe again. Somehow, it was like there’d been a piece of you missing until today, something that had been ripped out the day of the arrest, and Ducky’s words plugged that jagged hole.

“Ya got me there, sweetheart.” Ducky shrugged and laughed. “Even, then.”

“You guys are literally the best, no exaggeration.” You fell back into Bucky’s chest. “I still feel like I should do something for you.” You glanced around the apartment and a twinge of sadness plucked at your giddy heart. An idea leaped to the forefront of your thoughts, although you weren’t sure how to present it. “You two shouldn’t have to live like this.” You crossed your arms decisively. “If you won’t let me pay you, then can I at least help you get a better apartment and some decent furniture? You both deserve it!”

“Ah, now that’s not—"
“A problem is what it’s ‘not’. I may not act look or act like it, but my dad’s got money—a lot of money—and something small like giving you the down payment for a nice place, maybe giving you an advance on your rent for a couple of years, that’s nothing, trust me.” You assured them both with your brightest smile. “Plus, you can get rid of this awful couch. Personally, I’d recommend something in black leather; it’s sexy and useful.” The quote from Zip had them grinning broadly.

“But, Ángel,” Bucky pretended to pout. “Then I’d have no excuse t’ let ya sit on me.”

“I will sit on you whenever you want, just ask.” Apparently, your answer was something of great hilarity, given the fact they exploded into snickering. “What? What did I say?” Ducky tried to reply, but Bucky caught his eye and winked, and Ducky nearly fell out of his chair in riotous guffaws. “Oh, come on! What did I say?! I don’t get it!”
Gonna Have a Good Time (Just Gimme a call)

Hazel, against your wishes, had gone ahead and slipped a pre-paid card under your door to pay for the calls. She’d tried before several times to simply give you cash, but you’d become too adept at slipping it back into her pockets or purse when she wasn’t paying attention. Therefore, she’d resorted to guerilla tactics and stuffed the cerulean card through the crack under the front door while you were out. You’d activated it, proceeded to have a small heart attack over the amount that was already loaded on, before promptly calling her to both thank her and simultaneously scold her for giving you that much. At this point, it was easier to simply give up, accept the gift and have done with it, rather than continue to fight her generosity.

However, it did come at a convenient time because you’d been wondering how you could have justified spending another fifty or so dollars on an extended call to explain recent events to him. It would probably take longer than a mere twenty minutes to ease Red into the idea of sharing. If it had been anyone other than either one of the twins (or perhaps, if it was anyone outside the club considering you were now aware he’d shared with most of them at one point or the other in the past), he probably would have warped right out of jail to throttle them.

So, in a situation born out of Hazel’s (annoyingly persistent) charity and Bucky’s poor sense of timing, you were once again waiting for that thrice-damned loading circle to go away. Bucky was seated beside you on the couch, his hands stuffed deep into the pockets of his jacket, looking like he’d been forced to eat undercooked rat-on-a-stick for dinner.

“Well, hello beautiful.” Red’s face filled the screen, he was seated rather close today, and he was grinning widely. “Special event at work? Been a while since ya wore that sexy-ass number t’ the office.” You’d made a habit recently of calling him straight after work; it made sense he’d assume you’d gone to work in the dress, although your motives for wearing it were far from business-appropriate.

The notorious little black dress, the one you’d dared to wear only once before, suddenly seemed much tighter around your chest. Every time you saw him these days, it felt as though your heart swelled with joy. Wasn’t there an old addage about distance making the heart grow fonder? By now, you weren’t sure if that was possible. “Actually, no. It’s…um…technically, it’s for you.”

Last night, you’d been incredibly confident, somehow the feeling had withered since then. Now, you were all nerves. “Oh, yeah? Ya really shouldn’t tempt me like this, angel. I’m tryin’ t’ play nice here an’ stay in my kennel.”

“But, you know what? I’m here! You blurted out, color rushing to your cheeks. “He wanted to talk to you, too! So, this kind of like…I dunno what it is, really…” Out of the corner of your eye, you saw Bucky facepalm. “Oh, hush you!” You snapped and tapped at his arm. “Anyway, we were talking last night and I was wondering how you felt about-” You winced a little. “-…about possibly…maybe…okay, so you remember how you said you used to share with the twins a lot before?” You licked your lips nervously. “Right, so, I’d like to ask if there’s any way you’d consider-”

Bucky calmly took your phone out of your hands. “Angel, this is gettin’ t’ be painful t’ watch.” On the other side of the screen, Red’s smirk faded to an expression of puzzlement. “Red, I love ‘er. You feel up t’ lettin’ me in on this or no?”

“Well, it’s ‘bout fuckin’ time.” Red groaned loudly, his mouth stretching into a grin that glinted ivory and gold. “I was wonderin’ when ya’d finally muster up the sack t’ say somethin’.”
Bucky choked on air, slapping his chest to get some breath back into his lungs, while you melted into a heaping puddle of relief. “I’m not dead?” Bucky jokingly put a finger to his pulse point.


“Hey!” Mildly insulted, you popped up over Bucky’s shoulder to glare at your husband.

“I meant that in the most lovin’ way possible, sweetness.” Red amended.

“You knew?! THIS WHOLE TIME?!” You nabbed the phone out of Bucky’s frozen fingers. “We haven’t been doing anything, I swear! He told me yesterday-“

“Cool it, awright? I know ya ain’t been foolin’ around on me. Bucky ain’t no Jody.” You never could have guessed how relaxed, how ridiculously calm, Red was going to be about all of this. “I noticed a couple months back, I knew it’d come up eventually, an’ I decided it’s not a problem. He’s a good guy an’ he’ll take care of ya while I’m held up with this bullshit. I’ll feel better knowin’ he’s there for you and the kid, ‘specially if I ain’t comin’ home.”

“Don’t talk like that, of course you’re coming home.” You scolded. “Ducky will win your case, you’ll get released, and then the three of us can work something out-“

“Sweetheart, as much as I’d love t’ believe that, we gotta prepare for the worst here.” Red sighed, and leaned on his fist as he watched you wearily. “Oh, don’t look at me like that, sugar.” You could see his resolve weakening with every moment that passed. “Awright, awright, fine, I’ll think positive.” He rolled his eye lights dramatically. “It’d be easier if I could get some fuckin’ time away from this shithole.” He grumbled under his breath.

“Why not take a bathroom break?” You suggested hopefully. “We’re almost at the end of our call time, anyway.”

Bucky shot you a questioning look, but you shook your head at him. “Sounds like a plan t’ me.” Red’s brow twitched suggestively. “I’ll talk t’ ya later, baby.” The screen froze and then went black.

“Sorry I kept ya waitin’, angel.” Your eyes flew open to see Red seated on the lid-less toilet in his cell like it was throne fit for a king. “I wanted t’ try this ages ago, but I had t’ learn the routines of the place first t’ find an opening.” He stood up, glanced around the corner toward cell door, and walked
right through the warp into the bedroom. “Feels good t’ be home fer a while.”

You held back for a moment, hardly believing that he truly was here. “I…I missed you so much.” You choked a little on the words, a sob rising in your throat as you fought to speak.

He rubbed his ribcage ruefully, his hand coming to rest over the place were his Soul pulsed. Something deep in his sockets flashed bright and hot like a dying sun, and you found yourself suddenly crushed to his chest. You wiggled your arms free enough to hug him back properly, and, for one small moment, the world was right again.

He tightened his hold, accidentally cracking your back in doing so, and then pushing you back on the bed. He didn’t seem to feel up to talking much right now; indeed, he looked rather crazed compared to the level-headed, laid-back monster he’d appeared to be earlier. There was something wild in his sockets now, a touch of madness in the magic that sparked and snapped in sanguine volts along his bones, and his teeth were bared in a needy snarl as he buried them in the glowing mark on your shoulder.

The pain made you gasp, and then melt under him. His tongue lapped at the skin caught between his jaws, his hands reached for yours to pin to the bed, while he ground his pelvis against yours. He’d never been so intense, wordless in the ferocity of his desire, and so unwilling to divide himself from you for the slightest delay. When he kissed you, he trapped your tongue carefully with his teeth, and stroked the tip methodically.

When he finally had to pull back to give you a chance to breathe, he was smiling so wide that you feared his jaw might crack. “Missed you, too, angel. Don’t have a lotta time, but I needed this.”

“How long ya got?” Bucky’s amused voice broke the magic of the moment.

A moment of silent communication passed between Red and Bucky you couldn’t understand. Whatever it was, it had Bucky shrugging off his jacket and his hands working at his belt. “Not long enough t’ do what I wanna do.” He tugged at the tights under your dress. “Fuck, why ya gotta wear so many clothes, angel?”

“Says the guy who wears two shirts and a jacket in summer.” You stuck out your tongue at him, and pushed his fumbling hands away. You pushed down your tights, and pushed your dress over your head. “So, why am I taking these off?”

“T’ gimme spank-bank material.” He admitted shamelessly. “Maybe I ain’t got the time t’ fuck ya proper, but it don’t mean I can’t enjoy a good show while I’m here t’ jerk off to later.” He met Bucky’s eye, made a sharp motion with his head toward the bed, and tossed you atop the formerly neat duvet. Stunned, you flinched a little at the impact and let out a surprised little noise. “Aw, sorry, did I scare ya, babe?”

“You are a smug bastard.” You pushed yourself up with one arm.

“How many times have I told ya not t’ curse?” He scolded, eye lights pulsing in mimicry of a heartbeat. “Ya wanna have a dirty mouth? We’ll give ya a dirty mouth.” He touched your face, exceedingly gentle at first, and then twisting almost painfully through your hair to yank your head lower. “I know ya ain’t afraid of me. Never of me, right?”

He’d never given you a single reason to be, had he? For a moment, you thought back on all the murders, on all the blood on his hands, of everything he’d admitted to you in the dark of the night once he’d believed you were asleep…it always reminded you of a confessional, a private guilt keeping him awake he refused to admit to anyone else and only when he thought it wouldn’t burden
you. How he wondered if he was just as bad as the assholes he’d eliminated, and how it sometimes
gave you the idea that each jackass he killed…he might kill them because he saw a little of who he
used to be in them and hated them all the more for it.

Rarely, and typically only in moments of physically demonstrating his affections, he’d slip up and
say things like this, or ask questions that made you wonder if he still doubted how much he deserved
a quiet, good life with a family. “Oh, I’m terrified- of course not, you corndog.”


Red raised a brow at him. “Hey, I’m not the one with ‘is pants ‘round his ankles an’ his cock down
angel’s throat…much as I’d like t’ be.” He added ruefully.

“Wha-“ Before you had time to form the rest of the question, he’d forced your mouth wider and
shoved you down on his best friend’s cock.
“How long has it been since we did this?” Your dad sipped at his hot chocolate, a nostalgic smile falling easily into place on his face. The soft illumination of the kitchen light made his hair glow like a silver halo around his head.

You scraped your fingernail along the rough, unglazed bottom of the mug. “I’m honestly not sure, probably not since I moved out for cosmetology school.”

He picked up the tub of Swiss Miss, considered it for a moment, and then placed it back atop the microwave. “It’s been such a long time since I’ve had this cheap, powdered sludge.” He swirled his mug a bit and took another drink. “To be frank, I can’t tell the difference.”

“Don’t let Stefan hear you say such a thing.” Stefan had been your family’s personal chef for as long as you could remember and he’d often felt maligned by your father’s poor sense of taste. “Thanks for coming, dad. I hate to ask for anything, you know I do.”

“What is money good for, if not for being spent?” He chuckled to himself. “So, who is the gift for?”

“How did you-”

He arched an eyebrow at you skeptically. “Honey, you haven’t asked for something for yourself since your twelfth birthday. It’s always for someone else. Who is it for and how much?” He reached for his pocket to get out his cheque book.

“The twins.” You relented with a sigh. “I’m not sure how much they need, but Ducky’s already refusing payment for getting Red out. Bucky’s the only one making money right now.” You turned away, finding it hard to meet his eyes. “They live in a run-down apartment, their furniture is destroyed, and it’s just…it’s disgraceful the way they have to live. I know they won’t want anything fancy, but maybe we can get them an apartment in this building? It’s expensive, the landlord is miserly, but anything is better than what they’re dealing with right now. They don’t have anyone, dad…they’re…they know what it’s like.”

“I’m not sure what you mean.”

“Their dad walked out on their mom when they were pretty young.” Re-telling the story was difficult, it almost felt like you were living it yourself. “They only had her, and she worked so hard for them. She could barely be home, but she’s gone now. They’ve only got us and each other, and I want to repay every bit of kindness they’ve shown both Red and myself.”

Your father clicked his pen slowly, a habit he’d failed to rid himself of despite his advancing age, and thumbed through his leather register with the other hand. “A single parent working hard for her children…doing her absolute best…perhaps failing and always making mistakes.” His voice was soft, as fragile as the petals on a dried flower. “I see what you mean.”

You winced and coughed uncomfortably as you accidentally inhaled your next sip. “That’s…no. I didn’t mean it like that.” You cleared your throat, the hot chocolate was no longer the only reason you were choking up. “Dad, I didn’t mean it like that. I’m not trying to blame you for anything, I’m sorry.”

“Of course,” He shut his eyes tight, and his shoulders were now tight with stress. After a few seconds, he seemed to force himself to relax and the ink pen flew fluidly over his book and register. “The anniversary is coming up. Are you going to visit?”
You stared down in the murky, brown liquid that still spouted steam from your cup, if only for something to focus on. “I’ve never missed a year.” You reminded him, your tongue curling thickly around the difficult words. “And you?”

“Purple cornflowers, as always.” The pen was clicking again, snick-snick snick-snick, but his hand had paused after the second cheque. “I’m sure she’d have…I don’t she would blame you if you couldn’t this year. It’s been difficult with everything going on.”

“No, it’s alright.” The steam was collecting in tiny beads at the ends of your hair on the strands closest to the edge of the mug. Your face was close enough to it to feel the radiating heat all the way to the tips of your ears. “I’m actually…well, I think it’s a good thing you brought it up because I think…dad, I think I’m going to be okay.”

His head jerked sharply to the side, all pretenses of focusing on filling in the cheques gone, and his eyebrows were pulled together into a chrome caterpillar that perched above his shrewd eyes. “Okay?” He echoed hollowly. “‘Okay’, in what sense?”

“In the sense that mom is gone…in the sense that she’s been gone for a long time.…a-and in the sense it’s not my fault.” Your throat muscles worked against themselves, somehow your jaw didn’t want to work properly, and the muscles in your thighs felt twitchy like you’d drank too much coffee. “It’s sad, and it was hard, but now…it’s easier. I have my own family, chosen and made, and I’ve been considering—“ You tugged at the edge of your shirt, one of the ones that hadn’t quite been outgrown by your belly yet, to pull it back into place where it was riding up. “—I’m gonna be a mom soon and…say something happened to me, right? R-right, so there’s no telling what’s going to happen. Being pregnant and all…I haven’t had much time to really think about it, but it’s terrifying, you know? If something goes wrong and I’m…if I end up—…I know they’re going to have more than enough family, but I don’t want…dad, I wouldn’t want it for them. I wouldn’t want my kid to spend their life feeling guilty about it.”

“Honey, do you truly feel that way?” His eyes were misting over.

“I think I understand now. It’s not about what I did or didn’t do, and I’m not venerating her or keeping her memory closer by holding on to the idea that I could have done more than I did. I wouldn’t want it that way, and she wouldn’t have wanted it, either. I’m going to be okay.” Despite how your body had suddenly decided to quake like a shoddy building on a California fault line, you felt more solid and grounded than you had in a long time. You’d almost bitten your tongue trying to get it out, but your voice strongly resonated in your chest. “No matter what happens, everything will be okay. It’s my time to shine, right?” You grinned awkwardly. “Kinda…er…more literally than I would’ve expected back in the day, but you know what I mean.” You yanked your shirt back down again to cover the exposed, wine-red glow that was once again peeking out from under the fabric.

He abandoned the cheques, dropped his pen back on the counter, and laid both hands on your shoulders. “I’m so proud of you. I’ve always been proud of you. I know we’ve had our differences, and I know I could’ve done better, but when I look at you now…sweetie, I see everything your mother and I did right.”

“I probably should’ve said something to you,” You admitted softly. “I didn’t want to bother you. It wasn’t that I didn’t want you around or to talk to you. I just…I just felt like you needed to work to feel normal again. I wasn’t looking for trouble on purpose; I was looking for you in all the wrong places.”

When you’d asked him over earlier, you hadn’t been expecting it to take a turn in this strangely cathartic direction. It wasn’t supposed to end up with the pair of you struggling with tears over cold, dollar-store hot chocolate. It wasn’t supposed to turn into an hour of memories, reminiscing over
half-forgotten ghosts of good times long since passed, and it wasn’t supposed to melt the settled frost between the two of you. It wasn’t supposed to, but thank goodness it did.

He left behind four substantial cheques, not to mention his pen, but not merely that. There was something different now, a spring where winter’s last vestiges of chill had released from your chest, and you felt different. Were you different? Or had you always been like this; a seed buried in the permafrost, simply waiting for the warmth needed to poke your head through the soil and greet the shining sun? It was odd, and yet you felt liberated from your frozen, lonely Alcatraz.

That evening, Bucky dropped by again. You’d called him over, of course, intending to surprise him with the money, and to warm him up to the idea of accepting the gift. He could be as stubborn as Red sometimes, which is probably why they were as thick as thieves, although that only meant you had a good idea of how to coax him into it.

He was looking pretty beat-up today; the crest of his pompadour was flattened against his head, there was a deep scratch above his left eye, and everything from his knuckles to his elbows was turning a nasty prune color. Regardless, he held himself to his usual good humor and mannerisms, laughing as you fussed over the minor contusions and rolling his eyes while you dabbed at the cuts with rubbing alcohol. “You called up Red yet?”

“Well, before I left for work today.” You smiled secretively. You’d let him in on what you were planning for the rowdier twin, and had gotten his enthusiastic approval. “Dinner is almost ready, how do you feel about barbeque chicken with mashed potatoes and cornbread?”

“I feel hungry, that’s how I feel.” He hooked his legs over the arm of the couch, his head falling into your lap, and stretched his hand out to fondly scratch King’s massive head. “We took on a few Leadheads today. Got their hands on a handful of black market guns and a stash of weed that would’ve set Snoop Dog up for a year.”

“Are they taking up with cartels? Or do you think they’re growing it on their own?” You asked, suddenly alarmed as vague ideas of people like Fidel Castro flashed through your mind.

“No idea, but it don’t matter now. We buried it in Silas’s gramp’s compost heap under a mountain of cow shit and old vegetable peels; ain’t no one gonna go diggin’ through that.” He sounded so ridiculously self-satisfied it was hard not to laugh with him. “So, I know what’s for dinner, but ya haven’t mentioned dessert yet.” His eyes rested on your chest, flitted up to your mouth for a second, and then his eyebrows jumped in quick, suggestive motions.

“Between you and Red, I swear-” You teased your fingers through his disheveled hair, earning yourself a melodramatic protest from him. “I don’t know which one of you is worse!” You shoved him off your lap to check on the chicken.

He followed close behind, his hands settling on your upper arms, and you heard him let out a low, contented sigh. “Feels like we’re finally doin’ some good out there, mi vida. People are talkin’, and there was a protest down at the courthouse today – ran into it on my way to work.”

You took the chicken out and pulled off your oven mitts. “Has Ducky been able to speak with that boy yet?”

“Far as I know, he’s got somethin’ set up for this Saturday at a diner with the kid’s mom.” Bucky moved to the fridge to pour himself a glass of apple juice. He glanced at the half-filled cup in his hand, raised a dissatisfied eyebrow at it, and then reached into his pocket for an aluminum flask. He added a nip of whatever was inside to the juice before taking another swig. “Not sure ‘bout the details, but apparently the kid was a real hijo de la gran puta a few months ago. Got himself into all
kinds of shit, but—" He chuckled to himself. "-apparently, he ran into Big Red and Hazel’s loudmouth boy-toy, so they set him straight. His momma was so grateful, once she heard what had happened to Red she made him get ahold of Ducky.”

You put your hands on your hips. “How exactly did they ‘set him straight’?”

“Ah, y’know—” He grinned, scratching the back of his head. “-the usual ways.” He looked like he was barely restraining himself from bursting out into riotous laughter. “He is getting straight A’s now, wears pants that fit ‘im –gone and done a complete 180 from what I heard.”

Dinner went well, although there wouldn’t have been much to mess up in the first place. You didn’t bother telling Bucky that the chicken had come marinated (all you’d had to do was pay attention to the timer, thank goodness), the mashed potatoes were instant (those little pouches came in wonderful flavors), and the cornbread was as simple as adding water and plopping the mix into the oven to bake. You were still rather horrid with cooking and baking, you were capable of doing all of that at the very least. However, if he’d known, you weren’t entirely sure he’d have cared.

He scarfed down his entire portion so fast, it felt like you’d barely had time to take your second bite before he was up for seconds. It made sense, though, considering how hard he and the others had been working themselves. It was embittering, as you watched him plow (albeit much more slowly this time) through another plate, how he and everyone else was forced to do this. They could have laid down and taken it, but that…that wasn’t an option for people like them.

It wasn’t an option for you now, either. You had a duty to make this world better, to forge a life as decent as you could, for the baby. This would be a daunting endeavor, certainly, but you were getting a handle on things. Supplements, for instance, were now something you didn’t need to be reminded to take.

Originally, you’d found it necessary to set an alarm on your phone for them, but you’d trained yourself to be more aware of the time and no longer needed it. Magical supplements were twice a day; once with breakfast and once with dinner. Prenatals were four times a day with food; breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snack. In spite of having acquired the routine, you still disliked taking them.

The magical supplements and prenatal sat beside your plate right now, which you eyed with distaste. The prenatal were bitter, nasty things that stuck to your tongue and made you choke a little every time. The tiny, beige pills tasted of vomit and rusty iron. Hazel’s prescribed supplements outshone those in every way (and also literally because they radiated a cheerful, emerald glow), and were comparatively pleasant in taste. They tasted…green…in a similar fashion of grape soda tasting less like grape and more like purple. Frowning, you forced the prenatal down with a massive gulp of juice and coughed a little from the momentary wave of nausea that accompanied the aftertaste.

Bucky curiously plucked one of Hazel’s supplements off the table to examine it. “Kinda weird t’ think only a few years ago magic was something outta movies or books or little kids’ stories. Now, my best friend’s a literal monster and all these people I thought were crazy for claimin’ t’ have powers were tellin’ the truth.”

You picked up the other pill and studied it. “It’s pretty amazing.” The gel capsule cast a muted, green light on your fingers. “Without Red -without monsters and magic- so many things would be different…or maybe they’d be the same, I don’t know.” You weren’t sure where you’d be, if not with Red.

Bucky seemed to read your mind. “Do ya think you an’ me woulda-“ He winced a little at that. “I mean, you’d still be here in the city, right? So…there woulda been a chance…”
You popped the pill into your mouth, a crappy excuse to take a second to answer. “I’d probably be working here in the city, but I’m not sure. Red’s kind of the only reason we met in the first place…” You trailed off awkwardly as the mood of the room shifted.

Bucky reached for your hand, folded the supplement into your palm, and sighed. “Yeah…yeah, that’s what I was afraid of.” He mumbled, and stuffed his hands into his jacket pockets sullenly.

“Did I say something wrong?” Your heart dropped and your hands grew clammy as you cursed your own ineptitude. You were truly awful; you never knew what to say, you never knew understood what not to say, and then you ended up upsetting people. “I’m sorry, I-“

“Nah, ’s not you. Well, I guess it kinda is, but it ain’t something you can control.” His caramel eyes followed the patterns in the popcorn-style ceiling. “I’m gonna ask you somethin’. I promise I ain’t gonna be mad if the answer is yes, but am I-“ He let out a harsh, rough breath of air. “-coño…am I a replacement?”

“A…a what?!”

“A replacement.” He repeated in a dull, flat voice. “I’m not mad. It’s hard for ya without him, I know, but I…” He cleared his throat. “I can’t do that. I can’t fill his shoes, Ángelita-“

You touched his shoulder lightly. “No, of course not! I am so sorry if I did anything to put that horrible idea in your head, but no. I adore you for different reasons than I love Red…well, you’re both very similar and I do have a very specific type of person I’m attracted to, but I can assure you I’m not keeping you around as a replacement.” You felt a bit rambly with that last sentence, but he was looking more hopeful now. “Besides!” You added with a manic, nervous laugh. “Red has giant feet - there’s no way you could wear his shoes.”

“I’m going to let that one go.” Bucky shook his head. “We’re going to pretend you didn’t make such an awful joke, you’re gonna take yer pill, an’ then I’m gonna fuck you silly.”

“How incredibly romantic.” Your deadpan retort caught him by complete surprise. It wouldn’t have even been that funny if he’d been expecting it, but he clearly didn’t know you well enough yet to wait for it. “So, are you okay? We’re okay, right?” You glanced down at your plate. “Also, I think we should relax first. You ate a heck of a lot, you could get a cramp.”

He was already draping his jacket over the back of the couch. “I think you’re getting’ swimmin’ and fuckin’ mixed up, sweetheart. Easy t’ do, after all…I’m pretty well known for my breaststroke.”

“My god, you are worse than Red.”
Coffee And Donuts (Part 1)

Chapter Notes

This was too long, so I had to break it up. XD Next half will be posted tomorrow!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Y’know,” He rubbed thoughtfully at his chin. “I really miss that grumpy, greasy bastard. It ain’t the same without him around.” He twirled a strand of your hair around his fingers. “Did I ever tell…no, I am sure I haven’t…” He puckered his lips to the side, something you’d learned which meant he was thinking, and then grinned. “Anyway, guess it doesn’t matter.” He carefully placed his plate in the overloaded sink, but stopped you from going for the tap. “Ah, but I suppose you are right. I haven’t been particularly romantic, have I? I must live up to the standards mai tried to raise me to have.” His toffee-brown eyes were soft with remembrance. “I was the only hell that poor woman ever raised.”

You pulled him into a hug, and he rested his hand on your head for a quiet moment. You could hear his breaths become heavy and sharp as axe blows to his chest, but he made no other noise and refrained from further comment. He was standing as still and solid as a mountain, but inside he was being battered like a sapling in a hurricane. Beneath his worn-out t-shirt, every muscle was tensed as he fought to keep his roots in the ground. You held him all the tighter until your arms began to ache, but eventually the storm passed as all storms do. He’d gone to arms with the rain and came out the other side as a victor, although sunshine had yet to peep through a part in the clouds.

“So, what should we do with ourselves for the rest of the evening?” With Red, you’d learned the best way was to move on as if nothing had changed except the subject of conversation. It never failed to put him at ease, and thankfully the same trick worked with Bucky.

He perked up immediately, made a grab for your hand, and pulled you toward the door. “I’m feelin’ coffee and donuts, whaddya think?”

“As long as they serve it iced, I’m game.” You ran back to the couch. “Oh, don’t forget your jacket!”

King’s ears twitched and he came trotting over with a pitiful whine. You kneeled down to give him a good scratch. “It’s okay, boy. We won’t be gone for long. Wanna treat?” King huffed, ignoring the offer of a treat and stared pointedly at Bucky.

“She’ll be fine, pooch.” Bucky reached into his own pocket and pulled out a small packet of crackers. “I always keep some of these on me. Never know when I’m gonna run into a hungry street dog.” He opened them up and tossed one down. King licked his chops with relish as he polished off the saltine. “Can’t believe I’m bribin’ a dog t’ get a date.” Satisfied, King gave your hand a small lick and left Bucky in peace.

“King’s so smart. He understands a lot more than you’d think, but then again he did manage to survive whatever it was that scarred him up.” You gushed as you slipped your arms into your own thick, woolen coat. It was the tail end of November now and the weather had grown frosty, although no snow had fallen yet. It hardly ever snowed in the city and maybe that was a good thing because it would only make the traffic worse, but there was something cherishable about waking up to a blanket of white outside the window.

“He was probably a pit dog.” Bucky frowned to himself at the thought. “The scarrin’ is mostly on his
face and neck…most pit dogs are trained t’ go for the sensitive spots, so it’d make sense.” He mounted up on his bike. “Had t’ be smart t’ make it through shit like that, I’d think.” His bike was a sleek black chopper with chrome that reflected the streetlights in brilliant, solar flashes and you knew from experience how smoothly it could skim over black rivers of asphalt. While he pulled his riding gloves on, you strapped your helmet into place.

If it had been cold before, it was more so as the pair of you wound through the early evening traffic. It was always heavier between five pm and nine pm because all the commuters were going home. Red lights were frequent, and the lines of cars sometimes extended for miles. Bucky had no problem weaving between these puttering sedans, twitchy hybrids, and moaning work-vans to get wherever he was headed.

Despite living in Ebott City for so long, you hadn’t explored much of it. So, once he’d passed the city park, you were very much lost. He rode on and on, until the traffic lightened and then nearly died altogether. The sidewalks were cast in sickly yellow light, and pockmarked and cracked underneath the weight of decades of foot traffic.

On the left-hand side rose a massive concrete complex shaped like a ‘U’ with a patchy plot of frost-browned grass in the middle. A swing set, with one swing sporting a broken seat, was set off to one side. A young girl in a windbreaker sat watching a game of kickball being played by a few others with a soccer ball. Even the ball itself was falling to pieces; the leather cover protecting the rubber had was hanging off like a snake going through a shed.

The kids glanced up curiously as Bucky eased to a stop on the side of the street. They ran over to the fence to gawk at the bike through the rusted chainlink fence. He parked near a light pole, pulled out a thick length of chain and a heavy padlock from a small pack attached to the back of the bike to secure it. “Hey, mister!” Bucky turned to see the girl in the windbreaker poking her little fingers through the fence and waving him over. “That’s an awful pretty bike!

“It’s not pretty.” One of the others hissed at her. “An’ don’t talk t’ people ya don’t know, stupid.”

“I’m not stupid! And it is pretty. Look at how shiny it is!” She stuck her tongue out at the rest of the kids and made them all groan.

“He’s right, ya know. Shouldn’t talk t’ strangers, kiddo.” Bucky winked at the little girl. “But-” He kneeled down so he was eye-level with her. “-you’re right. It sure is pretty an’ I’m real proud of it. Maybe if ya ask him real nice, Santa’ll bring you one just like it.”

“Oh…” She shuffled her feet and looked down. “I don’t think so. Tia says I should ask for sumthin’ practical. Not sure what that means, but I think she wants me to ask for socks.” Her face pinched up a little as a cold breeze swept by. She shivered hard for a moment, as did the rest of the children. You knew if you were a bit chilly under your own coat, then she was probably freezing in that threadbare windbreaker.

“Bucky-“ You tugged on his cuff. “-is there a dollar store or something around here?”

“Yeah.” He gave you a strange look. “It’s just down the road by the gas station, why?” He followed your gaze back to the little girl, whose face and fingers were turning red, and realization dawned on his face. He stepped back, scratched the back of his head awkwardly, and murmured. “I dunno, I don’t wanna look like a creep givin’ shit t’ kids.”

“Maybe if we asked her parents?” You whispered back. “Honey, are your parents home?”

“Don’t live with my parents, ma’am. My tia should be home from work in a couple hours, though.”
The little girl blew into her hands and rubbed them to keep them from going numb in the cold. 

“Why?”

“Um…because well, you know we…we…we know Santa and…um..since you’ve been such a good girl this year, Santa is going to give you an early present!” You were miserable at lying, so bad even the little girl was giving you the side eye at this claim, but it was the only thing you could think to do.

“Bullshit, you don’t know Santa!” Accused one of the other kids.

“Andre, you’re not s’posed t’ cuss.” The little girl snapped back. “If they say they know Santa, they know Santa! You’re just mad ‘cuz I’m gettin’ an early present.”

“Am not, ya stupid baby!” Andre, who seemed, by both mannerisms and looks, to be her older brother or perhaps a cousin.

“Are too!” She argued with a triumphant little crow. “You’re jealous! Jellybelly, jellybelly, jellybelly-“

“Okay, okay, there’s no need for jealousy or name-calling.” You stepped in and glanced over the rest of the group. The little girl looked to be about six, while her brother could have been ten, but the oldest looked about twelve. A few of them had no gloves or scarves, one had no coat to speak of, and the little girl was wearing only that tattered windbreaker. All of them needed something warm, and you felt so terrible you almost wanted to cry. “Do any of you have an adult who can come down here while we…um…go talk to Santa?”

“My grandpa!” One of the older boys spoke up. “He’s probably just watching the news. I’ll go get ‘im!” He took off like a bullet while you fiddled with your wallet.

Of course, you couldn’t afford all of this, but if you explained to your dad…maybe he’d be willing to help with the rent this month? You were carrying the rent, utilities, internet, and your phone bill on two paychecks which barely left you enough to feed yourself. You hadn’t told your dad how much you were struggling financially these days. You didn’t want to seem incapable or constantly use his money as a crutch. Sure, you’d grown up rich, but he’d never let you act like it.

But these kids…they could catch pneumonia dressed like that. What if your baby had nothing but a bit of cloth-lined plastic to wear in winter? You didn’t want to even think about that, and you could only imagine how embarrassed, how incredibly stressed, and overwhelmingly guilty the little girl’s aunt must feel. Standing there, considering all of that, it felt like an eternity before the boy came back with his grandad in tow. The elderly man squinted through thick glasses at you, and then frowned. “What’s all this about Santa Claus? Who the hell’re you people?” His tone wasn’t entirely friendly, but not quite hostile either.

“Um…um…C-can we speak to you privately, sir?” You motioned him closer and moved as close to the fence as possible. “I don’t want to be…you know…but…that little girl shouldn’t be out in just a windbreaker. We were wondering if you could watch her and the others while we go get her something a bit warmer?”

“It ain’t none of your business what that little girl is wearing, lady.” The old man spat in reply. “Take yer charity an’ shove it up your rich ass.”

“S-sir, I…I’m not…I just want to hel-“

“Go to hell, we don’t want handouts.” He snapped.

The entire conversation, Bucky silently stared at the old man with mild bewilderment. “Hey, I know
The old man stopped mid-curse and cocked a fuzzy brow at Bucky. He squinted over the top of his frames, and then yanked them off to clean them on the edge of his sweater. He blinked. “Well, fuck me if it ain’t that kid from the auto shop. Boy, I been meanin’ t’ come down an’ tell ya she ain’t never been a smoother ride than when you—…” He glanced from Bucky to you and then back again. “Aw, shit. Man, I ‘pologize for goin’ off on your lady, greasemonkey.” He took off his knit cap to you. “Ma’am, I’m sorry about that. We got a lotta social workers comin’ ‘round here, offerin’ stuff, an’ then tryin’ t’ find a reason t’ take people’s kids away. Didn’t mean t’ be an ass.”

“It’s f-fine.” You stepped back from the fence, trying not to make it obvious you wanted to hide. “S-sorry for offending you.”

“No, it’s awright. Kids shouldn’t be out this fuckin’ late anyway.” He waved a wrinkled paw dismissively. “Can’t tell ’em a goddamn thing, but it looks like you’ll find that out for yerself soon enough.” He pointed at your belly and grinned. “Bet yer damn proud, greasemonkey, ain’tchya?”

You had an answer ready, it was on the tip of your tongue, but then Bucky’s arm slid over your shoulders and you glanced up to see him beaming down at you. “Yeah, I am.”

“I’ll watch these troublemakers for ya while you two go talk up ’Santa Claus’.” He smirked and snickered behind his thin goatee.

Since the dollar store wasn’t too far away from the coffee shop, it made sense to go there first and get what was needed. You weren’t too sure of sizes, but went for a size larger than what you guessed. It wouldn’t matter if it was a little big, in fact they could get more use out of the coats, hats, scarves, and gloves that way. Thankfully, Bucky thought to pick up a couple of carabiners and slipped all of the bags’ handles on those upon checkout, but he wouldn’t let you carry anything out the door. “You’re pregnant, like hell am I gonna let a pregnant lady do any liftin’ she don’t have t’ do. Mai would roll over in her grave, Ángelita!”

“Well, since you’re carrying the bags, how about I put in our order? You can drop the stuff off and ride back to get me.” He conceded to that, but not before stealing a kiss and running off.

He was already waiting when you returned with the treats. Somehow, you were able to hold the cardboard cupholder and donut box between the two of you as well as keep a one-armed grasp on his waist while he sped along. He was headed back toward the park now, which was odd. You’d expected him to head straight back home to the warm comfort of the apartment, but no.

The parking lot was relatively empty. A homeless man was asleep on a bench under a streetlight at the far end of the walking trail; not many other people seemed interested in coming to the park this late at night. If you peered closely into the darkness, you could make out a single jogger running next to their beautiful golden retriever, but no one else. “What are we doing here?”

“It’s nice out here.” Bucky popped his kickstand and unzipped the pack on his bike. Like a magician pulling a rabbit from a hat, he drew out a rolled-up throw blanket. “It’s always a good idea t’ be prepared. Ducky keeps one in his pack, too.” He explained. “We used t’ go on long-ass road trips back when he was in college. We’d drive all over the state, camp wherever, an’ basically live off of canned stuff. Haven’t done it in a while…kinda miss it.” He threw the blanket over his shoulder and took your hand. You could make out the faded pinpricks of far-off stars out here, but only just barely. He picked a bench under a cypress tree, brushed off the needles, and pulled you into his lap as soon as he sat down. “Ya got some of the raspberry-filled ones, nice! Those are my favorite.” He said upon opening the box of donuts.
“Really? I love them, too. Red prefers Boston Crème, but…” You trailed off. “Sorry.”

“No need t’ be. It sucks not havin’ him around. Nobody else likes my fuckin’ jokes.” He said around a mouthful of pastry. With one hand, he managed to pull the blanket around both of you. He took a sip of his coffee and seemed surprised. “You remembered how I like it?”

“Well, that’s an important detail to keep in mind.” You blushed and fiddled with the edge of the blanket. “So…camping, huh?”

“Yes.” He made it through yet another donut, this one a simple glazed affair, and playfully licked a bit of chocolate crème off the corner of your lip. “You an’ me will go on a trip of our own sometime. Still gotta get you back to the racetrack, though. I’m dyin’ t’ see what my prize would be if I won another race for you. I got a kiss last time, you gotta up the ante if I win again.”

“Whatsoever you want.”

“Sweetheart, you shouldn’t be so vague.” His eyes were molten candy, and boiling hot enough to keep the winter night at bay. “Because I may hold ya to your word an’ take exactly what I want.” He pushed his fingers under the edge of your coat and shirt. He smirked at your little gasp. “Sorry, my hands are cold. Maybe you can warm them up for me, huh?”

“I don’t think this is decent public behavior.” You tried not to jump when his other hand joined in on the fun. He was mapping out tiny doodles on the skin of your stomach while you squirmed.

“No one can see.” He traced the edge of your bra as he pressed his face into your hair. “And it is a shame they can’t.” You swore you felt his tongue on the nape of your neck, and then you felt a brief brush of teeth. He didn’t clamp down, as Red would have done, but simply nibbled and moved on. “’Cuz you’re damn beautiful when you’re blushing, Ángelita. Mi corazón…te amo… I love you more every day. What you did for those kids was amazin’. I know you ain’t got the money for that, but you did it anyway. Compassion is a rarity.”

“I thought te quiero was-“

“It is, but…well,” His laughter was a puff of coffee-scented warmth on your neck. “It is hard to explain, but I shall try. We have two kinds of love, you see? I tried to keep it simple…keep it calm…uh…friendly? No, I don’t think that’s the word. When I say te amo, it means more. I was falling for you before, but now we’re together and I can express the stronger feeling. Understand?”

“I think so?”

“I think you will have to learn a bit to begin to understand fully. You’re smart, you’ll pick it up after a while.” His nose brushed against your throat. “I should teach you how to beg for my cock in Spanish.” He moved his hips slightly, a move that could have been mistaken for a simple shift for comfort, although it was anything but innocent. He worked one hand under the cup of your bra and smirked. “You love me?”

“Very much.” You pecked his cheek.

“No, no, I want to hear it.” He pinched your nipple hard enough to make you gasp.

“In Spanish or…?”

“Hell yes!” He yanked one hand free from your shirt and gripped your chin to make you look him in the eye. “Te amo, mi Ángel.”
“Te amo.” His entire face lit as if someone had stolen a spotlight and planted it in his skull. His smile was wide enough to see the edges of his molars, and the heat in his gaze burned his love into your heart. Your heart pounded frantically, almost like it wanted to be out here with him, but instead you were limited to pressing yourself as close as you could.

He was practically bouncing out of his seat. He couldn’t sit still. “I’m gonna tell Ducky an’ rub it in his face! He said ‘no, you have to be patient!’ Patience my ass! Best day of my life, hands down! Fuck yeah, this calls for a victory donut!” He slid you carefully off his lap, covered you with the blanket, and snatched a final raspberry-filled confection from the box before jumping on his bike. His tires squealed and screeched, and the sole of his shoe began to smoke as he spun in tight circles. He didn’t stop until he’d swallowed the final bite. “Take my phone and call that motherfucker I call mano. He won’t believe me if I do it.” He shoved his phone into your hands.

It took a couple of rings before a sleepy voice answered the phone. “What is it this time, James, and why can’t it wait until I’m awake?”

“Hi, sorry to wake you up, Ducky.” You glanced at Bucky, who was making the whole bench vibrate with his energy level. He was a D-cell Energizer Bunny on steroids by now. “Bucky says-“

“SHE SAID SHE LOVES ME, ASSHOLE. FUCK YOU AND YOUR PATIENCE!” Bucky yelled ecstaticly at the phone.

“Ow, Jesus H. Christ…” Ducky moaned. “I think I’m deaf in that ear now, manito. Congrats, now let me go the fuck back t’ sleep. G’night, sweetheart, don’t let ‘im wreck ya too bad.” He ended the call with a loud yawn.

“Don’t worry, baby, I’m not just gonna wreck ya. I’m gonna fuckin’ total that pussy like a Honda Civic in a monster truck rally.” Upon the return of his cell, he yanked you energetically off the park bench back to the bike. The blanket nearly slipped off your shoulders, but you grabbed it in time to save it from falling. You pitched all of the trash into a nearby bin with an impressive underhand toss on the fly.

He tugged the blanket out of your grip to carelessly stuff it away. “…perhaps I should have actually let Red buy that barrel of lube.” You suddenly felt quite concerned about what you may have gotten yourself into. “Whatever you have planned, Bucky, please take into consideration that I have to be able to walk to work tomorrow.”

“You ain’t walkin’ anywhere.” The engine hissed at the sudden start, but soon began to softly purr at Bucky’s gentle encouragement. “I’m drivin’ ya to work from now on.”

“I appreciate that, but won’t that be a lot of gas? I can pay you-“

“I’m afraid I only accept one method of payment.” He flashed you a smirk over his shoulder before flicking his visor down. “-an’ that’d be a piece of ass for credit or debit.”

Chapter End Notes

Just so you all know, my twitter handle is @marshmallowpire if you’re no longer using tumblr (I know I won’t be using it as often and probably will move over completely once Pillowfort is stable).
Oh, and guys, if you didn't know, I have a NSFW collection of Underfell pics coming out soon! Zvladputin, the star of my audios and voice of Red, will be cosplaying as our favorite tsundere biker! Visit both my tumblr (meldaburke) and twitter for more details and updates!
Returning home was an event in and of itself; Bucky’s hands were everywhere the moment the pair of you stepped inside. Out of the corner of your eye, you caught sight of King baring his teeth in a reproachful grimace before slinking into the kitchen to avoid the scene. Bucky didn’t appear to notice or care since his face was currently pressed into your neck. His tongue moved in slow circles over the sensitive skin there, although he occasionally ventured up to nip at your earlobe.

His hands fluttered over the flare of your hips, fingertips barely brushing the denim, as he sought to somehow touch all of you at once. “Maybe…Bucky, can we…I think we should…maybe we should take it slower?” You placed your hands over his. “I-it’s special, right?”

He pressed a final, open-mouthed kiss to your reddened neck. Shallow, panting breaths gave way to a much more controlled rhythm until he could speak again. “Gonna be the death of me, sweetheart, but if you’re wantin’ a warm-up I can manage.”

He did try to honor your request to keep things slow, knowing it was for his benefit rather than for yours, but he was having an immensely difficult time keeping his hands to himself. It would be the first time without Red, an event you took seriously and one meant to be special, and you didn’t want him to regret it in the morning because he’d overexerted himself. He was, as you’d reminded him several times tonight, hurt and shouldn’t be expending more energy than necessary.

For a while, he kept you in his lap on the couch. It was incredibly difficult to honor your own boundaries for tonight when he had his hands on your hips with the less-than-subtle intention of grinding your ass against his crotch. Very difficult, indeed. You tried to seem stern, yet received only a heated look and a carefree wink in return. His hands worked hard their way up to your waist, pressing his fingertips into the curves firmly, while his mouth suddenly returned to its earlier home just below your ear. “You and Red seem to have the same surprise attack strategy when it comes to sex.” You laughed as you playfully tried to squirm out of his grip.

“We are different, Ángelita.” His voice was lower, both in pitch and in volume. “He is more…controlled. I am not.” He pushed the edges of your shirt up, warm fingers dancing over your skin, and scraped his blunt nails along your back. “You say I am not a replacement, but you must prove it. What do you want from me, sweetheart; do you want a lover, a father to your child…someone to share your life and heart? I can’t let myself just be a cock t’ you.” He nipped along your spine. “Ya really think you could love me? Love me like ya love Red?”

“Absolutely, but you should know doubt doesn’t look good on you.” You sighed out of pleasure, and tried your best to turn to face him, but he had your lower body on lockdown. “Just…just let me turn off the tv first, I’m the one who has to pay the electricity bill around here now.” You heard him chuckle and the remote was swiped off the table. The tv instantly went dark and you were tossed up over his shoulder like a ragdoll. “You’ve got a peculiar habit of picking me up and tossing me about, sir.”

“Don’t be concerned, I do it to everything I like. I toss my tools, my jacket, and my women, but I most enjoy tossing salads.” He hopped nimbly over King, who’d ventured out of the kitchen to stand in front of the doorway, before using one of his elbows to push the door closed. “I’d bet my mother’s rosary that dog hates me.” He frowned as he heard snuffling and low growls from the other side.

“Red swears up and down he despises him, too, but King always comes to him for table scraps and treats. In fact, Red’s the entire reason we had to put King on a diet for a month.” You giggled at the memory. “He doesn’t hate you. It’ll just take him some time to deal with having another man in the
He pitched you forward and swung you into a princess-style position. “‘Another man in the house’...is that an invitation t’ move in?” Bucky’s mouth tipped up into a lop-sided, self-satisfied smirk. “Damn, now who is movin’ fast, huh?”

The skin of your face burned with a wildfire of a blush that carried a flame from your hairline down to your neck. “I hope you know we’ll be splitting the cost of getting a bed big enough for three.” He merely cocked an eyebrow down at you, and then snagged yet another smooch. He trapped your bottom lip between his teeth, sucking until it was numb and plump, and following it up with a rough shove of his tongue that almost reached the back of your throat.

He let your feet fall to the ground first, but you were too dizzy from the kiss to remember how to support yourself. He caught you before your knees buckled, but a bit too enthusiastically and ended up shoving you up against the cold glass of the bedroom window. You gasped at the change in temperature, for it was shocking even with the barrier of your shirt between the pane and your skin, and tried to flinch away. You caught a glimpse of sadistic pleasure in his warm eyes before he forced you back. “Red ever get t’ temperature play?”

“Oh gods, not another one...” You faked a groan. “Am I not allowed to have a taste of vanilla once in a while?”

With a sharp yank, he tugged the plastic blinds up the rest of the way. “Hey now, vanilla does have its place—not in my bed, but it does have its place.” Your shirt was already pushed up to your ribs, so it was simplicity itself for him to pull it up and off. He ignored, or more likely relished, the shiver that wracked your upper body the moment your skin made contact with the glass, and teasingly jerked his hips into yours. “Besides, temperature play is so entry-level, it might as well be vanilla...just more exotic vanilla...French vanilla.”

“Oui.”

“Oh ‘Tish, that’s French!” Both of you burst out laughing, then the laughter died to giggles, the giggles transformed into sighs, and the sighs turned to moans. He popped the clasp on your bra and threw it over his shoulder. He happened to glance behind you and smiled. “It’s snowin’.” He stepped back to let you turn to see, and, sure enough, heavy flakes were floating to earth like tiny, frozen feathers. There was already a dusty, layer of nature’s glitter coating the sidewalk, cars, and street.

He moved too fast for you to follow and, upon plunging two fingers under the bands of both your fleece-lined leggings and skirt, freed you from your remaining clothing. You were left only in a simple black thong. It was nothing particularly sexy or out of the ordinary, since you always wore thongs with skirts, but now you were wishing you’d gone all out with satin, lace, or at least a more memorable color.

In a self-conscious move, you attempted to move back from the window. “Stay.” His voice was harsh, not angry, but still commanding. His breath fogged the glass, creating a world of a thousand rainbows to replace the dirty city below, while you strained your neck to look back at him. “You move an’ I’ll put a few bruises on that ass.” A few moments later, the light went out.

The bedroom was as black as the empty void of space, save for the small column of light from the window, and his voice was back at your ear. You were trapped between the heat of his body and the chill of the window, and it didn’t seem as though he had any plans to move to the bed soon. “Harder for anyone to see in, but we can see out.” His voice poured into your ear like hot chocolate and pooled in your belly. The bittersweet scent of coffee mixed with a faded hint of cigarette ash on his breath, and it distracted you from the rustles coming from behind. You were too caught up in all of
that to pay attention…that is, until he trapped you once again between the frosty pane and himself.

The skin of his chest was roughened by a sparse growth of hair, which made you curious to know if it was the same shade of coal-black as his pompadour. As sensitive as the skin of your back was, you were able to feel the ridges and bumps of a few quite ghastly scars. The keratinized flesh scraped against your own, but you didn’t mind.

As if reading your thoughts, he answered your unspoken question. “The details would ruin the mood, baby.” He rested his chin on your head. “Better that you do not see them anyway. A few are from scraps with the gangs, others are from bar fights, and a few more I earned from a painfully passionate one-night stand with the pavement.”

“A motorcycle accident?” You tried to make eye contact with his distorted reflection in the window.

“It happens to the best of us.” He shrugged. He pinched your ass hard enough to make you wince and used your surprise to shove your chest more firmly up against the window. “Show the world those beautiful tits, sweetheart.”

Your cheek and breasts were pressed flat and losing a bit of sensation from the chill, but your back was warmed by his body heat. Work-calloused fingers played with the string of fabric that gave you a final shred of modesty. “Pretty as it is, this will have to go.” He plucked at the thong before sliding it down and allowing it to fall to your ankles. He dipped his fingers between your folds to gently circle your clit. “I was thinking—“ His tongue laved the juncture of your neck opposite of Red’s dimly glowing mark. “How would you like another hellion running around; a little black-haired devil makin’ trouble an’ wearin’ your smile the entire time?”

“Sounds like…-“ You shuddered as he nudged your legs farther apart. “-s-sounds like chaos.”

“Ah, but happy chaos, hm?” He murmured into your hair. “Don’t mind me, it is only a thought.”

“Maybe…if we…if we wait a little while…I mean, we could eventually.” You were having trouble forming coherent thoughts as he increased the pressure and speed. Your legs, now twitchier than they’d ever been, were going weak again. Without warning, he hooked your left leg over his forearm as you scrambled to brace yourself against the window frame.

“It appears I’ve swept you off your feet.” He didn’t even break his rhythm, and you could see him looking a tad haughty out of the corner of your eye. “But we’re only just gettin’ started, Ángelita.” He pressed a single fingertip against your entrance to steal a few droplets of gathering moisture. “Would ya like to know when I figured it out?” He generously spread your wetness over your clit, so that the slickness heightened every gentle pass over it. “It was that moment in the bar. Do you remember? The disgusting shit he said…it flicked a switch in my brain an’ all I remember is I wanted to tear his throat out.” A little snarl parted his lips over his perfect teeth and his eyes reflected a murderous heat only Hades could possibly surpass. “Never met a girl who saw me before you, ya know. People see twins, they do not see two people, but you saw.”

“You and…hn…Ducky are night and day. I don’t see how—“ You choked on your words as he spread your lips wide. If anyone looked up, they’d possibly get an eyeful. Strange that he’d be the exhibitionist type, but rather fitting, too.

You reached up to trace out a heart in the fog surrounding his mottled reflection. His breath tickled the back of your neck as he ceased his tortuously sweet touches to wage war on his belt buckle. He stepped out of his jeans and kicked them carelessly away. With your leg still hung over his arm, he rubbed his hips against your ass in leisurely strokes. The length of his dick blazed against your skin like a poker fresh from stoking a fireplace. “Mi corazón, I would give you the world for a kiss.” He
licked a line from your shoulder to your cheek, moved a wisp of a curl to the side, and pressed his lips against the back of your jaw. “Everyone should see you this way...tits out and legs spread for my cock.” Soft growls left his throat as his fingers found the uneven knots of the scars that ended just below your scapula. “How could anyone hurt such a sweet thing? You’re beautiful, amorcita, more beautiful than any woman I’ve ever...” He stopped and sighed, brushing the back of his fingers over your mangled back. “If he weren’t dead, I’d kill ‘im.”

“Well, you kinda did that already.” Your breath clung to the window as a splash of white that died and was born again with every exhale.

A cruel smile slithered over his face, and you shivered. “The snap of bones in my hands and the way he screamed...ah, yes, I remember that quite well.” He rubbed his thumb over the ragged edges of your scars. “When Red is free, I will add my name, and you’ll have us both wherever ya go.”

“I...I’d like that.” He pressed himself between your thighs.

“Would ya now?” His tone was mischievous. “You know what I’d like even more?” He snapped his hips hard enough to enter you all at once. “I want you tagged, so every time you open your legs I can see what belongs to me.” His thrusts were merciless, causing pleasurable tremors to wrack your body. “A little gold ring right here-” He squeezed the flesh of your right labia between his thumb and forefinger. “-if I can’t put a ring on your finger, I’ll put a ring on your pussy.”

The condensation of the window dripped onto your chest as he took his pleasure. You moaned his name until he grew tired of his own foreplay, yanked himself from your body, and pushed you roughly back on the bed. He pinned your arms above your head, knocked your knees apart, forced his way back in, and ground the head of his dick into your cervix. He didn’t seem to have it in him to force words past his lips right now, but you could hear it in the rhythm of his hips and see it in his eyes. I love you...I love you...I love you.

You wished you could share your Soul with him as you had with Red. It didn’t seem fair, it didn’t seem right, when you felt he had as much a claim on your heart as Red did. A few broken, battered words in Spanish tumbled from his mouth, and you weren’t sure if they were endearments or curses or endearing curses, but the way he moaned them into your skin set your body aflame.

Noises, embarrassingly wet smacks, echoed through the room as he fucked you with everything he’d been holding in for so long. The headboard hit the wall a few times with enough force to leave a dent, but you couldn’t care about the safety deposit when you had a wild man between your legs intent driving you insane with lust. “I...I thought...” He gasped into your neck. “I thought of you...every...single...night-” He punctuated every word with a roll of his hips to hit a perfectly delicious angle. “-I came...fuckin’ hell, I exploded over you every night.”

“Sounds...ah...sounds messy.” You clung to his shoulders and trying desperately to match his pace.

“Yes...” He slung your legs over his shoulders, folded you nearly in half, and yanked your body down harder on his cock. “Yes, but a happy mess.” He laughed breathlessly, his eyes wild and wide as he drove himself into you.

You crossed your ankles behind his head and grabbed onto his forearms for support. Your fingernails left gouges in his skin, but that only seemed to egg him on. You weren’t getting much stimulation, but he needed this and so you let him have his fun. “James,” You brushed a thumb over his cheek. “I love you, too.”

“Fuck, babe...not fair...usin’ my real name?” He winked at you. “That’s cheatin’, that is.” Searing hot, panting breaths ghosted over the skin of your chest as he took a nipple between his teeth. He
growled over it like a dog over a bone. “Mine…fuckin’ finally…goddamnit…all fuckin’ mine…” He descended into gruff Dominican swears once again before grabbing the headboard and slamming himself into you a final time. A snarling, bestial grunt left him, his caramel eyes meeting yours in a haze of ecstasy, and something he saw there prompted him to latch one hand around your throat. “Eres mío, Ángelita...forever…te amo…never forget…” He closed his eyes, still fighting for breath, and rested his forehead against yours. “Siempre te querré.”

“James,” You moved under him insistently. “Please?” Your pussy was aching, burning with need, and it must have shown in your voice. His eyes shot open and you could see a hint of guilt there before he drew back.

“Sorry, got a little carried away.” He grinned down at you and reached down to flick a thumb over your clit. “How ‘bout I make it up to ya?” He eased himself out of you and hunkered down between your legs. “Wonder how you’ll taste with my cum leakin’ outta ya?” He sounded so ridiculously proud of himself that you grabbed a nearby pillow and lobbed it at his face. He ducked it easily and snickered. “Oh, you’re gonna regret that, sweetheart. Now-” He trapped your clit carefully between his teeth. “-suffer.”
The throat-coating tang of scorched rubber and engine grease met your nose as Bucky’s bike rolled into the massive parking lot surrounding the racetrack. It was a comfort, even as your eyes watered due to a wash of dusty gray smoke belched from the rear-end of a nearby hot rod, you cherished this place. It held some of the best memories; how had you not come back sooner? Returning here was as good as a hot bath for easing the building stress of the past three months.

Bucky popped the kickstand, got off, and held out a hand to help you off. “Ducky’s on the other side of the lot with the Caddy.” He informed you after quickly checking his cell.

Ducky, as per usual, had skipped entering the race in favor of the opportunity to put up their most recent project for auction. They’d spent a great deal of time and money on this one, a gorgeous 1976 Cadillac De Ville, and he was eager to make the sale soon. They only ever looked to make enough from the sales to fund their next restoration, but there was no missing the gleaming excitement in Bucky’s eyes as his phone buzzed with another message from his brother. “Says he’s already got a few offers and he hasn’t even put it up on the showroom floor yet.” He sounded so proud it melted your heart.

He would have to entrust you with his phone while he was down on the track. “I’ll tell you everything he’s said after the race.” You assured him upon pocketing it. “It’ll sell, I know it will.”

A shadow of doubt drifted to block the sunshine in his eyes. “Yes, probably.”

“It will.” You said firmly and stood on your tiptoes to kiss his cheek. “Now, go ahead and get signed up, I remember the way to the stands.” You squeezed his hand before letting go and stepping into the river of spectators. “Te amo!” You waved goodbye, but couldn’t help glancing back at him every now and again to watch him roll his bike up to the registration line.

It took quite a while to find a good seat, the main hindrance being the sheer amount of people who’d come to watch today. This race had an attendance list easily three times that of Red’s race, and it made you slightly uncomfortable to be alone amidst such a crowd. You flinched a little each time someone accidentally brushed up against you as they passed, but you were able to ignore the discomfort by focusing on texting Ducky.

You let him know Buck was signing up and got a quick reply. He could, from the vantage point of the showroom’s rooftop café, see partially into the stadium. He made a tongue-in-cheek quip about the quality of the coffee there, and so went the conversation for the next several minutes. The Cadillac was, to his pride, one of the most frequently viewed as buyers perused the lot. The odds in selling the Caddy were rising by the minute, according to him.

The digital lot system brought two guys you didn’t recognize together, although the rest of the crowd went wild at the pairing. From the excited conversations around you, you gathered that these two were both regular racers as well as intense competitors. Still, despite being out of the loop of information, you eagerly fed on the energy and sat on the edge of your seat as the Christmas Tree counted down.

You found yourself rooting for the racer on your side of the stadium; his helmet sported ridiculous golden devil horns that made you giggle each time they flashed under the cold light of the winter sun.
When he won, you rose with the applause and clapped your heart out.

Horns, as you’d taken to calling him, ticked up the roster. People around you were growing rowdier, tossing around empty beer cans, popcorn, and swear words with every race he won. Over time, your enthusiasm took a left turn toward mild concern. Horns was nigh unstoppable; thirty races down and he’d won half of them.

Bucky, too, was winning all of his races, although he’d had to really fight for the win in his most recent match-up. He’d come up ahead by the scruff on his chin, a mere .5 seconds, but you could see him bouncing energetically around in the pit via the camera feed below the list of racers on the leaderboards. He wasn’t fazed by his near loss; instead he seemed empowered by it…perhaps even inspired. Not for the first time, you envied his confidence.

Bucky’s phone buzzed, taking your thoughts off the race for a moment, and you glanced down to read Ducky’s text. At first, you expected to see a crack about being able to see his brother’s giant head all the way over there, but the urgent message on the screen made your stomach drop. You checked the cameras again, and then the timer down in the corner of the video. The five-minute reprieve between races was nearly up –there was no time to pull Bucky out of the race now.

Your fingers curled around the frozen metal of the bleachers, on edge more than ever, as Horns rolled his bike up to the starting line. Bucky wasted no time in joining him, but didn’t seem to be focused on his opponent. He scanned the crowd in the final minute until he was able to pick you out of the knot of large, burly motorists you were currently seated in. His teeth reflected the glint off the chrome job on his bike when he smiled up at you. He revved his engine in a loud, yet brief, pulse, before the warning siren blared.

You muttered a prayer to the god of sex, drugs, and rock’n’roll as the lights on the Christmas Tree dialed down. Somehow, the air grew colder despite the abundance of bodies and the heat pouring off the bikes below. You drew your coat tighter around your body, eyes pinned on the final light as it slowly winked out...

Horns took the lead almost immediately, his bike growling in taunting triumph as he powered across the dragstrip, but Bucky wasn’t one to be left to eat another’s dust. His chopper followed in hot pursuit, swerving and nearly kissing the back tire of the other motorcycle. His body was pressed forward, like a gamer hunched over a controller to power through a boss battle, to cash in on his aerodynamic advantage.

He was able to pull up to the side of Horns' bike, his chopper pumping out plumes of gray as they battled for the lead. The nose of Horns’ motorcycle edged up a smidge farther as he, to, leaned forward, but Bucky managed to push his bike even harder. Nose to nose, it seemed like a tie was inevitable as everyone watching held their breath.

A collective gasp went up from all around as Bucky’s chopper bucked like a wild horse and he seemed to lose all control. He’d run over a shred of tire left over from a spin-out by a previous racer; he’d been so focused on out-doing Horns, he’d completely overlooked it. For a single heartbeat, Horns’ victory appeared to be assured.

Using every ounce of strength and skill he possessed, Bucky yanked his bike up on to his back tire. Horns was in the lead by half his own bike’s length, but the acceleration from the second before he’d wrested his bike into a wheelie powered him forward in a sudden burst of speed. There he was, front popped up and still holding his own. Thinking quick, he let himself drop back down, landing the nose of his bike only inches ahead of Horns' front tire, and swerved to the right to avoid another patch of crash debris.
Horns, however, was so distracted by Bucky’s showy maneuvers, that he didn’t see the danger until it was too late. He hit the patch of tread at full speed, his bike bouncing a full two inches off the pavement, and he was forced to violently twist his handlebars to the side while pumping his brake to avoid making love to the pavement.

Some cheered, others jeered as Bucky zipped across the line, but all went silent as he pulled into a sharp stop almost immediately. He leaped off his bike, ran back across the drag to where Horns’s had skidded to a halt. He threw off his helmet, chucked it over his shoulder, and ran the other racer’s side. Horns’ tires were smoking from the high-powered skid, although nothing else was visibly wrong. He knelt down beside the bike to give it a once-over, and then shook hands with Horns.

The camera from the pit had, by now, panned over to bring the scene into clearer view. Once Bucky was convinced everything was fine, he picked up his helmet and followed Horns into the pit. He disappeared into the bowels of the pit, probably headed down the racers’ ramp that led under the track and fed into the registration area, with Horns at his heels.

You dashed down the short aisle that led back to the registration, dodging as many people as you could by using your small size to squeeze through tiny gaps in the crowd. He’d definitely make a beeline for the registration desk to claim his winnings. You discretely slipped between two enormous, road leather-clad bikers and claimed a spot right next to the registration desk. You got a funny look from the attendant, but he didn’t say anything to you, so you assumed you were free to wait there.

Eventually, your assumptions proved correct when Bucky came peeling out of the ramp leading back to the pit. The others gave him plenty of room, a few even shouting hearty congratulations as he walked by. He raised a hand to thank them, but the other was latched tightly around the shoulder of the other racer –Horns.

Horns kept attempting to tug away, but Bucky, all smiles and warmth that he was, was insistent. Then, out of the blue, the racer stiffened and cast a sharp look your way. He stopped resisting, allowing Bucky to haul him up to the desk with minimal effort. Bucky presented his I.D., proof of registration, and waited patiently while the attendant counted out the cash and deducted the maintenance fee. “Bucky-“ You were already pulling his cell phone out of your pocket to tell him the news, but you froze.

Horns had yanked off his helmet, much to the shock of everyone nearby, and you found yourself face-to-face with…well, she definitely wasn’t a guy, that’s for sure. Horns smiled kindly at you. “I get that look a lot. Promise I’m the real deal, sweetheart.” She tugged off her riding gloves to reveal her hands. “See?”

Her body was laced with bone. Her hands were both flesh and fleshless; where the skin of her fingers and palms ended, the tops of her knuckles protruded through, and every inch of it gleamed porcelain white. Her face was entirely skull, and bearing cartilaginous plates to form a mouth that sported a prominent set of fangs. “Oh…oh my god.” You clapped a hand over your own mouth. “I mean, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean that in a bad way! I mean, I didn’t think there was-“

“Another hybrid?” Her eye lights dropped to your heavy stomach. “Yeah, neither did I.” She tucked her helmet up under her arm and held out her hand for you to shake. “Heard about one in the papers, but I figured it was bullshit. Nice surprise, though.”

Bucky clapped her on the back. “Well, whatever the hell ya are, here’s your cut.” He stuffed half of the reward into the pocket of her leather jacket.

“Hey, you won fair and square.” Horns fished it back out.
“An’ you woulda won if not for that bit of tread.” He replied defiantly. “Yer a great racer, pana. Keep it!”

Horns looked as though she wanted to continue to protest, but she seemed to realize he wasn’t going to take it back. So, she shrugged and let it go. “Thanks, so are you. Never would’ve thought to do what you did out there.”

He grinned broadly. “Thanks, a pal of mine taught me trick riding. He is…umm…” He was getting stuck on his words again, his excitement making him lose track of the right words in his second language, eventually he gave up and chuckled. “He is a bacano…very good, y’know?”

“Cool.” She nodded. “I might hit you up for a few tricks sometime, handsome.” She winked at him, and then turned back to you. “You can call me Riff, sweetheart.”

“Well, it’s not my real name, but-” You clasped your hands behind your back shyly. You were still awful with new people, and meeting a hybrid? That was pretty intimidating. You had so many questions, but you weren’t sure if it would be rude to ask them. “-you can just call me Angel. Everyone does.”

“Nice to meet you, Angel.” She knelt down to be eye-level with your stomach. “And nice to meet you, too, kiddo.” She met your eyes briefly to clearly ask permission, which you promptly gave. Violet magic gathered in a haze at the tips of her fingers as she gently pressed them against your belly. A jolt, not unlike the feeling of a strong static shock, ran through your entire body. “Huh,” She pulled her hand back, dusting away the magic. “The Soul is insanely strong, but I guess she gets it from the father, right?”

“She?!” In all of your previous check-ups with Hazel, she hadn’t been able to tell if the baby was a boy or a girl. You didn’t mind knowing, but it was still a bit of a surprise.

“Sorry, sorry!” Riff frowned guiltily. “Were you waiting to find out?”

“Well…not really.” You chuckled. “Don’t worry about it. I was just surprised since my maginurse wasn’t able to tell me even with an ultrasound.”

Riff visibly relaxed. “Great, glad I didn’t spoil anything. Congrats on the baby girl!” Then she added. “Oh, and don’t think this means your maginurse was overlooking anything. Nobody, monsters or mages, could tell what I was going to be, either. ‘Course, woulda thought an ultrasound would do the trick, but I guess the magic messes with the tech or something…I dunno.” She made a puzzled sound. “Anyway, I always told myself if I ever met another like me, I’d give a few pointers. You got loads of questions, right?”

“I do, but there’s something fairly urgent going on right now, so could we possibly meet up in…well, actually I’m not sure how long this is going to take…” You fiddled with Bucky’s phone nervously. “Bucky, your brother texted me while you were out on the track. He says-” You swallowed hard. “-…he said that he found your dad at the auction.”

Bucky’s entire body went stiff as a board, but then his eyes hardened and his mouth curled up in a manner that could only mean homicide was on his mind. “All these years-” He laughed coldly. “-that bastard-“

“Bucky,” He grabbed the phone from you, face still twisted with fury as he viciously typed away. “Please, don’t go into this angry. It’ll be best if you don’t let him think he’s affecting you-“

“I’m not angry!” He smashed his finger into the send button. “¡Yo tengo un quille! That son of a
goat-fucking, dickless *cabra*n!” He shoved the phone in his pocket, took your hand and pulled you away. “You might as well come!” He shouted over his shoulder at Riff. “This won’t even take a minute, *pana*. You can answer all of Ángelita’s questions after we run the dog off!”

Chapter End Notes

Shout out to my girl @Sanriff for letting me use her OC! Thanks sweetie! <3
The showroom echoed with every pounding footfall as Bucky raced through the floors of the building, his arm latched around your waist tight as a c-clamp, with Riff taking up the rear at a casual jog. Lines of vehicles, all classics in varying models, colors, and years, were passed by at a whirlwind pace. You stumbled a few times as your legs struggled to keep up with the madness. In comparison to how quick he typically was, Bucky was striking like greased lightning.

He was breathing heavy from exertion by the time he reached the top floor, where his brother waited at the only occupied table in the entire café. Beside Ducky sat a man who couldn’t have been mistaken as anyone other than their father; he was short, with the same load-bearing shoulders, sun-wrinkled skin, and gray hairs threading through his slicked, coal-black hair. His lips were thick and drawn up in a hopeful smile that would have been quite charming thirty years ago, but it didn’t quite reach his eyes. His eyes were the only difference, you noticed they were somehow the same and yet not. His were hazy, almost jaundiced, shiftly, and the color of coffee with too much artificial sweetener – distasteful and falsely sweet.

He rose, arms open. “¿Qué lo qué, mijo?”

Bucky stopped a few feet short of his father. “Nada aqui mama guevo.” He snarled back, his tone so acidic and poisonous that even you knew he was already throwing insults.

Bucky’s dad threw up his hands in defeat. “Calm, son, calm.” He offered a placating smile, one which Bucky did not return, and sighed. “Perdóname, mijo…please.”

“You are sorry?” Bucky stormed up to his father. “For what, exactly? For leaving? For abandoning her? Are you sorry for not even bothering to come to the funeral? Donald sent you three letters! ¡TRES CARTAS!”

“His English isn’t as good as ours, mano.” Ducky reminded your brother solemnly. “Try to control yourself, please.” His jaw muscles were tight, his golden eyes narrow and flaming, but there were no other indications of temper from him. “Angel, please meet our sperm donor Hermas.” He made a sweeping, half-hearted motion toward his dad. “Pai, es Ángel.” He pointed you out specifically, so his father wouldn’t get you confused with Riff, who was making a point of hanging back in the doorway.

“Ah,” Hermas nodded slowly, peering at you with those unsettling eyes. “You are…friend of my sons. ¿Sí? I…apologize…my English…not very good…” He spoke very deliberately, obviously considering every single word before he tried to pronounce it and you gave him a bit of credit for trying so hard.

“Sí…uh…soy pana…lo siento no hablo Español.” Your eyes flicked to Bucky, who was panting now out of anger rather than from exercise. “It’s probably not really my place to say much. If either of you needs me, I’m here for you. Say what you need to, and then we can all go home.”

“I don’t have anything to say to him.” Bucky watched his father like a hawk. “I despise the fact he’s even lookin’ at you, Ángelita. He’s nothing but a liar.” He put himself partially between you and his father.
“Ángel…” Hermas smiled widely. “Beautiful name, jeva….beautiful.”

He reached for you, but Bucky knocked his hand away. “Don’t touch her!”

Hermas yanked back his hand as if he’d been burned, and frowned up at his son. “I drove, mijo… long time.”

“He drove up from one of the counties downstate.” Ducky explained curtly, his voice short and to the point. “He heard about the trial, apparently he’s been ‘trying’ to find us for years. He said he never got the letters because he moved too often.” His distaste was clear, but he also sounded unsure of himself. You couldn’t blame him, though, because this was his father…a man he hadn’t seen in well-over seventeen years. It was bound to be awkward and stressful for both of them.

“Ese allantoso…bullshit.” Bucky spat, his eyes trained directly on his father. “¡Son un jabalado! That is bullshit. It isn’t as if we were under fuckin’ witness protection. He could’ve looked us up in the fuckin’ phone book! We sure as hell didn’t move! Does he know mai worked herself dead just t’ keep food on the table? He’s practically the reason she’s-”

“He didn’t kill her, ermano.” Ducky said calmly. “He is an asshole, but you need to control yourself. You’re getting yourself worked up for nothing. It isn’t worth it. I have made it clear we do not want anything to do with him, but he insisted on waiting to see both of us.”

Meanwhile, Hermas had been staring very intently at you. “You…are the woman from papers.” Suddenly, he became extremely animated, trying to duck around Bucky to get a look at you, but your lover kept a better guard on you than a soccer goalie would do for a net. “Mija-”

“Mios Dio, I swear if you came all the way here to get us to ask her for money, I am going to put you in the ground.” Bucky hissed, and you had a horrible feeling he was sincere in his threat.

“I’m fairly certain now that is precisely the reason he came.” Ducky’s left shoe tapped against the tile floor impatiently. “Ángelita, I apologize for the harassment. I believed it was my sudden successes that drew him out of the woodwork.” He reverted to Spanish, this time speaking to his father, and wielding as much authoritative command as he could. His words caught Hermas’ immediate attention, and he immediately stepped back like a dog called to heel.

“James, please stop.” You wrapped your arms around his waist. “I think you should just calmly tell your dad he has no place in your life any longer and leave it be.”

Bucky turned on his heel, his fingernails digging and dragging over his scalp, and growing low in his throat out of frustration. “My real name is cheating, mi vida.” His voice was strained, torn between fury and pain. “Fine.” He spun on his heel and poked his father in the chest. With a speech in machine-gun Spanish, forming words that blurred by so fast you could barely pick out syllables, he backed his father up against a wall.

“He’s warning him not to come back.” Ducky stated plainly, and then winced at something his brother said a bit too loudly. “Basically…among other things, anyway.” He perked up again at another string of sentences and whistled through his teeth at his twin. “Eh, mano, not in front of the ladies!”

“They don’t know what I’m saying!” Bucky retorted.

“Still ain’t polite.” Ducky smirked and got up from his chair. “Made the sale, by the way.” He informed you. “Mano,” He called again, this time in a sharper, warning tone of voice. “We’re leaving.” He stopped in front of Riff. “A pleasure to meet you, ma’am. You can call me Ducky, the
idiot cussing out the bigger idiot is my brother Bucky. I apologize for him; he has always had anger issues.”

“I have NO ISSUES! The ONLY issue I have is the one standing in front of me!” Bucky snapped over his shoulder.

“Sorry, manito, sorry.” He nodded at his twin and smiled at Riff. “I meant to say he’s always had daddy issues.”

Bucky glared at him half-heartedly, then snorted and stuffed his hands into his pockets. “We’re getting somethin’ to eat. I need to take my anger out on a cow’s worth of burgers before I put my hand through a wall…or through someone’s face.” He pulled you under his arm. “You are welcome to join us, pana.”

Riff rocked thoughtfully back and forth on her heels. “Maybe I oughta give you three a little time to cool down. That was pretty damn heated back there, so…rain check?” She eyed you uncertainly.

“Yeah, maybe tomorrow? Or we can skype or something. I’m not really all that busy other than work.” You gave your number, checked that she had it right, and then smiled gratefully at her. “I’m sorry, that was probably terribly weird for you.” You murmured. “Thanks so much in advance, it was amazing to have met you. I hope we can be friends, but right now I’ve got two fairly irritable bikers to attend to. Bye!”

Bucky held on you like a lifeline all the way through dinner. He chomped his way through three massive burgers, making a new meaning out of eating one’s feelings, and did it all with one hand. Gradually, however, the heavy scowl lifted and he was smiling again. Ducky was quiet through the meal, barely commenting on his conversation with his father previous to Bucky’s arrival, and instead tried to delve into the story of the Caddy’s turn on the auction block.

“It went for double what I thought it would.” He told both of you. “Market value hovers around twenty-three to twenty-four thousand, but these two older guys wanted it bad. They fought over it until the bidding hit forty-six, and one of ‘em gave it up as lost.”

“Damn, I think that’s the most we’ve made since we sold that El Dorado.” He jabbed a fry in his brother’s direction. “You remember, right? Off-white, with the coffee-brown leather upholstery? Man, I wish…” He shook his head dreamily. “Oh, well.”

“You know, speaking of money…” You bit your lip. “I’ve been trying to find a way to bring this up for a few days now, but I talked to my dad a while ago.” You dug in your purse for the pair of cheques and slid them across the counter. Ducky, a frown already in place, picked them up. “That’ll cover getting you a new apartment, I think, or at least one in my building…oh, and the second one is for whatever you want or need…furniture, maybe? My vote for a new couch is still in place, just so you know.” Just thinking about that awful, pokey spring made your bottom hurt.

“I.”

“I’m not letting you refuse.” You folded your hands in your lap serenely. “Either you cash the cheques yourself, or I’m going to simply tell my dad you’re being silly. He’ll just void these out and we’ll buy you everything you need ourselves.”

Ducky rubbed his forehead, his tongue running over his bottom teeth as he considered his options. “I haven’t seen this many zeros since I reviewed my student debt.” He muttered, awed. “I know you said you had money, but…not this kind of money…”
“Well, technically, I don’t.” You smiled at him. “It’s my father’s, but he’s very generous and he adores all of you. He also didn’t see a point in not paying you for all the work you’ve been doing when it really wouldn’t be a bother for him.” You could already sense the impending argument. “I know you two aren’t sticking with me for my father’s money, you don’t need to prove that. What I want you to know is that I’m not willing to see either of you struggle when I can do something about it.”

“You’re barely paying your own bills, but you went to your father to help us?” Ducky shook his head. “Manito, I hope you realize this means you owe Angel oral any time she wants for…uh…let’s see-” He squinted at the cheque, pretended to count on his fingers, and then shrugged helplessly. “-life.”

Bucky glanced over at you. “Oh no, what torture…what agony…” He threw his arm across his face in dramatic despair. “My poor, poor tongue…how could you sell your brother out like this? You are pure evil…so…so evil…” And then he ruined it all by peeking out from under his arm and shooting his brother with finger guns.

“Hush, both of you.” You blushed and shoved your hands into your lap. “We shouldn’t be talking about that in a public restaurant.”

“Perhaps you are right.” Bucky acquiesced. “That is something off of the secret menu.”

“I’m going to die now, excuse me.” You shoved your head into your folded arms as the twins shared a gut-busting round of laughs at your expense. Aside from your embarrassment, you were elated to know they were happy again. Too many wonderful things had happened today to allow the mood to be ruined by a leech.

After paying for dinner, the three of you stepped out into the chilly evening air. The sun was already hidden by the multitude of skyscrapers, but its setting was dutifully reflected in a million shades of baby’s blush pinks and golden god rays. You tore your eyes away from the scenery to see Bucky tucking a cigarette between his lips. “Been one hell of a day, huh?” His thumb struck the wheel of his lighter, and his face was lit up by the scarlet glow of a cluster of sparks as they leaped for freedom.

Ducky deftly flicked the cigarette out of his brother’s mouth. “Yep, sure has.”

“Hey!” Buck pouted. “Those are expensive, asshole!”

Ducky stepped down from the curb and mounted his cruiser. “All the better reason for you to quit, then.”

“Do you see what I must deal with?” Bucky groaned and punched his brother’s arm. “We will need to buy that bed soon, so I can get away from this abuse.” He hauled you up on his bike, slipped his helmet on, and turned the key. “Which way from here, baby? Our place or yours?”

“I’m gonna drop back by the office to take care of a few things.” Ducky interjected. “Would you mind hangin’ out at our place ‘til I get back? Red’s trial has been scheduled, so I wanted to write up a better defense outline.”

You hugged Bucky’s waist tighter than was necessary as your grief over Red’s absence came back with a vengeance to sucker-punch you in the abdomen with all the force of a freight train. The day had done so much to take your mind off of it, but now it felt as if it had only been putting a Band-Aid over a gaping wound. “I can wait.” You were glad your voice was muffled by the rumble of Bucky’s engine; maybe they couldn’t hear it tremble.
Ducky took off first, but Bucky hesitated. He twisted his head to try to look at you. He didn’t say anything, but placed his hand over yours. You rubbed your head against his shoulder, bringing forth a burdened sigh, and then the two of you sped off in the opposite direction.

Their apartment was as grungy, yet homey, as you remembered. Bucky snagged his evening beer out of the fridge, tossed you a soda, and showed you straight into his room. He cracked the tab on his drink and leaned in the doorway as you took a look around. “Since ya hate the couch, figured my bed would be better.”

His room was fastidiously well-kept, something you hadn’t expected, but a little cluttered. A rickety, clapboard dresser was squeezed into the space alongside an aluminum-framed twin bed. On the opposite side, there was a small desk and bookcase. His bookcase held a few books, but mostly displayed back issues of Hot Rod, Motor Trend, and Car & Driver. One of the bottom shelves was home to a very delicate tool case filled with miniature tools, and several minuscule cardboard boxes stacked in tidy rows.

A random can of WD-40 was placed beside a cheap LED lamp in the corner of the desk, which was littered with tiny gears, wheels, and die-cut pieces of metal. “Models.” He explained, between sips. “Workin’ on a Corvette right now.” He opened the drawer of the desk and, sure enough, there were probably around twenty or thirty handmade models of various cars, trucks, and bikes.

“Wow, those must take you forever to make.” A few of what you assumed were his favorites lined the top of the bookcase; a cherry-red hot rod Lincoln, a gun-metal gray ’57 T-bird, and a solid black ’79 Honda CX 500 motorcycle.

You took a seat on the edge of the bed and found it to be only a little less uncomfortable than the couch in the living room. The mattress was unforgiving, in spite of the nest of blankets that were piled atop it, and it nearly folded in half when he sat beside you. The wall above his bed supported a black and white print of a motorcycle in motion, while the others were plastered with posters of various bands. “It’s a lot cleaner than I expected.” You admitted.

“Why?” He flopped backward, hands behind his head. “Because Red is a pig?”

“No, I just…I dunno why.” You rested your head on his chest. “It’s a nice change, though, I’m glad you can pick up after yourself.” You grinned up at him. “True, he’s a slob, but he’s my slob and I love him to death.” You nestled deeper into the soft cotton. “I wish he was here. He’d have been able to help more with your dad, I know he would’ve. All I could do was just stand there—"

“It was enough.” He played with your hair, but his eyes were distant. “When we were small, we knew nothing. Mai kept her troubles close to her heart, away from us, and took care of things as best she could. I remember her hands were always raw…always covered in dyes like she’d dipped her fingers in a rainbow.” He glanced at his own hands; his nails were ragged, the cuticles slightly peeling in some places, and the skin of his palms and fingers padded by callouses. “Twice, he left. The first time, we were too young to remember much, but I know she cried. The second time…she did not cry. It was—“ He scrunched up his mouth in thought. “—a few months after we immigrated. The paperwork barely had time t’ cool before he was gone again. All of her hard work, all of the studying she did and made us do, was nothin’ to him…or maybe he’d planned to leave all along, I don’t fuckin’ know.”

“I’m sorry.” Your fingers clenched around his shirt. “At least he did a couple of things right.” You smoothed down a few loose strands of his coarse, pomade-slicked hair. “He gave me you, for one.”

“You’re gonna give me cavities.” He groaned, rubbing at his eyes wearily. “Damn, I need a pick-me-up.” He cocked an eyebrow expectantly at you. “Any chance I could have that sweet mouth
wrapped around my cock?”

You stared at the door, which he’d left wide-open, while indecision gnawed at your gut. “Ducky’s going to be home.”

“Ain’t nothin’ he ain’t already seen.” He propped himself up with one arm, his expression more than a little needy. “C’mon, sweetheart, he knows how t’ knock.” He crossed his cramped room to shut the door with a nudge from his boot. “Remember whatchya said?” He played idly with the buckle of his belt. “‘Whatever you want’?”

You knew you weren’t going to deny him. You simply couldn’t, he’d dealt with so much stress in the past few hours. He’d granted you a day of ease; it was only fair to help him get his mind off of things, too. Also, you had promised him anything he wanted if he won the race… “Whatever you want.”

“Right, then-” He jerked the leather tongue of his belt up and free of its metal loop. “-I wantchya naked and kneeling.”

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for any possible mistakes. I wasn't able to consult with my friend for the Spanish in this chapter since she was busy. :/
Your jaw muscles ached, your lips were swollen and abused, and your scalp burned where Bucky's fingernails had dug into your skin. The pain was controllable, even somewhat enjoyable, as it was evidence of how desperately he needed you. His taste on your tongue, the rose of a blush he'd planted on your cheeks...it made your heart flutter in your chest like a moth trapped inside an upturned glass. You flew higher with each hushed moan; you drew his cares away as venom is drawn from a bite.

"Angelitaahh..." He rocked his hips forward, causing the edge of his belt to brush your cheek. "I love ya so fuckin' much-" He gently supported your head as he fucked your mouth. His work-calloused thumb circled your nipple as he mumbled through sentences comprising of lust-slurred, half-English endearments. "-Tú es mi vida! You-" He bit his lip out of frustration, growling at himself for forgetting. "Dame un chin amor, mi chula."

You stopped to look up at him, his dick still halfway down your throat, with a question in your eyes. He sucked in a breath at the sight. "Coño-" His entire body shuddered hard for a moment, and then he closed his glazed eyes to focus. "Geddup, love."

Obediently, you rose. "Did I do-"

"Fuck no," His voice was harsh, but it wasn't meant to be. "Sorry...sorry, shit...nothin's wrong." He barked out a laugh. "Everythin' is...ah...uh..." His shoulders dropped and he frowned a bit. "Damnit, English, man..." He grumbled to himself. "Maybe I should just show ya, huh?" His candy eyes were sweetened by sin and dusted by desire like a sprinkle of salt over caramel.

He yanked you closer to fasten his lips over yours and stole away your own ability to speak properly. When he let you go, he was beaming brighter than the Caribbean sun. With no warning, he shoved your face into the mattress and pulled your legs apart. His jacket, which allowed only to compensate for the chill, barely covered the curve of your ass. The decorated leather was shoved up and out of the way before he worked his way inside your body.

You watched him over your shoulder and witnessed the moment he realized exactly how wet you were for him. His pupils blew out, turning his gaze as hungry and black as a starved shark, and he snapped his hips into you without mercy.

“Havin’ fun without me?”

You yelped in surprise at Ducky’s sudden intrusion and fumbled with Bucky’s jacket in a vain effort to cover yourself. He observed your struggle from the doorway with a giant, self-satisfied smirk. “What happened to knocking?!?” Your voice was made squeaky by humiliation.

“I did-“He strode inside and took a casual seat on his brother’s bed. “-several times.” He pushed your disheveled hair away from your mouth, and then turned his attention to his brother. “You think Red would mind?”

“After the day we had?” Bucky scoffed, and then shrugged. “Doubt it, but it’d be good form t’ ask.”

Ducky grinned, pulling out his cell phone. “They can’t refuse ‘im a conversation with his lawyer.”

“Wait,” You sat up, holding Bucky’s jacket closed with one hand. “Are you two seriously gonna- “

“Well…I mean…” Ducky winked at you. “Can ya blame a guy?” He traced the line of your jaw
sweetly. “Besides, you can’t just go prancin’ around our place naked and not expect t’ get thoroughly ravished.”

“‘Ravished’?” Bucky echoed mockingly. “Please don’t tell me ya’ve been reading goddamned mommy porn again.”


“Um…I wasn’t prancing…” Your half-hearted protest was ignored, and so you burrowed your face into Bucky’s blanket to hide your blush. The cotton fibers tickled your nose each time you inhaled, and the thick pad of the mattress muffled every word that left your mouth. “I can’t believe you’re seriously calling Red under business pretenses. What if someone listens to the call?” You were mortified by mere idea. “I’m not saying I mind you joining in, but what if someone overhears?”

“Nah, probably won’t happen. Even if they do, they won’t know what the hell I’m talking about.” He pushed up his brother’s jacket to get a peek at your ass. “We’re gonna use that little code phrase the two of you have—‘Your neck cracked due to the speed at which you snapped your head up. ‘-Bucky informed me about Red’s…’bathroom breaks.’” He chuckled at the face you made.

He spent a small amount of time on hold, tapping out the beat of the music on your bottom as he waited, until someone picked up. From there, it was a simple matter of providing adequate identification information. In no less than twenty minutes, Ducky had Red on the line. “‘Sup?”

“Heya, asshole. Long time, no see. How they been treatin’ ya?”

“Pretty fair, I guess. Food sucks, heating system sucks…everythin’ kinda fuckin’ sucks ass, actually. I swear I can see my goddamned breath at night sometimes.” He sounded grumpier than usual, which inspired a pang of pain in your heart. No matter how many times you’d spoken to him, nor how many quick visits he could steal, it was never enough. It wasn’t as good as having him home.

Also, he hadn’t mentioned anything at all to you about how things were at the prison. As you listened to him rant to Ducky about the myriad of problems at the prison, you were beginning to suspect he’d avoided complaining to you. You flinched when his voice unintentionally rose; if he was acting this pissy with Ducky, of all people, then he was probably hangry. He always got angrier when he hadn’t had a decent meal. “An’ t’ top it all fuckin’ off, it’s goddamned Thanksgivin’ an’ they’re servin’ fuckin’ turkey sandwiches an’ watery-ass mashed potatoes. Fuckin’ disgraceful is what is.”

“Sounds rough, pana.” Ducky sympathized.

“Wait, today’s Thanksgiving?” You scrambled to get up and check your phone. True to what you’d heard, the date in the upper corner told you all you needed to know. Your heart sank as you realized you’d failed to keep up with the days. No wonder Red was so upset; you hadn’t gotten a chance to call for the holiday. “Oh no! I’m such an idiot, I completely-“

“Sugar, ‘zat you?” Red’s voice over the speaker was loud and insistent. “Ducky, hand ‘er the phone, will ya?”

You took the cell gratefully. “Red, I’m so sorry. I’ve had my head up my own ass recently with everything going on. I would’ve called if I’d been keeping the days straight, you know I would’ve!”

“Ah, calm yer tits.” His voice was so low in your ear, it made the receiver buzz. “You been feelin’ okay? Feet still killin’ ya, I’d bet. Bucky better have been doin’ his fuckin’ job—’Bucky snickered at
the jibe. “-or I’mma come down there myself.”

“Well, that’s actually why we’ve called.” Ducky spoke up, his eyes bright with amusement. “We were wonderin’ if you could fit in an extra-long bathroom break.”

Red paused, and there was a bit of rustling on his end of the line. “Yeah, I could probably fit one in. They’re givin’ us a little extra rec time for the holiday, so I don’t think anyone would miss me for the next four or so hours.”

“Four hours? Really?” You couldn’t hold back your excitement.

“Probaby a little more, if they’re slow t’ get back on patrol, which I’m willin’ t’ bet my left nut they will be.” There was more shuffling, and then a soft, staticky hum. “Awright, where you three at?”

“Their apartment, Bucky’s room.” You told him eagerly.

In a moment, the phone went dead, and you held your breath in anticipation. After a few seconds passed, a scarlet dot bled into existence in the middle of Bucky’s room. Space and time sang with voices of static as Red’s warp opened wide enough for him to step through. He closed it with a careless gesture of his left hand once he was through. “I swear,” He pulled you off the bed into his arms. “You get more beautiful every day.”

The orange jumpsuit had never looked right on him. It clashed with the glow of his magic and highlighted the yellowing of his bones caused by his love affair with tobacco. It was dingy and threadbare, as if it had been washed too often and with little care. The bottoms were baggy, even on Red’s hulking body, and bunched up over cheap, jail-issued boots. His sockets were dark, cradled by circles the color of old blood, and he was holding himself tighter than his usual, casual slump. It brought tears to your eyes, and you wondered how these changes could have happened right under your nose. Had he been putting up a front to save you the worry? That certainly sounded like something he would do. You couldn’t force your lips to move to greet him, so you simply stared at him in mute distress until he began to frown. “Don’t look at me that way, sugar. I’m fine.” You could read the lie in his eye lights, which were barely more than weak, twin embers in the void of his sockets. After a second, he realized he was caught and sighed. “Bein’ locked up…always on guard…havin’ t’ watch my fuckin’ back all the damn time…it brings back a few unpleasant memories. It’s rough in there, y’know? Smashes down all the pretenses an’ brings out the worst even in the best of people. There was a riot the other day—” He shifted his stance, and it was then that you noticed a brief flash of pain before it was quickly hidden away. “- an’ it wasn’t pretty.”

“What?” The twins both froze up.

“Yep.” He unzipped his jumpsuit halfway down his ribs and pushed it to the side. “Somethin’ about them throwin’ the tattoo guy in solitary or whatever, I dunno. They don’t let me around the other prisoners much, on account of mah charges, so I’m not exactly on the up an’ up. All I know is they made a few plastic shanks out of a broken chair, some bedsheet ropes, and lured a couple of guards out of the fish bowl durin’ chow time with a fake fistfight. Ambushed ‘em, hogtied ‘em, an’ kept ‘em as hostages tryin’ to negotiate gettin’ tattoo guy outta the hole.” He gestured to his entire left side. “’s why I’m not at my best today.”

Ducky facepalmed and groaned. “Please, tell me ya didn’t break it up on yer own.”

Red gave him a lopsided, pained grin. “I broke it up on my own.” He admitted with a chuckle, and then winced. “Damn, I’m fuckin’ sore.” His right side was a mess of new cracks, each one encrusted with dried marrow, and a particularly deep gouge down his sternum continued to ooze tiny bubbles
of gore at the slightest of movements. “Their on-call nurse dunno shit ‘bout treatin’ monsters, so I had t’ try to take care of this shit on my own. Think I made it worse, though.” He ran his fingers gingerly over his ribcage. “Ain’t just my ribs, but that’s where I got the worst of it.”

“Why the hell did you let ‘em get so fuckin’ close?” Ducky sounded almost angry, if one knew him well enough to be able to see beneath his typical, coolheaded facade.

“Well, ya know, when yer fightin’ seven armed assholes all at once, an’ you ain’t got nuthin’ but yer bare fuckin’ hands, it’s kinda hard t’ dodge an’ block.” Red snapped back. “I can’t warp in fronta the guards, dumbass. If anyone caught me, they’d have my ass under double the security an’ I’d never get t’ see my beautiful, little angel.” He twirled on of your curls around one, battered finger. “I’m fine, honey. Stop cryin’, ya know I can’t stand when you cry.”

You hid your wet face in his shoulder. “Please don’t do anything like that again!” You implored him. “If you start fights- “

“Sugar, I don’t start fights. I finish ‘em.” He corrected you with a cocky wink. “But, if it’ll stop the tears, I’ll keep my nose clean from here on out, promise.”

“Yeah, jeez, Red.” Bucky rolled his eyes. “Stop bein’ such a fuckin’ hero. You’re makin’ me look bad.”

Ducky pinched his nose and let out a long-suffering sigh. “Don’t encourage him, manito.” He shook his head. “Damnit, Rojo, ya can’t be doin’ shit like that. All it’ll getcha is a rap sheet an’ a few new enemies.”

Red glared over your head at his friend. “What the hell was I supposed t’ do, huh? Look the other fuckin’ way? You can’t tell me you wouldn’t have done the same damn thing I did.” A heavy scowl weighted down his face. “As for makin’ enemies—” He scoffed contemptuously. “—ain’t none of those pussy-ass mothers gonna make a move on me. An’, if they get the balls t’ try, they’ll get theirasses handed to ‘em on a golden plate. I didn’t survive two centuries in the Underground on luck alone.”

Ducky threw up his hands in defeat. “What’s done is done, I suppose, just don’t get involved next time, alright?” Red only grumbled, but it seemed good enough for Ducky. “Great, thanks…now get over here an’ shake my hand, ya noble jackass.”

“So, angel—”Red’s grip around your waist tightened. “—I’mma take a wild guess an’ say we’re havin’ a party, izzat right?”

“Well, today is a day for bein’ grateful for all the shit we got.” Bucky cut in. “I think we should show Ángelita how thankful we are to have her around.” He elbowed Ducky. “Right, mano?”

Ducky hooked an arm around his brother’s shoulder. “I’m thinking sex and then dinner, are we all in agreement?”

“Only if ya make that bombass stew, bro.” Red crossed his arms over you. “Otherwise, I’m gonna fuck ‘er an’ you’ll only get t’ watch.”

“Sancocho, tostones, and white rice in less than four hours?” Ducky tapped his finger against his chin thoughtfully. “Yeah, I can do that.”

“Am…am I being bartered for food?” You weren’t sure if you were turned on or insulted.

“Honey, if you’d ever tasted this man’s cookin’, you’d understand.” Red petted your hair. “Now, how we gonna do this, boys?”
Again, you were amazed by the natural understanding that flowed between them. Ducky granted Red his space on the bed without so much as a single word, who proceeded to shuck off that horrid jumpsuit and chuck it into a random corner. You were momentarily stunned to see he did, indeed, have numerous other injuries from dealing with the jailhouse riot. There were defensive wounds covering his arms and hands, and a serious dent in his fibia that appeared to have occurred by something traumatizingly blunt. He waved a hand in front of your face. “Sweetheart, it’s nuthin’ I can’t handle. C’mere—“ He opened his arms for you. “-si’down and take care of me if you’re so worried.”

Bucky opened one of his drawers and pitched Red a bottle of lube. Ducky, meanwhile, stepped out of the room to undress and carefully hang up his suit. “You’re gonna have a cock in every hole, sweetness.” Red poured a generous amount of lube into his hand, catching Bucky’s eye. “She ain’t never had anal before. Figure it’s best if she has all of us here t’ get ‘er used to the feelin’.”

“No anal?” Bucky cocked his head to the side, grinning. “Ah, Rojo, if I weren’t sure you loved her before, I would know it now. Anal is one of your favorites.”

“You never mentioned that.” You twisted your head around to look at him. “You could have, I wouldn’t have minded.”

For once, he was the one blushing. “I was workin’ my way up t’ askin’. It’s somethin’ ya gotta…ya know…it’s pretty rough if yer not ready for it or if the other person don’t know what the fuck they’re doin’.” His fingertips massaged the tight muscles of your ass. “I keep waitin’ for you t’ say no t’ me.”

“It’s nothing I can’t handle.” You repeated his words back to him with a tiny, shy smile. “I’m willing to try almost everything at least once.”

“Golden showers?” Bucky asked hopefully.

“Uh…” You tried to ignore Red’s snickering. “Hm, you know…I might have to think on that one…or at least we’d need to try that in a place where the clean-up would be easy.”

Bucky shrugged, and flipped Red off. “It’s not a ‘no’, cabrón.” Then he thought for a moment and did a double take. “Wait, how does the innocent Ángel know about golden showers?”

You huffed at your husband as he broke down into guffaws. “R-research…oh, Red, it really isn’t that hilarious. I’m a grown woman, I swear I’m not innocent at all.”

“Sure, sure, you’re a complete deviant.” Red placated as he peppered your shoulders and neck with gentle kisses and licks. “An utter sex goddess.”

“You’d do well to remember it.” You frowned at Bucky, who was dying of laughter. “I am absolutely a sex goddess.”

“You tell ‘em, honey.” Ducky strode to the bed to stand between your open legs. “And, as a sex goddess, I’d imagine you’d enjoy it if I—“He braced himself on your shoulders, lined himself up, and violently bucked his hips. The rough sensation of being so suddenly filled quite literally knocked the breath out of you. “-did that?” He rubbed his thumb over your mouth. “I thought you were a sex goddess? A sex goddess would be moaning her heart out right now, not blushing like a little porcelain doll.”

“I…ahh…hn…” You reflexively flinched as Red worked the tip of his finger inside your body. “I am—“

Ducky cut you off with a sharp pinch of your nipple. “So cute.” He cooed down at you. He fondled
your breasts, lingering over them with express desire. “I’ve always adored your tits.”

Red’s teeth sank deep into his mark, and the hot surge of pain and pleasure stole your reply. When he finally withdrew, lapping at the blood that flowed from the re-opened wound, you still struggled to speak. “I’m…ah…barely a B-cup… I don’t—“

Ducky withdrew and swiftly thrust inside you once again. “More than a mouthful seems like a bit of a waste to me, but I’m pretty sure they’ve gotten bigger over the last few months, whaddya think, *Rojo*?”

“Yep, definitely a little thicker than I remember.” Red slowly pumped his finger, stroking and taking his time opening you up. “Relax, babydoll, you’re too tense. I don’t wanna risk hurtin’ ya.” He squeezed the curve of your hip lovingly. “Bucky, quite yer gawkin’ an’ help yer woman relax.”

“My…” Bucky blinked out of his trance.

Red raised a boney brow at his friend. “She’s as much yours as she is mine, dumbass.” He rested his chin on your shoulder. “I’m addin’ another finger, sweetness. Tell me if ya need me t’ stop, awright?”

Bucky rested on his knees beside Red on the bed to get a decent angle and kissed your forehead. “Ángelita, it’s okay.” He brushed the back of his hand over your cheek. He guided your mouth down and sighed contentedly as he slid past your lips.

Eventually, Red had loosened you up enough to move on from mere fingers to teasing your ass with the head of his cock. He hissed like a flustered rattlesnake in your ear as your body gradually accepted him. It felt…odd. Not bad, per say, but it was strange and new, and you weren’t sure you liked it yet. There was a slight burn, although that was soon alleviated with a touch more lube. “Damn baby, you’re drippin’ into my lap.” He growled. “You gonna cum on ‘is cock?” His hand left your hip to lightly play with your clit. “I wanna fuckin’ see it. I ain’t seen you cum in too fuckin’ long.” He worked you hard, the sharp tips of his phalanges biting into the delicate flesh of your pussy. “My pretty, little angel gettin’ fuck-drunk…aww, look at those cheeks.” He nom’d lightly on the flesh of your reddened cheeks. “Jus’ accept it, darlin’. You may not be a sex goddess, but ya make a mighty fine angel.”

Rivulets of blood ran down your bitten shoulder where he’d left a trail of tiny lovebites, which mixed with a dribble of pre-cum and saliva that leaked from the corners of your mouth and stained your skin in lines of pink and red. Red and Ducky synchronized their movements, but never went so fast that Bucky was dragged all the way from your mouth. The angle he hit made your throat constrict, but you were so out of it, you barely noticed.

Red expertly coiled up a spring inside you, and you were soon desperate for release. You moaned around Bucky’s dick, and pleaded your case to him with your eyes. His response wasn’t to assist, but to speed toward his own end. You swiped at his glans with the tip of your tongue until he snarled out a curse and grabbed the back of your head to shove himself down your throat. Considering the earlier teasing, you couldn’t blame him for being the first. The depth he’d forced himself to left you no choice other than to swallow everything he gave you, but you still choked just a little and cum spilled from your mouth to find a home in the valley of your breasts.

“You look beautiful covered in cum, Ángel.” Ducky slammed himself back inside you with a rough grunt. “Still haven’t managed an orgasm yourself, though, aren’tcha havin’ any fun?” He teased. “I wanna feel that pretty cunt twitchin’ soon or I’m gonna have t’ put ya on your knees an’ fuck you like a bitch in heat.”
“An’ here I thought you were the civilized one.” Red retorted, his eye lights currently pinned on a bead of cum that decorated your chin. He turned your head to the side, eyeing Bucky as he did, and flicked out his tongue to catch it.

Your head exploded like a sun gone supernova. It was an expulsion of blue-white light that pulsed between your eyes and *burned* between your legs. You couldn’t see, you couldn’t hear, and the only thing you could feel was azure fire that sizzled under your very skin. Heat and pleasure were all you could comprehend as you fell into a sea of flame and drowned in hedonistic satisfaction.

You slumped back into Red’s chest to allow them both to chase their own highs. Your throat was raw, and you felt the echo of your own scream as a surreal, orgasmic shadow. Blissfully sweet kisses graced the skin of your neck, while deceptively brutal thrusts rocked your body. Territorial snarls, demonic and guttural, ripped through the air and accompanied twin rushes of heat that warmed both your body and your heart.

When reality finally snapped back, you found yourself sandwiched between Red and Ducky on the bed, while Bucky had one arm thrown across both your neck and Red’s in a sleepy embrace. You started to wiggle, prompting Red to lift open his socket and smirk. “I dunno ‘bout the rest of ya, but I’m thirsty as hell.”

“There’s beer in the fridge.” Ducky’s thick arms shook a little as he struggled to push himself up. “Get it yourself or don’t get any at all.”

Red yanked the pillow out from under Bucky’s head to lob at Ducky’s face. “I’m a fuckin’ *guest*. Didn’t yer mother teach ya hospitality?”

“Hospitality, yes. How to be a butler? No, I’m afraid not.”
Dinner was glorious just as he'd known it would be, although it wasn't able to fill a sinking feeling in Red's metaphorical gut. It had eased his mind, made him feel a little less cold on the inside, and granted a greatly needed change of pace, yet he couldn't ignore the knowledge that this relief was temporary. Throughout the meal, he'd kept one hand under the table to have a constant grip on your knee. The touch kept him grounded, but it also made him anxious. He wasn't sure if he'd be able to force himself to let go; his hand felt as stuck as a fly on sticky paper.

Ducky passed by to pick up Red's plate without a word. He deposited everything into the sink, rinsed his hands and wiped them on a nearby dishcloth. "Thanks for stoppin' by, Rojo. I was gonna go over some details of yer trial, but..." He trailed off, a small smile quirking his lips. "I'll save that for tomorrow. Kinda tired after all that, so I think I'll head t' bed." He rolled his shoulders and covered his mouth politely as he let out a monumental yawn. "G'night, both of you." He stopped behind his brother's chair and messed up Bucky's pompadour. "G'night, idiota." Ducky snickered as his twin groaned, pulling a comb and tin of pomade from his pocket to carefully fix his hair.

Red smirked across the table at his buddy; sometimes, he wished he could've had something like that with Boss. Watching the twins made him wonder if it was still possible, although he had his doubts. Boss had wised up, but Red often found himself mulling over the idea that the time for repairs hadn't passed by. As much as Boss had done, Red couldn't hate him. His brother made tons of poor choices, but he'd always be the smartass babybones Red raised. Maybe, once all of this was over, there'd be time to start over with a clean slate. He could be a dad, a better brother, and give this whole family-man thing an honest try.

You cleared your throat, bringing Red out of his thoughts. "Bucky and I have some news." Well, damn if that wasn't ominous. "It's about the baby."

He'd never show it, but nervous tension curled in his bones. "A'right. What kinda news?"

You beamed brightly. "We're having a girl!" You kept your voice lowered, but you were clearly excited.

"Ahaha...a...heh...a girl?" Sweat broke out on his forehead. He didn't know anything about girls. Well, not little girls, anyway. "You sure?" From what you'd told him before, Hazel'd tried her damnedest to figure the kid out with no success.

You lightly touched your stomach. "Quite sure. It's a long story, but she won't be the first of her kind." You locked eyes with him earnestly. "Red, we met a hybrid today at the track."

His mind went blank. "What kinda hybrid?" Gaster had always theorized that there were monsters who'd been lost above ground during the War; some possibly being deserters or getting separated from Asgore's army in the confusion of battle.

"She's...she's like you, Red." You laid your hand over his. "I know it's hard to believe, but it's true."

"I saw 'er, too." Red glanced Bucky's way in time to see his friend tucking away his comb. "An' there was somethin' bout her magic bein' similar, so she could figure out what was up with the kid." He shrugged. "I dunno, but sounded legit to me."

Red swallowed hard. After all the mistakes he'd made with Boss, he'd thought he could handle another kid, but he wasn't prepared for a daughter."I dunno how t' raise a girl!" He croaked.
"Ain't it pretty much the same?" Bucky tilted his chair back on two legs and crossed arms behind his head. "Just don't wipe back t' front when ya clean up the shit."

He clutched at the sides of his skull as his thoughts spun out of control. "But there's periods an'...an'-" His jaw clenched as he growled. "-boys."

Bucky flailed as he lost his balance, tumbling out of his chair before scrambling to his feet. "Mios Dio, you're right!" He whispered, horrified. "I can buy tampons, pads, an' chocolate no prob, but man..." He shuddered. "How young is too young t' teach a kid t' shoot? Cuz she's gonna be out on the range aimin' for a paper target with a bull's eye on the crotch."

"Hush, it'll be fine." You patted Bucky sympathetically. "Parenting is one of those 'learn as you go' experiences. If we get stuck, we can always ask Hercules, right? He's got a daughter, so-"

Red rapidly composed himself. "Yer right, yeah. There's him an' it's like Bucky said; it ain't too much different than what I'm already used to." He thought of Boss and snorted. "Compared t' what Boss put me through, a baby girl shouldn't be much of a problem. 'Specially if she takes after her mama."

Bucky's eyes drifted to the clock. "Forty-five minutes, cuzzin."

Red sneered. "Fuck that noise, we're goin' t' the void. Time don't mean shit there. I ain't goin' back t' that place until I'm good an' ready." He despised the jail; a man could go insane with nothing to stare at except four white walls. Simply thinking about it made his bones itch, and he could feel his magic bubble forth like a roiling pot on a stove top. "Bum me a smoke, bud? I ain't had one in too long."

Bucky slipped a packet of Marlboro's out of his pocket. He tucked the filter into the corner of his lips before handing the pack over. Out of the corner of his socket, he caught you blatantly staring at Bucky's mouth. "Darlin', watch ya don't start droolin'." He winked at you before flicking his hand to open a warp. An expression like a chastised puppy crossed your face. "She's got the hots for smokers. Pretty damn convenient for us, eh?"

Bucky grinned, pulling a cheap lighter from his pocket. "Well, I'll be goddamned-" He pulled you under his arm. "-an' you never thought t' tell me?"

"Realistically, it'd be impossible and rather boring for us to discover every detail about each other in a few weeks." You stammered over yourself, clearly embarrassed. You scurried through the warp, watching Red intently as he secured the warp behind himself.

He hadn't allowed you into a void pocket previously, and that wasn't by mistake. Without a tether to the outside world, the void could be maddening. Hell, sometimes he wondered how he could stand the all-encompassing non-existence this place consisted of. It was quiet, the kind of quiet where the only noise was the relentless ringing in one's ears. No light could pierce the darkness, yet one could see as well as in perfect daylight. It was eerie, but peaceful like white noise from an ancient television set. "She's right, ya know." He plopped down on nothing and let his feet dangle over an imagined edge. "Kinda disappointin' t' learn all about a person in one go. Takes the fun outta the chase."

Bucky passed him the lighter, which he gratefully accepted. "Here, we got time...or none at all, t' be more precise."

You lingered several steps away from him and Bucky, although he couldn't miss the longing in your eyes. "Just a few more months, sweetness." He leaned back against a wall he'd conjured from his thoughts. The void was easy enough to manipulate; possibilities were infinite outside the boundaries of space-time and the mind would always be the most powerful force in a world without physicality. "In the meantime-" He pulled the cigarette from between his teeth. "-ya wanna see somethin' hotter?"
"I-I...uh...maybe?"

Red elbowed Bucky. "When she stutters, it means 'fuck yes'." He snubbed out his cigarette and flicked it into the empty expanse. "For someone who was claimin' t' be a sex goddess, yer blushing' up a storm." He knew he had you enthralled; it was the way your eyes sparkled and the tint to your cheeks. He never had to work himself hard to get a cute reaction. It was adorable the way you stumbled over yourself at the slightest flirty wink or dirty joke. Getting you hot and bothered was a hobby, so as soon as he saw his friend toss away the fizzled remains of his own cigarette, he made his move. He snatched at Bucky's jaw like snake at a mouse, and yanked him close. "Damn lucky I like you, dude. Any other guy I caught lookin' at angel the way ya do, I'd gut like a fuckin' fish."

Bucky forced a grin, but minute movements of his eyes in your direction gave away his nervousness."Izzat so? Why do ya like me so much, Jack?"

Red rubbed his mandible thoughtfully. "Much as I hate t' admit it, ya got style, an' I do 'preciate style." He smirked. "Bein' a pretty boy don't hurt yer case, either. And-" He had to duck his head a bit to be at eye level."-yer a great guy. I know it, she knows it...hell, everyone in the club knows it.'S fun t' have ya around, too. Unfortunately, ya ain't had much of a welcome. Kinda rude of me, sad t' say, since we're so tight." He was close enough for his breath to ruffle the loose hairs frizzing out of Bucky's cherished pompadour, and he blew on them purposefully to tease him. "Whatchya say I make up for that, huh?"

Bucky's thick eyebrows pulled together in confusion. "Wh-"

Red descended on his lips, keeping his eye lights trained on you, and devoured his mouth with a passion. At first, Bucky didn't seem to know how to react. He was frozen like popsicle, eyes wide and full of disbelief, until Red worked his tongue into the kiss. His eyelids lowered as he began to kiss back. He curled his tongue around Red's playfully, chuckling in the back of his throat all the while. When he finally pulled back, Bucky's lips were wet and his eyes were flaming. "That's one helluva welcome, Rojo." He ran his arm across his mouth with one eyebrow saucily cocked. "Think I might need a towel t' mop up all yer spit."

"Shut yer trap an' kiss me, asshole."
“Oh, I am going to do more than that, Rojo Loco.” Bucky grinned up at Red with a twinkle in his bright eyes. He wrapped his arms around Red’s the thick cervical vertebrae before casting a flirty wink your way. “Dinner an’ a show, mi corazón, eh?”

You gaped at them, while Red chuckled. The purring laughter soon became a hungry snarl as Bucky took the opportunity to press a fiery kiss to the skeleton’s mouth. “Watch it, shortstack.” He easily whirled Bucky around to pin him to a non-existent wall. Damn, the void was convenient. Maybe he should consider fucking here more often. “I’m in charge of this party.”

Bucky winked up at him playfully. “Are ya? Are ya, really?” He posed his question with a smooth grab at Red’s crotch. He roughly ground his palm against his clothed erection -a dirty power play in the monster’s opinion.

“Cheater.” He snarled before grabbing ahold of his best friend’s fluffy hair and yanking his head back to attack his neck. “An’ yeah, ya smartass. I sure as fuck am.” He latched onto his flesh, sinking the points just past the first layer of skin.

“Dios mio ...ah!” Bucky gasped in pain, but there was a tell-tale blush dusting his cheeks. “E-eat me, asshole.”

Red drew back, his teeth dripping with blood, and tugged at Bucky’s hair again. He wasn’t afraid of breaking him; he knew he could take it. And, stars damnit, he was gonna take it or Red’d pull every trick in the book until the snarky Dominican gave in.

“Sure thing, but first-” He forced him to his knees before working that ugly-ass jumpsuit down past his knees. “-yer gonna eat me.” Thank the stars he’d had the chance to clean himself up while Ducky was cooking. He let the edges of his phalanges dig lightly into Bucky’s scalp as a touch of incentive.

Bucky’s cocky grin refused to die, even as he wrapped his hand around Red’s cock. As many times as they’d fucked together, they hadn’t once thought of doing this...well, actually, Red had considered it a few times, but hadn’t acted on it. He hissed through his teeth as his friend’s tongue experimentally lapped at his head; damn, he could get used to this shit. Outright cursing as Bucky’s mouth slipped down his shaft, Red couldn’t resist smirking down at him. “Touch yerself.”

For as long as he and Bucky had been friends, Red hadn’t once witnessed him back down; not from a fight, not from a race, and never during sex. He was all fire and brimstone; a man who wielded a sword of poetic justice and wore a grin glinting bright as gilt armor. He did not kneel; he hadn’t what it took to submit, yet here he was doing precisely at Red’s feet. A flash of pride struck through him like a bolt of lightning. “Ey, trooper-” Bucky’s brown eyes were full of wildfire when he looked up and Red winked. “-yer doin’ good down there. That big mouth of yers was practically made t’ suck cock.”

Bucky’s eyes narrowed as he used the hand he was previously jerking off with to show Red his middle finger. “But ain’t that already what yer doin’?” He pushed his hips forward, groaning as the head of his cock touched the back of his new lover’s throat.

His eyes watered with the struggle to fight his gag reflex, and Red smirked. “That’s it, choke.” He broke into devilish laughter, low and black, as his eye lights flashed brighter with lust. “You ever consider this before, champ? Jerk off to me, maybe?” He petted his friend’s hair fondly. “‘Cuz I...”
fuckin’ have, an’ I gotta say—” He let out a soft, pleasured growl. “-it’s better than I thought.”

His throat constricted around Red, who wasn’t planning on letting him off easy. From experience, he knew Bucky enjoyed a bit of breath play now and again. “Ain’t I lucky, huh? I got sugar an’ spice. Now be a good boy an’ gimme everythin’ nice.” He pulled back to let him get a small gasp of air before grabbing both sides of his head and began to properly fuck his mouth.

He was panting hot and heavy like a wolf after prey, and there was indeed a kind of predatory shimmer to his eye lights. Red was careful, however, to be on the look-out for any real signs of distress, but every time he glanced down he was met with a daring, defiant, and confident gaze. Admittedly, that did something for him. He did tend to prefer outright submission, but there was still the boss monster inside him that longed for more of a challenge.

Saliva tinged with magic dripped down Bucky’s chin as he continued to fight giving in and admitting he was enjoying the moment. His resolve was weakening, though, and his own cock was shining with pre-cum. “Hope yer ready for dessert, bud.” Red grinned wickedly down at him as he felt himself towing the line of climax.

He winked at you before forcing him as far as he dared down Bucky’s throat. He gnashed his teeth together, drew out the light rub of his tongue on the underside of his cock before giving in to the need. He lost himself in an orgasmic rush as Bucky did his best to handle the heavy flow of magic that flooded his mouth. After letting out a bone-deep sigh and withdrawing, Red roughly jerked him to his feet.

Bucky wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, but only succeeded in smearing the mess across the lower half of his face. “S-smug bastard.” He coughed a little, but he couldn’t win the battle against a grin. “That…hah…that all ya got?”

“Oh, I ain’t done yet, trooper.” Red spun him around, trapped him with an arm around his middle like an iron bar, and curled a finger at you. “On yer knees, angel… an’ take off that shirt, ya won’t be needin’ it.”

You were made to kneel in front of him, and he watched you with a lazy, contented smile. He languidly licked his palm as you obediently yanked your shirt over your head. He reached out to hook your chin with the clawed tip of one phalange. While you looked on, he rolled and pinched one of Bucky’s nipples until he was groaning out a string of unintelligible curses. After a few moments of teasing, he moved his attention from nipple to cock, but still lightly held your head up. “C’mon, I can tell ya wanna give in.” He purred into his ear. “Ain’t no harm in it. Promise I’ll take care of ya, too, trooper. Just gotta let go… give angel ‘er show… look at ‘er, I bet she’s got a river runnin’ between ‘er legs right about now.” His slicked hand moved over the length of Bucky’s cock at a merciless pace that made Bucky’s stance unstable. “Maybe she’ll let us take turns lickin’ that up, whatchya think?”

He shivered so hard Red had to work a little harder to support him, but it didn’t affect his rhythm in the least. The muscles of Bucky’s stomach twitched and his fists were clenched; he was still holding on, but only just. “Don’t ya wanna see how pretty ‘er face’ll look covered in cum?”

That did it. Red was forced to wrap both arms around his lover’s body to support him as Bucky’s eyes flew wide open and his mouth opened in a noiseless cry. He quivered and convulsed, and his chest heaved desperately. He couldn’t take his eyes off the warm, white beads that now covered your cheek, neck, and dotted your chest.

“Heh, classic pearl necklace.” Red shot you a lop-sided grin. “Nice.” Your shirt then flew into your lap before you could reach for it. “Go ‘head an’ clean up with that. Bucky here’ll lend ya one of his.
It’s the least he can do for makin’ the mess in the first place.”

Bucky stumbled forward when Red finally released him. For a second, he was silent and you started to wonder if he truly was okay. His head slowly raised until you could see a mile wide grin, and quiet chuckling turned to carefree, jovial, gut-busting laughter.

“Ahh, Rojo Loco, I think I’m gonna miss ya as more than Ángelita will.”

Works inspired by this one: Fight Me! by MsMK, Killer Angel by Zeke_Weird (King_of_Weird)

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