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<td>Alternate Universe - Mobtale (Undertale), Alternate Universe- Mafiatale (Undertale), Sooner Or Later You're Gonna be Mine, StaringBack is a lovely author read her story first, Their Gaster inspired me, Quite the charming skeleton, related to SOLYGbM universe by StaringBack, 1920's themes, prohibition and stuff, SOUL of Perseverance, 2nd person POV, Reader has backstory, Mobtale - Freeform, there's jazz everywhere, booze everywhere, Riddles, Wings is flirtatious af and it isn't good for you, but that's just my opinion, Warm and Fuzzy Feelings, &quot;put your mouth on mine&quot; feelings, Violent Men Coming To Hurt You, Mutual Pining, Switch Pining, d e n i a l, Slow Burn, It's Gonna Burn SO Good And Slow</td>
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Violet Velveteen

by AlluraNice

Summary

Money. Murder. Jazz. Liquor. This damned city had it all. Every cranny had a crook and every gutter held a beggar. With your history, though, you couldn't be picky, scraping dimes off dirty tables and counting blessings instead of wages. But, it could all turn around in a night, when you decide to move into a new boss's territory, a gang of monsters known as the Gasters. No protection fees and no catch... you decide to get to the bottom of it, and the Don on the block isn't too happy with that. You've been lucky for the last three years, but your luck is about to run out...

Notes

I'd like to mention the work that inspired this one, "Sooner or Later You're Gonna be Mine". Their writing is an inspiration and I'm loving the dark turns in their plotline. If you're a fan of the mobtale au, you're gonna love it. I hope I can capture the universe as well as they did. This chapter is more of a prologue, the real tea is in the next chapter, so if you want to jump in with minimal background, just skim this : )
See the end of the work for more notes

- Inspired by Sooner or Later You're Gonna be Mine by Staringback
“It seems you’re all moved in then, miss. It’s a pleasure to have you her, miss- Janie, was it?”

“Oh, that’s just a nickname-”

“Huh, in any case, welcome to the neighborhood!”

Your neighbor places your door key on top of the box in your arms, gives you a smile, and disappears into his own dwelling, slamming the dingy door. Quirking your lip, you decide he’s a strange one. Careful with your box, you back into your new apartment and nudge the door to close with your foot.

The walls may be faded, and the carpet was ragged in the living space, and the two windows on the left wall were cloudy... but now it was home. Your desk, situated betwixt the windows, were cluttered with homey knick-knacks and a happy periwinkle vase. Your couch of tufted brown suede and stains tucked itself against the other wall of the space, partnered with a dinged up side table on which a collection of novels lay, stacked under an old radio. With plenty of room to dance and two left feet, you wouldn't mind a reading chair...

You walk to your desk and shuffle your box onto the surface, careful of the clanking machinery inside. You flip the top flaps over and slide your hands in. Out comes the scuffed, but well-oiled, typewriter, metal parts clicking as it's freed. You situate it on the desk and smile, before reaching into the box to gather some paper stacks. Soon, you've fed a paper into the machine and clack a few keys.

Welcome home!

The strikethrough key was stuck, but it provided a creative outlet, none-the-less.

Sitting into your rickety little desk chair, you look around your new hovel. It cost you a pretty penny to move into, but it would be worth it in the long-run. Your old neighborhood had just been getting worse, with rival gangs clashing outside your very window and protection fees never letting up. The building was a ways from the diner, but having to commute an hour for no protection fee was a dream you wouldn't pass it up. The dominant gang, the Gasters, were supposedly a group of skeleton monsters, something that gave you a chill to think about. You'd actually never met a monster and figured it safer to keep it that way. From the awful stories in the papers, and their
justified grudge against humanity, you weren’t too keen on making an acquaintance. Especially since you were such easy pickings.

No protection fees…

It was so unusual. They must’ve made a great deal of money in whatever “business” they placed themselves. It was such a decent gesture but mobsters didn’t just give things out for free. With their type, it was like making a deal with the devil. Too often, some desperate soul became victim to the “charity” of the mob, and were suddenly expected to return the favor, usually in the form of a suicide mission. So to assume these skeleton brothers were “good mobsters” was about as naive as you could get.

Your shoulders jerk in a shiver. Luckily, you’d prepared something to tip the scales. You stand and make your way into the kitchen, ignoring the dripping faucet and drafty window seal. You pull flour and sugar from the cabinets and pre-set the oven. It isn't long before you're dropping little globs of cookie dough onto a greased sheet pan and have thrown them into the oven. You find your best plate as they bake- the white one with the blue doily pattern in the center- and take to connecting your radio to a good station. When they finish, you’re about done with the 5th chapter of Misses MewMew Cashes Cuties and set the cookies out to cool. After a scrumptious sampling for yourself, you brush crumbs off your plaid, cotton dress and pile the delights onto a plate. Throwing a threadbare cardigan around your shoulders and donning your navy cloche hat, you stuff your key into the front pocket on your skirt and head downstairs.

The crisp autumn air whipped about your bare ankles as you headed down the street. When moving in, it was clear that the large, ornate townhouse at the end of the road was the Don's home. With newly planted hedges and a wrought iron fence surrounding the beautiful brick house, it was far beyond the economic status of the rest of the block. Pushing aside the unlocked gate, your mary-janes clicked up the stone work steps to the biggest door you’d ever seen. Bright red with a large brass door knocker and handle.

You take a breath and raise your knuckles to rap delicately on the door. Your breath flushes past your lips in self-directed annoyance as notice you’ve probably knocked too lightly for anyone to hear. With a bit more heart, you bolster yourself and tap the brass knocker only to have it yank inwards before your second knock. You pull back as though you've been electrocuted and find yourself face to face with a wide, barreled chest. Your eyes go up, up, up until you tremble under the dark, steely pinpricks of crimson. Standing in the open crevice of the doorway is a monster of bone and malice, dressed handsomely in a black suit and a red dress-shirt. His face was round but no less intimidating, with a golden fang and a threatening gaze that cut straight through your soul. His deep rumbling voice sent a shiver across your skin.

“take a picture because I hate staring ,” he growls.
You.gape-.literally- for an excuse, caught between counting your blessings, cursing yourself for offending the damn Don, and coming up with something polite enough to excuse it.

“I-I’m so very sorry! I- uhm,” you cast your gaze down only to remember your dish of cookies, “- I just came to drop these by! I was hoping to thank you and your brothers for everything you’ve done!”

His gaze shifts from you to your “fancy” plate. Silently, he holds out a skeletal hand and you rush to deliver your gift.

“I was hoping to talk to you about the community and what it means to us for you to waive the protection fee. Speaking personally, it’s been life-chang-”

“uh-huh, thanks,” he grunts and the door begins to close, along with your opportunity.

“Wait!” you yelp, bracing your hand against wood.

You feel it doesn’t close because of your strength but rather his surprise that you would attempt to keep it open, evident by the slithering glare he begins to produce. Gulpimg, you fear you crossed a line and back-track, hands folding together in front of you like a prayer.

“Don Gaster, if I could have just a moment of your time, I-”

“not the don,” he grunts roughly.

You blink. Of course the first person to answer the door wasn’t The Don, what were you thinking.

“ya got wax in your ears?”

“Oh! My apologies! It was a simple mistake. You see, I’m new on the block. Is the Don in? It’s urgent that I speak with him about the community,” you recover, laying it on thicker and sweeter than cream.
He narrows his sockets and doesn’t reply. You try to nudge a bashful grin onto your trembling lips.

“No? Um, then could you please let him know that I-”

“i ain’t no messenger, toots,” he snarls, “put it in a letter and not on me.”

“Oh, but it wouldn’t nearly be… as… sincere…” your voice fades as his glare holds you harshly. You gulp, mustering a Hail Mary.

“It’s urgent ,” you say, your voice dripping with pity as you bat your lashes.

He doesn’t buy it...

...which is evident…

...when the door slams in your face…

Jolting, you feel the release of pressure around you, like a change in altitudes, and you let out a breath. You briefly mourned your fancy plate- it went to a righteous cause- and decided to go home and regroup. Gingerly crossing the neatly trimmed yard of the Gasters, you realize you pushed it a bit too far again. You were lucky to have not gotten into greater trouble or offense with the brute at the door, and you’d need to appeal to the mobsters in another way in order to accomplish your greater mission…

...maybe marshmallow squares tomorrow…

You grin, joking aside, your luck would run out eventually and it was important to gain their favor before that happened, before you really pissed them off.

Another chilly autumn breeze sweeps your dress up your calves and you shiver drawing your cardigan closer to your frame, finding strength as you return to your dwelling down the street. Wings watches from the drawn curtain, a curl of violet smoke slipping out from under his teeth.
Absently, he puffs the rest from his chest in a shallow cloud and turns to Sans in the doorway.

“What did she want?” he croaks, sauntering back to his desk and his blueprints.

“to talk to you, and bring us cookies,” Sans replied, hands in his pockets. “the batch is downstairs, disposed of.”

Wings takes another drag and slumps into his cushy leather sitter. “Good,” he says, exhaling violet.

“she said she was new in town, you think she’s with anyone?”

“Our adversary’s don’t suspect a thing, it’s doubtful she’s anything more than curious about monsters. Poor thing looked frightened, you were polite, weren’t you?”

“of course.”

“That was sarcasm. I know better.”

“you would.”

The morning rises and after recovering from last evenings events, you set about making a delicious, lemon bundt cake. It was a bit drier than you’d like to present it, but perhaps the generous coating of icing would help. You set out to the townhouse, a fresh pip in your step.

Thinking back, the only reason you failed yesterday was from the shock of seeing your first monster. Today would be different. You aimed to gain the name of the monster from yesterday and hope that the small amount of familiarity will get you in better standing. You needed him to be just a bit friendlier if he was going to consider arranging a quick meeting for you.
Once down the many flights of stairs and the short walk of concrete, you stepped up to the Gasters home, bolstering yourself to knock soundly on the bright red door. You straighten your shoulders, lift your chin, place a gentle smile on your cheeks.

Hello! My name is Janie- no- no no, that name wasn’t yours anymore, your name was-

The door jolts open and startles you but you maintain your facade and-

Oh. This one is much taller…

“HELLO? AH, A HUMAN. WHAT DO YOU WANT?!?” he jeers. His voice is shrill.

He’s also a good head taller than the one before and more angular, looking almost stretched. He wears a red dress-shirt under suspenders, the tails tucked neatly into his black, pinstriped trousers.

Smile, honey, smile.

“Hello!” you hurry, recovering nicely, “I was wondering if Don Gaster was available. I brought something sweet and hoped we could talk.”

His sockets narrow. “YOU ARE THE WOMAN FROM YESTERDAY,” he states simply.

You nod, holding back a tremble. “Yes, I came by but was told Don Gaster wasn’t able to meet with me. I didn’t catch the name of the fellow at the door.”

He was intimidating, to say the least. You considered the last one to be tall, but goodness, they kept growing. You didn’t want to imagine how tall the Don was, or how beady his little eye lights would be, or how you felt when the skeleton man held your gaze so tightly you felt it pierce your core.

“That’s my brother, Sans. We didn’t expect you to come back. What do you want?”
You smile and bounce the plate in your grasp. You wouldn’t lose another plate until you were sure you’d be let in. There was only so much cheap, chipped china you had.

“Well, I’m new to the neighborhood. I came because of the protection fees, or rather the lack of a fee. From what I’ve seen, it’s been a monumental improvement on the lives of those affected. I wanted to come by and personally express my gratitude to the Don. I wouldn’t take but a moment of his time, is he available?”

“DEFINITELY NOT. HE’S VERY BUSY MOST OF THE TIME. THANK YOU FOR THE CAKE, I WILL TELL MY BROTHER OF YOUR GRATITUDE,” he yells, then motions for the plate in your hands.

Though you want to demand an audience and throw a fit, you find it wiser to deliver your gift into his skeletal hands. You do so begrudgingly, watching your second precious piece of china fade from your life. You bite your lip…

“...sir? If you could let him know I need to see him, it would mean the world to me- to us, ergh, the community!”

He waves you off and clenches his jaw. “YES, YES, I KNOW, YOU ARE ALL VERY GRATEFUL AND I COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND WHY. PLEASE STOP SAYING IT WITH FOOD, THOUGH. OUR GARBAGE IS OVERFLOWING WITH GRATITUDE.”

Garbage? But... that would have to mean-

The door is slammed again, leaving you out in the cold and down another plate. You grit your teeth together and turn from the house, almost tripping down the short steps in a flurry of frustration. It grows in your chest like a ball of thistles.

The garbage?! They really just threw it out without a second thought. Unbelievable! How was that sympathy at all?! No these mobsters weren’t nice guys at all, puh! Rotten crooks, they were. You were telling the first resident who would listen to you that they were no good gangster trash!

Your jaw tilted, your hands in the pockets of your cardigan. It was cloudy again and the morning had been chilly. It felt like a cold front.
Of course no one would listen to you, though. “Just picking up on that, are you? Was it the pinstripes or the murderous demeanor that told you?” Boy, you could hear the ridicule already. “Oh, honey, are you new to the city?”

You kick a couple of amber leaves on the sidewalk and scuff your shoe. What a joke, trying to figure this all out. Sure, it was simple enough. Get the boss alone, shed a few tears, see if he cared at all. His sympathy could be confirmed and you would decide to stay indefinitely. If you had any doubts, you’d save money and look for a back-up in case things went south. Maybe he didn’t need to be kind, but decent enough to explain his actions.

Sighing, you decide to try again tomorrow, without offering anymore of your valuables.

Meanwhile, Don Gaster leaned against the wall of the entryway, bony arms crossed as he contemplated. Papyrus had taken the cake to the kitchen to be dealt with—“THERE’S A HOLE IN THIS CAKE.”—and promptly disposed of it. Humans sure were weird. But Wings had a multitude of things to consider, having heard the conversation from inside the foyer.

She came back, which meant she had an agenda. An agenda which may be related to expressing gratitude, but that was a fat chance. He knew better than to assume people had good intentions. With one of the older residents, maybe he’d consider the likelihood of them being brave enough to go this far, for gratitude. But she was new and all too friendly. That wasn’t progressivism, that was manipulation, and he knew the game all too well. He knew the tricks, knew how to work people into a false sense of security, knew how to sweeten the deal with a well-placed word.

Oh yes, this little darling wanted something, and he didn’t like it.

…

But …

He grinned devilishly.

If she wanted to play games, he’d oblige. As if there were a greater mind than his. Of course, he never played fair, but no one would expect less when you mess with the Gasters.
Nothing is Free

Chapter Notes

I suggest playing some film noir jazz faintly in the background, like an old radio. Curl up with a blanket and let your guard down. You're in no danger and you need be in no hurry. Let your mind feel free to set the scene, smell the autumn air, hear the rustling of the amber leaves. And remember, reader, lies do not become us.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was cold, oh, it was cold. A front had blown in last night, not only making it difficult to get off the, otherwise stony, mattress, but also to sit outside the Don’s townhome on the newly constructed park bench. The wooden slats made no effort to conserve your body heat, and the chill slithered up your worn stockings and shivered up your spine. You tremble and rub your knees together, glancing up from your paper at the red brick apartment as your teeth chatter.

No one had come out. Not the “Sans” fellow, not his goliath brother, and certainly not the Don himself. You huff through your nose and straighten the paper print, rereading the same sob story about a jailed murderess. Someone would eventually come out, or see you. You needed to let them know you were serious! Even if the bitter cold nipped your cheeks and numbed your fingers, and they were all very tall and scary, and you knew better than to mess with mobsters.

But there wasn’t an easier way to protect yourself…

Because even as the wail of winter tells you to go home, and your common sense screams to let it go, despite it all, you have to know. What is the motive? Why revoke the protection fee? What do they gain through being decent to these poor, poor people? It didn’t make sense, didn’t line up with their occupation. And even if you didn’t discover the motive, at least you could discover its existence. Then, you’d be prepared for the inevitable.

Nothing is for free… Not even peace of mind.

You glance up at the domineering house, and a weight presses into you. Your skin rises with goosebumps and you shiver, passing it off as the wind as you bury your nose into your newspaper.

Wings watches you from the window of his study, hands folded behind his back and glimmers at your shivering. You’d been out there for a few hours now, having finished your novel long ago and now flipped through a rumpled newspaper, over and over again. He thought the freeze might get
you to leave, but even as the cloudy sky grew darker, you stayed and you shivered. The townhouse was perfectly cozy, warmed by a large fireplace in the living room. Had you been patient and not been so pushy, he might’ve invited you in to warm up, curious about the new face on the block.

Your nose and cheeks are flushed from the weather, and he watches your fingertips get paler as time goes on. He grins. *What a persistent little thing.* He planned on approaching you eventually, but it was amusing to see how long you were lasting out there. If he went to sleep and found you frozen to the bench the next morning, he wouldn’t be surprised. You must be getting paid handsomely.

He stalks to his desk, pressing the butt of his cigarette into the ceramic ashtray as he passes and heads out the door, a thin trail of violet smoke following him. He takes the stairs with his hands in the pockets of his slacks, descending to the living room where Sans lays crashed out on the couch. He’s always like this after his visits with her . . .

...Actually… He’s always like this…

Stepping to the coat closet, he pulls a black duster off the hanger and fits it around his shoulders. Papyrus pokes his head out of the kitchen.

“WINGS, DINNER IS ABOUT TO START, WHERE ARE YOU GOING?”

Wings straightens his tie and grins. “Just outside to have a word with the new girl. She’s been waiting patiently enough. I’ll be back in a moment.”

From across the street you perk as the door opens to the Gaster home. Your fingers curl around the newspaper and you begin to look as interested as possible in your article. Your foot bounces erratically as you struggle to maintain a casual demeanor. Could this be him?! It could be one of the brothers, coming to threaten you for loitering. Were you too obvious? Maybe they just wanted to talk. Jeez, you didn’t even know which one it was!

Carefully, you glance over the edge of your paper and- *oh goodness, you made eye contact.*

He was not one of *the* brothers, but he very well may have been another brother? You didn’t know how many there were, it could be a house of 8 for all you knew. What you did know was that you were caught staring, frozen like a doe. Oh, you were so busted, you were in trouble, this was a bad idea, this-
Then, he smiled. In a very warm way, and you felt the dread dissipate a little. This wasn’t a “you’ve got 3 more seconds of life” smile, it was a friendly hello. You return it nervously as he approaches, your fingers loosening the crumpled print.

Still tall and bony, but not lanky or wide, this one was well dressed. As he drew closer, you noticed faint cracks across his browbone and down his other cheek, giving him a rugged look beneath the smile. Still, you didn’t get a good feeling about him.

“M-may I help you?” you ask, when he stops in front of you.

“I could ask the same thing, miss,” he crooned. You almost winced at the scratch of his voice, so rough. He smells like spice and smoke. “I apologize I was unable to meet with you sooner, but you said it was urgent?”

*It’s him.*

“Don Gaster!” you exclaim, rushing to stand with wide eyes and shaky palms. “It’s a pleasure to finally meet with you!” You extend your hand and he takes it easily. You’re startled by the contrast of your frozen fingers against his warm palm.

“The pleasure is mine, my dear. It’s wonderful to see such a lovely new face around,” he hums, his handshake firm.

You blink at the compliment. “Oh… thank you… um.” Focus, please. You grapple for words, your tongue twisted. Did he look amused?

“I-I needed to speak with you,” you finally produce.

“Of course, is anything wrong?” he asks, sitting down on the bench. His tall frame is almost comically too large. You also wish he’d invite you in to warm up- did he not feel your hands?!- but you tough it out.

“Oh, no, just the opposite, sir! I wanted- needed- to thank you for everything you’ve done for this community,” you air, sitting next to him on the damned cold bench.
Wings grins. “How sweet, my dear. They sent you to thank me?”

“No, ah, I came on my own… but from what I’ve seen, I’m sure the gratitude is unanimous!”

“That’s wonderful to hear.”

A pregnant silence falls and you’re unsure of how to continue. How do you even segway into a sob story? *Oh, you’ve given me new life, I was part of the dregs of society! I slept in the gutters and ate scraps from the bakery!* You wanted to ham it up, but in a realistic, more heartfelt way. Jeez, you ever really were an actress, more of a playwright, but wouldn’t that come in handy just about now! Already, you’d paused too long, seeming awkward and fiddly.

“…right.”

Wow. Truly moving commentary. His lips tighten and he clears his throat, seeming annoyed.

“Well, if that’s all, miss-”

“No! I, erhm… I really needed to… thank you personally.”

“Yes, you’ve made that clear.”

“W-what i mean is,” you stumble, feeling yourself lose control of the conversation. You just needed to breath, you could do it. “I was in a really rough spot when I heard of your neighborhood.”

“Most people are in a rough spot nowadays.”

“Yes, that’s true, but I was… um…”

Truthfully, you hadn’t come up with a good enough story, everything else seemed a bit over the
top. I went into dealing drugs, I sold myself, my child and I were left flat by my husband, I caught a bad case of the flu and lost my job. There was far too much story behind each excuse, and you weren’t quick enough to keep up elaborate lies. Your gaze drifted to your palms and you fiddle with your fingers, feigning reclusion as you came up with a good lie.

Wings holds back a deep sigh of annoyance. You were the worst spy he’s ever met. You didn’t even have a backstory figured out. Whoever sent you must’ve just picked you off the street to throw you to the hounds. A shame that delicate things are always the easiest pawns, always the quickest to fall into the debts of the mob. He felt sorry for you, especially since you were taking so long to answer. He’ll make something up for you, just to get this over with quicker.

Wings lays a tender hand against your knee. “By a rough spot, you mean that you were out on the streets?”

You take it in a heartbeat and run with it. Looking solemn, you nod your head. “It was terrible,” you whisper, “I’d just paid my fee but the rent was late one too many times, and I was evicted from my apartment. I stayed with a coworker for a few days before I heard of this neighborhood, and now here I am.”

He shakes his head, playing along easily. “How awful, you must’ve been panicked.”

“I was terrified of my situation. I don’t want to think of what could’ve happened to me, or my… dignity. You’ve truly saved me.”

“That’s quite a compliment and I take it humbly, my dear. Where was your old territory, again?”

“East, with the Hankerstudds family. Why?”

The Hankerstudds were a very small group, with hardly any gumption as a gang, from what Wings understood. What they wanted from him and his territory was beyond him, but the death of this little sneak would send the right message.

“Well, frankly, I’m just not sure why you’d want to talk to me. You’re the only resident to have stood so intently on our doorstep. It almost feels like you want something else…”

You abruptly realize his hand is still clasped around the joint of your knee. Something else? He
couldn’t know what you were doing, you were perfectly polite. Glancing up, you feel your heart sink as his expression has turned a sinister, eye sockets like a predator’s gaze and a smug smile fitted to his lips. Oh, oh no no no. You were sending the wrong message, a very dangerous message.

Jumping abruptly from your seat on the bench, heart hammering against your chest, you stumble backwards towards your building.

“O-oh, um, well, I’m v-very sorry to have wasted your time.” You weren’t trying to flirt, did you sound desperate? This was a very very bad situation.

“Running home, then?” he croons, head tilting.

This was bad, bad, very bad. Through your persistent nagging to save your own skin, you threw yourself to the wolves, catching the attention of the worst possible monster. When would you stop digging yourself into holes, like this? You clutch your cardigan around your frame and try not to trip over your own feet.

“Ah, thank you for your time, sir, I’m sure you have dinner plans. G-goodbye.”

You turn and almost break into a run, arms folded around yourself tightly. Wings lets you go, knowing he’ll be back tonight to finish the job, and if you were smart, you’d leave before that happened. He straightens the collar of his coat smugly and steps towards the townhome, only to catch his toe on the edge of a book laying on the ground. He stoops and lifts the small thing to his sight. Misses MewMew Cashes Cuties, ugh, humans were weird. Pocketing the book under his elbow, he casts a sidelong glance at the townhouse. Surely, his brothers wouldn’t mind him being a little late to dinner. He needed to return your book, after all.

As soon as you fumbled through your door, you slid the lock into place and latched the chain. You pull your hat off your head and run your fingers through your hair, attempting to breath properly. You’d never taken stairs so fast in your life. You’d wanted to look behind you, but you were too scared he’d actually be following.
You run your hands down your face and groan. You felt like a child, running from the scary man under your bed. What even happened back there?! One moment, it was going fine and then you were diving into forbidden territory. Had he really thought you were some secret admirer? Now you were really in trouble. You’ve seen a girl say no to Frank Hankerstudd before and she didn’t come back so pretty. She was bruised up and swollen that next week, walking around like it hurt to breathe. Another lesson learned from the misfortune of others that you’d not soon forget.

It was exhausting being in this city, but you knew that when you came here. The chaos gave you a certain refuge that you hoped would last a lifetime, if you lasted your own lifetime that is. You sigh and throw your hat onto the couch, along with your cardigan, before pacing into the kitchen to make dinner.

You’d get through this. You’d been pretty lucky the last three years. After running out of cash and stumbling into your waitressing job, then securing your trusty old typewriter, and only going hungry a handful of times, you shouldn’t be surprised that your luck is wearing out. If you did end up getting beaten to a bloody pulp by some snub-nosed skeleton, well, you’d had a good run.

It was still better than what your future could’ve been, had you not left so long ago.

You shuffle through the pages of an old cookbook when you hear a polite knock on your front door. You squint but leave the kitchen anyhow. It was dinner time, most people would be with their families eating. You attempt a peek through the peephole but find it blurred with mold. You scrunch your nose in distaste. Sliding the chain off, you flip the lock but your hand freezes around the knob.

_You’re so stupid, who else would it obviously be…_

Your stomach flips and you grit your teeth. There isn’t any sense in locking the door, you’ll either piss him off or get your lock broken if he really wants in. Deal with it gracefully.

You open the door. “Don Gaster,” you greet, blanching as his tall frame blocks the light from the hallway.

“May I come in?” he smiles, holds folded behind his back. He doesn’t give you time to answer and instead walks past you, entering your apartment.

You almost scoff but don’t forget yourself. “Of course,” you hum pleasantly, shutting the door
softly behind him. You turn and startle, your back hitting the door as he’s stood closer than you’d like, peering at you half-way over a bony shoulder.

“Come sit,” he husks and steps into your living room.

You take a moment to breath, peeling your hand from the middle of your chest when you covered it like an old woman. His vibe was different, he didn’t sound flirtatious or coy. His whole attitude told you this was business, but what business could he have? You comply with his order and stalk into the living room, keeping an eye on him as you settle yourself into your uncomfortable couch.

He’s stood at your rickety, beat up desk, fiddling with the typewriter, though you dare not chastise him. He types a few, slow keys, then gets bored, choosing instead to run his bony fingertips across the spines of a few books you kept on the shelf above. He reaches into his coat and pulls out your copy of a *Misses MewMew* novel and you wince. Hopefully, he didn’t know how cheesy it was. Taking great care, he stands it next to the other books and then focuses on you.

His gaze is stern. “You seem to like fiction,” he observes.

Your eyes dart away for a moment. “I suppose I do…”

He hums, then moves onto the rest of the room. You watch from the corner of your eye.

“I suppose you also like lies then?”

You blink. “I’m… not sure how to answer that.”

You go to turn but are stopped when you feel his hands grip your shoulders.

“Shh, I know what you are. I’m sorry to say you aren’t a very good little spy, but I’ll make it quick, my dear.”

Your heart drops into your stomach. “A- a spy?!” If you’re hearing right, that would mean you’d be pretty dead soon. Jolting, you attempt to throw yourself out of his hands and end up on the floor.
“Don’t be coy, now. Come here and die gracefully.” He steps around the back of the couch and you scramble to your feet.

“You assume I’m a spy?!” you sputter, backing into the corner of the tiny living room.

“Am I to assume otherwise?” he hums boredly, stalking towards you. His height is overwhelming and the lights in his eyes are dim. “You appear in my territory, encroach on my home, and lie to me, distract me, what are you then?”

He clasps your arms and gives you a violent shake. You gulp and shrink in on yourself.

“. . . I’m afraid it’d make you angrier to hear the truth,” you murmur.

“It might make me kill you if I hear nothing,” he spits, sockets narrowing.

“Well, I- uhm-”

“Spit it out.”

“I wanted to know if you were a good man!”

He pauses, snarl dissipating. He gives you a dull look.

“...Are you serious…”

“ Entirely.”

“A good man?”
“Well, maybe more correctly, a good monster, but-”

“You understand my occupation, don’t you?”

*Mobster. Crook. Gangster. Murderer. Processor of illegal goods. Like you didn’t know.* You can’t meet the pathetic look he’s giving and grit your teeth.

“Yes, but, well, it’s rather complicated.”

“You have only a few minutes to make it clear.”

“I- oh, well, I can’t even breathe! Give me some air, I swear I’ll be honest,” you plead and he scoffs at that.

“I’m already late to a very important dinner, and you want more of my time?”

“I really am sorry! I can make it up to you!”

He snarks. “And how?”

“With… money?”

He shakes his head in disbelief. Humans were so dull. What use did he have for your petty cash? How could the change in your purse fix him being late? You’d wasted enough of his time, told enough lies. He should just kill you now and get Sans to clean it in the morning.

His jaw clenches. Unfortunately, you haven’t been very quiet and no doubt a neighbor of yours must’ve heard the commotion. If you let out any bloody screams and he was seen as involved, that would ruin things very quickly. It was better he take care of this privately.

“No, I think I have a better idea. Come, we can discuss things over dinner.”
Wings wraps a hand around your arm and pulls you away. He hurries you out of your apartment and you try not trip over the stairs as he drags you down the steps. You find that it’s raining outside and your skin chills at the cold drizzle. Don Gaster seems unaffected, but without your coat or hat, you’re cold and exposed. The next thing you know he’s pulling you down the street and up to the great crimson door of the townhouse. You clamber to follow, his grip too tight to stagger.

This is where you’re going to die. There’s no coming out of this house, no way. You don’t go to a Don’s home and have dinner unless it’s your last meal. Your luck was out, this was it. You never even got to apologize to mom, or write that big murder mystery, or try that cherry chocolate cake recipe from the catalogue at the laundromat.

Don Gaster flings the door open. The bang it makes against the wall shakes the frame of the house.

“Sans, Papyrus, we have a guest!” he calls into the home, bringing you with him.

Dragging you forward, dripping in rain, you are lead into a large living space. It’s at least warmer. The living space by the stairs is lit with a roaring fireplace and circled with clawfoot couches. To the right is a dining table where the two skeletons you’ve met are sat, and they don’t look happy that you’ve interrupted. Dinner sits on the table top, untouched by the look of their plates.

The two monsters stare you down and your skin crawls. You nod your head politely.

“Good evenin-”

“Sit,” Wings commands, pushing you forward. Catching yourself, you see that the rounder one moves from his chair and offers it to you with a sinister grin.

“here, why don’t ya take mine?”

You have a feeling it isn’t a request and sit, allowing him to push in your chair. He takes the next chair down. Don Gaster takes a seat at the head of the table, folding his hands together on top of the tablecloth. With the tall one across from you, and one on either side, you are very much surrounded. No one makes a move for the food. Your hands fiddle and you’re not sure who to look at.

Wings reaches for a bottle of wine and pulls the cork from the top. “Let’s start with your name.
Your neighbors call you ‘Janie’?”

You wince. “That’s not my name anymore.” You don’t mean for it to sound defensive.

“Oh?” he hums, glancing up at you. You mumble the name you’ve chose and he nods.

“An interesting pseudonym.”

“I’m really not a spy.”

The bottle almost cracks as he sets it down harshly, snapping your attention to his glaring eyelights.

“I’ll make this very simple, my dear. If I hear one more lie out of your mouth, you won’t make it to dessert. But if you’re good and tell the truth, you’ll have nothing to worry about.” He lets his words settle in your ears before he leans back in his chair, taking his glass and raising it to his teeth.

“I promise not to lie then,” you promise. He pauses. Then, he nods.

“How smart of you.” He takes a long sip, keeping your eye before continuing.

“Why are you here?” he asks.

“I came because I heard you don’t charge protection fees.” It’s the truth.

“And then you wanted my attention. Why?”

“… That’s… complicated…”

He glints.
“As you’ve said. My patience wears thin.”

“I’m only worried that you’ll be more angry. Wouldn’t you rather not know?” You follow up your joke with a wobbly smile but end up biting at your lip. His hard gaze shows no amusement.

“You’re not funny.”

“Then promise me you won’t be mad.” You were really pushing it again. Making demands of someone who could kill you at any moment, or have the others snap your neck before you could blink, but maybe it would humor him. Anybody who could be brought to humor received things more easily.

Wings glowers for a moment. However, he had made no promises about telling the truth, so for convenience, he decided to agree. He studies you intently and his thumb rubs against the side of his glass.

“. . . sure, I promise I won’t be angry.”

“. . . I figured that you dropped the fees because you had some way to use it against people.”

If he could turn any whiter, he would. His finger stills on his glass and his gaze turns very intense. Did you already know? Did you- the dull little creature you were- somehow figure out everything?! It was impossible, he was so careful. Someone must’ve told you something, but he was discrete and everything was going perfectly. He steals a glance at Sans, who’s poker face has also faulted.

You hurry to explain, dreading the long silence that followed. “And I only assume that because I’ve been living in this city for 3 years, and from what I’ve learned, nothing is free. Every action has a reason and I could only assume you were no different.”

He squints and you can tell this is going no better.

“A-and that it if I could talk to you, and see whether you were like everyone else, I could look out for myself and move before there was trouble. . . Can you fault me for that?”
It seemed, to Wings, a safer excuse. And perhaps it wasn’t so dull of a plan. Not very smart or thought-out, but he could appreciate your tactics. Even though you got to be nosier than you should have, you didn’t care about the plan. You weren’t on some great mission to save the humans of this area from an evil plot, no. You were trying to get by. And he could toy with that desire very easily.

“... I’ll admit… it is insulting…” he starts, setting his glass on the table.

He turns to look at you, but the fire is gone. He folds his hands under his chin.

“But I cannot fault you. I understand that you were only trying to be smart about yourself and I apologize for the accusation. I hope we can… look past my rough behaviour?”

You were so lucky. “Oh, certainly! I’m sure spies are a sensitive issue, I don’t blame you at all,” you smile gently. Perhaps it was only a half-truth. You blamed him for the definite bruise forming on your skin but would rather that than a slow and painful death.

“Good, good. I’m so sorry for disturbing you this evening, you must be famished. Since you’re here, why don’t you stay and have dinner with us?” he smiles and you feel the weight lifted.

“That would be very kind, yes, thank you,” you grin and you feel almost lightheaded at your fortune. You counted your lucky stars because you must’ve had a gift. You just had to survive a pleasant dinner and you’ve survived plenty of those, not to mention this was only one course.

“Splendid. Papyrus cooked a marvelous meal tonight and we have plenty to share,” he says, lifting the wine bottle to fill the glass by your plate.

“How generous, sir,” you smile, noting the gold filigree label.

“Please, call me Wings. We omit the formalities in this neighborhood. You’ve met my brothers already, Sans and Papyrus.”

You nod and give them both a polite smile, which Sans does not meet as he pulls a large slice of lasagna from a dish and Papyrus merely stares at you quizzically. “Charmed,” you hush, holding
back annoyance at their dismissal.

Wings presses his teeth together but doesn’t chastise them. He clears his throat addressing you as you raise your glass to your lips.

“So, my dear, where did you grow up?”

Your drink catches in your throat and, mortified, you spray red wine across the table. Stuffing apologies between your coughing, Wings is polite enough to get you a napkin.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know it was a sensitive subject,” he says and you wave him off.

“No, I just didn’t expect it. It’s just... it’s been a while,” you excuse. He gives you a sympathetic look.

“I understand. Why don’t we start with something easier?” he supplies and you nod gratefully.

“Thank you. I read an article today about a man from Kentucky probably 40 times and it’s just too interesting.”

“That interesting, hm?”

“No, I mean I sat outside so long, I had to.”

Chapter End Notes

If you find an error, let me know <3
Amber Afterglow

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Dinner had gone by quickly, with Don Gaster- Wings - being much more of a conversationalist than you expected. After the brothers had finished, they’d excused themselves quietly, but you found yourself at the the table with Wings for much longer. You had told him about your first three years in the city, what you’d learned, and he shared interesting things about coming to the city as a monster. After you shivered from your damp clothes, he suggested the two of you move to the seating by the fireplace.

You sat on an elegant, red corduroy couch, feet tucked under yourself while you nursed your new glass of red wine. The fire crackled and snapped in the large, brick hull, warming your toes and cheeks. The wine gave you a bit of a glow, but you’d been taking it easy. A compact radio sat on the mantle of the fireplace and played quiet jazz.

“Congratulations, you made it to dessert,” Wings smiled, handing you small china plate that carried a tiny, round chocolate cake.

You grin and take the treat from him. “Thank goodness, I was thinking you would see through me by this point.”

He chuckles and takes a seat next to you, balancing his own plate and glass. “Careful,” he warns.

The cake is sweet and rich and you have to actively avoid making a noise of contempt. If they have access to this kind of dessert, you don’t fault them for throwing out your Mary Crockett Bake Box cookies. This was heaven. Well-fed and warm, and probably more safe than you’d been since you’d arrived in this city, the townhouse was beginning to feel like paradise. It was the simple pleasures like these that made you really miss . . .

You clear your throat. “You have a beautiful home,” you redirect, and Wings hums.

“Thank you, I designed the floorplans,” he says.

“Oh, you’re an architect?” you reply, impressed.
“I am many things,” he grins.

You return it. “Careful, I’m a spy, you know.”

Wings groans and tilts his head back. “I really can’t apologize enough. It’s a very serious matter for a monster like me.”

You nod and take another sip from your glass. “I understand, and you have. I really do think you’re a gentleman, though.”

“A gentleman?” he asks skeptically. “I started our first conversation with an all too personal matter. That’s hardly fitting of a gentleman.”

You avert your gaze and set your empty dish on the side table. “I’m not holding it against you…”

A moment of silence falls and he studies you from the corner of his eye. Curse him for being curious, but your mannerisms didn’t fit your financial situation. You were educated—obviously—, you sat straight and ate thoughtfully. You were polite and well versed, and yet… you hardly had anything of worth. No pictures of family or friends, a threadbare wardrobe, a worn down collection of odd furniture. He figured with a girl as pretty and well-mannered as you, a decent man would have come by and wifed you half a decade ago.

But you were a poor, and alone and scared. And you were in this big city filled with crime and sadness, and you didn’t have a soul to rely on.

“Did your family hurt you?” he asks before he can give a second thought. He watches your face take a look of surprise.

“No, not at all! My family has…” you pause, thinking of the best way to handle this conversation. A sigh releases the tension in your shoulders. “They’ve been good to me, loving and fair. I just couldn’t stay with them, is all.”

In truth, it wasn’t your parents that were the problem, it was your decisions you were running from. They’d played a part in your panic, but you knew their hearts were in the right place. They wanted you to be comfortable, but you couldn’t have bared it any longer.
“Ah, so it was time to leave the nest. I see. Where did you grow up?” Wings asks casually. His leg lifts to rest on his knee.

The radio plays a faint tune and the fire snaps and flares. Your fingers twist together.

“I grew up in California,” you admit.

“You’re quite a ways from home,” he observes and you nod.

“It’s definitely a journey. I came here to- ah... become a writer,” you say, hoping the half-truth convinces him.

“Why not write in California?” he asks.

*Pick pick picking*. You pick at your nails, lips moving in an effort to find something to say. You’re at a loss and when you glance to him, he raises his brow at the bashfulness.

It would be *easier* to lie. ‘I wanted to find a subject for my novel’, ‘the city is a great setting for the genre I was thinking of’, *California doesn’t have jazz*, something like that would’ve worked. But you were doing well with honesty so far, and you didn’t want to seem like a compulsive liar. But was it really a good idea to reveal so much personal information with someone like him? On one hand, you lie to him and have a big chance of paying for it, or you could swallow your pride and talk about yourself.

You give a nervous chortle.

“It’s silly, that’s all. I’m afraid you’ll laugh at me,” you say.

“I wouldn’t dare,” he assures, placing a skeletal hand on your knee.

You fiddle, delaying the moment. Even now, embarrassment rises in your cheeks, ripening them to a rosy glow. It should be easy to talk about, it had been years. Untangling your tongue, you find a
way to speak, bashful as ever.

“I was engaged to be married to a man named Edwin Jaeger and left him the night before our wedding. I took every train that got me further away,” hushes from your lips.

You then await the appalled expression you expected, but Wings makes no such face. He simply pauses, looking to the corner of the room thoughtfully. He hums and lays his hand over his chin.

“Oh, I see,” is how he replies. So easy, that it confuses you. Oh, I see. . . As if you had explained how the mail system works. You knew very well your situation was deplorable, which was why you hadn’t told just about anyone what your situation was. You were ashamed to hear what someone might call you but here this skeleton man was taking it like an hors d’oeuvre at cocktail party.

Oh, I see. . .

Casual, with mild interest. Almost frustratingly casual. Maybe it was just the mob-boss in him expecting something more sinister and devious, who could know!

Your parents probably believed you were still hiding in California, smarter than to cross the country into the most dangerous city in America. Where homicide was more common than jazz, they wouldn’t set foot in these streets, neither would your ex-fiance.

“Edwin Juggar?”

“Mh-hm.”

“Did you love him?”

The question throws you. You look at Wings, and study him for a moment.

“Did I-- No. No, I--” you realize how flustered you’ve become and attempt to steel yourself. Your hair falls across your cheek to hide your eyes and you consider his question. It was kinder than you had expected, but you were coming to realize that was a part of Wings’ charm.
Something about it makes your chest warm. . .

A smile touches your lips and you tuck your hair behind your ear. Looking to Wings with renewed confidence, you speak with clarity. “No. I didn’t love him.”

Wings hums and swirls his glass. “Then, you did the right thing.”

You grin. “You say the most unexpected things,” you awe.

He smirks. “I like to think I surprise people. But in your situation, I think I reacted appropriately,” he hums and it pulls a giggle from you.

“Really? Christ, I’m a runaway bride! If you wanted to shame me or toss me out I. . . Well, I wouldn’t like it, but I’d expect it!” you titter.

He shrugs. “Why is your predicament so shameful? A man trying to guilt you into marrying him when you don’t love him, now that is shameful,” he says. You roll your eyes.

“Because of what I could’ve had, I suppose. Edwin is very comfortably wealthy- my own family is very comfortable- and they were hoping to merge companies with the marriage. They wanted to keep their money within familiar hands. But I just. . . “ you fade off into a sigh, toes curling, lip marring.

“I’ve been comfortable my whole life. I needed this,” you gesture around you, “I needed out, to see things, to be a part of all life had. I needed to be something greater and with Edwin, I can’t do that.”

And so far, it had been terrifying, but it had been your terrifying. You’ve got by so far. You were financially insecure and half-starved, but you also had a typewriter, a job, an apartment, and a couple of wacky coworkers you called friends.

“With Edwin, what I wanted was always something he could find in a book, or something he could buy for me, or have someone bring in, and how am I supposed to be anything with that? You know? I felt so cramped. I felt like I was just an accessory, I felt dull. I had to leave, if I stayed, I never would have known different. I had to see more, I had to know more. Every part of me just
needed to go, and fill the void with something. Do you know how I mean?”

When you turn to Wings, the warmest smile is on his face. “Yes,” he answers simply.

You smirk. “You are incredibly easy to talk to, do you know that?”

Wings flashes you a smile. “It depends on the person really. You, my dear, are incredibly easy to listen to,” he rasps, and again you feel a warmth in your chest.

Your voice lowers. “You’re not like anyone I’ve ever met, WingDings.”

“I’m not anyone else,” he hums.

“No,” you grin, “you’re a gentleman.” He returns the smile warmly.

From above the mantle, the clock hand reaches north and a delicate chime rings out over the cozy living room. You gasp.

“Is that the time?! Oh, I’m so sorry to have kept you so late!” you flurry, unfolding your legs to fasten your shoes to your feet.

“Don’t worry yourself, I had a wonderful time. May I walk you home?” Wings asks, stretching his arms above his head.

“I’d like that very much.”

And he does. The walk is quiet and the rain has quelled, the street shimmering a lazy blue under the moon. When you reach your door, which is thankfully still unlocked, you turn back to Wings with a smile.

“Thank you, for what you said tonight. You don’t know what it means to me.”
Wings smiles back. “Anytime. I enjoy your thoughts immensely.” You grin and step into your apartment and get ready for bed.

When Wings is back at the townhouse, he finds Sans and dumps a phone book on him.

“wha-i’m sleepin’, what is this for?” he grunts.

“In the morning, we’re going to make some calls, and then you’re going to find out all about our little dame,” Wings grunts, before turning for the door. “I want to know where she goes, at what time, on what day. If she has friends, I want to know. If she has a doctors appointment every 5th tuesday, I want to know. She’s very suddenly become very important.”

The place was called Klinko’s Diner and it took a half an hour on the trolley and a 20 minute walk to get there. It was old and dingy, brown like an old photograph and rusty around the edges. The booths were worn down and hard, and the mint green paint was peeling off the wood panelled walls, and the brass paint was chipped on all the fixtures. Worst of all, because of its location near the docks, it smelled like sour fish. By the end of the day, so did you. But it was also how you pocketed spare quarters and made a living, so you tried to look at it with a little more enthusiasm. When people asked, you called it “charming” and “cozy”.

At least your coworkers were decent. Kelly and Ariel were arguing quietly behind the counter when you came out from the kitchen, hair pinned under a waitress cap. Kelly catches sight of you and waves you over. When you near she places her hand over her chest.

“Darling, if you were my friend, you’d do help me in any way you could, right?” she says.

You glance over at the corner, and lo and behold, Edgar and Petey are sat waiting, discussing something with heat.

You give her a look. “They aren’t in my section,” you drone and she clasps her hands in front of her chest, dark eyes pleading.
“I know, I know, but if I have to say no to Edgar again, I think he’ll kill me! I’ll give you my heart if you do this for me, just for today!” she begs.

You make a face and sigh. Edgar and Petey were all too happy to give Kelly trouble with no tips, but they were with the Hankerstudds and far too ugly to be tolerated. People didn’t date gangsters unless they needed them for something.

You look to Ariel for support but she gives a hard shake of her head. “Don’t look at me, my shift is ending. And don’t you let her be dramatic and bully you, them boys are trouble but they’re her trouble.”

Kelly grabs your arm. “I’ll give you my faux pearl earrings!” she says. You give her a hard look but ultimately let out a sigh.

“You owe me big,” you mutter, and she grins and agrees happily.

“Big time! I owe you big time!”

Ariel scoffs and heads into the kitchen to gather her things while you fill two mugs with hot coffee. Placing them on a tray with two menus, you head down to the corner, teeth grit tightly. Edgar immediately notices the change.

“Hey, what gives? Kelly’s our girl,” he grunts but you ignore it and set the mugs down gently.

“She’s waiting a different section, so I’ll be taking care of you boys,” you supply. Petey chuckles.

“She must’ve gotten sick of you, shithead,” he says to Edgar, who scowls and attempts to swipe his gang mate.

“Shaddup! I’ll skin ya!”

You dig your notepad out of your apron and repress a sigh. “Will it be ham and eggs again?” you ask.
“With a lil coke on the side, please.”

“None for me, sweetheart, I got enough meat last night.”

“Hey, watch it, she’s a lady.”

“Ahh, she don’t mind. Do you, honey?”

You ignore it. “I’ll put that order in, then. Is the coffee all you need?”

“Hey, lady,” Edgar chuckles and you freeze when his meaty fist snakes it’s way around your forearm, gently pulling you to bend. “I think when a man asks you a question, you need to answer. . .” His sweaty fingers apply just enough pressure to give you a warning, and you glance over to see Petey grinning.

You caution yourself, and grapple for a proper response. Your reply tries to sound stern. “I don’t mind if I get a tip this time,” you counter.

“Hah, yeah I got a big tip for you, honey,” Petey sneers. The two break into guffaws of raucous laughter, Edgar releasing your arm to slap the table. You take the opportunity to flee and head back to the counter to place the order. Kelly catches your eye and offers an apologetic smile. You glower and mouth “big time”.

Late in the afternoon, your shift ends, and after 20 minutes of walking and a trolley ride that lasts an eternity, you stumble through your door. You collapse on your couch belly first, a deep moan escaping you. Toeing off your shoes, you reach and fumble for the knob of your radio, satisfied when it clicks to life and drones out a static commercial.

“Horbertz has the giggle juice if you’ve got the good time! Our brands are solid with no surprise monster bootleggers! You can feel safe knowing we buy from only the most reputable sellers and never deal with hinky hoochers! Hor-”

You wrinkle your nose. The commercial implied that monster alcohol was unsafe, but from your
sources, it only affected people more than they expected. The country had prohibited the new trade, but that only lead to it’s worth tripling overnight.

You and Kelly had gotten a tiny bottle of monster liquor from an old fling of hers, called Red Jazzberre, and the effects had blown your mind. It was the first time you had experienced magic, and the drink popped on your tongue and made you warm. After every sip, you could belt out a string of perfect notes and the two of you drunkenly sang “Cherry on Top”, picking up the lyrics when the other cracked.

You wondered if Wings had any of that. Did monsters just infuse alcohol with magic?

What kind of magic did Wings even use?

What even was magic anyways? You make it your goal to ask next time you meet. That is, if you see him again. Considering how difficult it was to meet with him originally, you shouldn’t count on passing him on the street.

Which makes you kind of sad. . .

Perhaps it was better that way, considering you witnessed his dangerous alter ego first hand, but part of you wouldn’t mind seeing him again. He was charming, smart, and unique. Your banter after dinner had really put you at ease with him.

You find yourself smiling at the memory.

. . . You shake it loose. . .

Don Gaster was dangerous. In his line of work, you don’t find success through charm and good wine alone. You’d better get your head straight or you’d end up like any number of poor saps in this city. Nothing is free, not even piece of mind.

Was that dinner even free? Would he twist it to use it against you? What could you even do in a situation like that? Say no? Dammit, now you’re all twisted again. This city did no good for anxiety.
While lamenting your position, you hear a hurried knock on your front door. Your brow furrows. It was almost dinner time. Sitting up, you turn down the volume of the radio and make your way to answer the door. When you open it, you’re surprised at the fellow who stands behind it.

“. . . Sans?”

He looks sheepish, and sweaty. How was that possible? Bone doesn’t sweat.

“heya miss. look i need to talk to ya real quick, and it’s gonna sound weird but can i come in?” he asks gruffly, shifting from foot to foot. You blink at the request but figure it better to agree.

“Sure, sure, come in. What’s the matter?” you ask, making some room for him to stomp into your abode.

“ah nothin, nothin. i just need to ask ya somethin. i just hope you don’t get the wrong idea.”

Shit.

That doesn’t sound like nothing.

You pray it isn’t trouble. Closing the door, you steel yourself, and then wind your fingers together. You take a sharp breath.

“O-okay... What is it?” you ask, the last of it leaving with a deep exhale.

“i, erhm, just need to know where you went today. . . is all. . .” he mutters, a bony finger reaching up to scratch his skull, his other hand deep in a pocket.

You blink. “. . . um, to work?”

“where’s work?”
“. . . is this about last night?”

Sans lets out a short chuckle. “eh, just a cautionary measure.” Not that you would know, but today went differently than Wings had intended for him. He was supposed to be following you around but… well, he had plans that couldn’t be ignored.

“Oh, I thought we were over all that. I work at a diner off the east trolley. Klinko’s.”

“uh-huh uh-huh. and then straight here?”

“. . . yeeeees.”

“no lie, huh? that’s a pretty far business. ain’t that in the hankerstudd territory?”

“Sans, I’m not a spy. I worked there before I moved.”

“miss, i gotta ask. i need ya to be pretty specific too. ya work there everyday?”

“How about this, I’ll give you my week’s schedule if you tell me about magic.”

The bones of his face pinch together. “magic? why would someone like you need to know about somethin like that?”

“Curiosity,” you shrug. He blows a piff of air and begins to shuffle around your apartment.

“eh, sounds like some spy shit to me,” he grunts, taking to study the typewriter on your desk. You cross your arms and shift your feet. What was he doing here, exactly?

“Well, I’m not exactly comfortable giving out my whereabouts to someone I hardly know, when I thought the issue was resolved,” you grunt.
Sans tosses a warning glare over his shoulder

“. . . are ya copin an attitude with me?”

You stiffen. “Look, I was only curious. You guys are the first monsters I’ve ever met and I’ve never seen magic. Just answer me one thing—”

“no,” he interrupts, bringing his hand from the typewriter keys to his pocket. “you don’t need to be knowin’ everything we can do and that’s the only time i’ll say it. you should understand that we’re playin’ nice in this neighborhood, but don’t try and get comfortable. we still deserve respect and you especially are on thin-fuckin’-ice. got it?”

The tiny lights in his sockets bore into you and a chill crawls up your spine. You give a cautious nod. “I didn’t mean any harm by it . . .”

“ehh, whatever. that’s all i needed anyways, thanks for lettin’ me in,” he grunts. He turns to leave and begins to walk out. You glance at the typewriter and see an extra line written below but can’t make it out.

“Oh, one more thing,” Sans holds in the doorway. You pull your gaze from the typewriter. “wings wants you to be ready at ten tomorrow night. dress nice.”

Your heart drops into your gut as the door closes roughly. Stunned for a moment, you gape blankly at the front entrance.

*Ready? Ready for what?!* Oh, now you’ve really done it! You’ve definitely been integrated into mob work. They’re going to make you seduce some guards or carry something illegal to someone dangerous.

Your knees shake and you grasp for the edge of your desk, stumbling to sit yourself on the stool. A hand trembles in your hair while your fingers clutch the corner of the desk.

It wasn’t fair. You did everything right last night, did Wings really not trust you? Did he just not care? You couldn’t figure it out with your heartbeat thundering in your ears. Your eyes pass over the paper of your typewriter.
Sans blips in front of WingDings’ study, standing just outside the frame. From inside, the eldest skeleton brother chuckles darkly. Sans nudges the door open and slumps inside the dimly lit room. The smell of dark smoke drifts around the study, evidence of the glowing cigarette butt resting in the ceramic dish atop the desk. Wings has a corded phone cradled against his cheek and a comfortable grin against his teeth.

“That’s good to hear—exactly what I was hoping for. . . Yes, I was afraid she might’ve been disowned, but I’m glad. Makes the negotiations quicker. . . I’ll call them in the morning, yes. Is there a way you could float around some rumors for me? I want some attention on this. . . something like that, sure.”

Wings exchanges pleasantries with the voice on the line before hanging up. He folds his hands into his lap and leans back into his chair, grinning wickedly at Sans.

“How much do you think they’ll pay for her?”

“. . . Two million.”

If Sans had eyes, they’d pop out of his skull and roll onto the floor. “two million?! I thought she was born comfortable?!”

Wings nods. “Oh, yes, very comfortable, evidently. Her father is the founder of Ghavielle and Co.
and that Edwin Jaeger is the son of Charles Jaeger, and inheritor of the Jaeger fortune. Apparently, their families had always been close business partners. I’d wager they can spare a couple million dollars between the two of them and still have a proper wedding come springtime."

Sans gapes and runs a hand over his skull. “two million . . . we could get out . . .”

“Getting ‘out’ isn’t the plan. This is to cover expenses,” Wings glowers sternly.

Sans nods. “right. s’just a thought.”

Expenses were definitely covered, but having a bit of cushion never hurt anyone. Wings just couldn’t believe you would admit to being so profitable. It was a shame you’d be returning home soon, he really had enjoyed his time with you. Last night was wonderful. The way the firelight danced and skirted shadows on your blushing face. The splendid way your dress had lifted over your delicate ankles and the look of pleasure on your face on tasting that cake had him laying on the charm. And you were so receptive, he almost got carried away.

Perhaps there would be time to explore each other.

Chapter End Notes

Hello. Yes, it's been too long, I know. It took two months to get through that first section, and I feel much more accomplished since doing so. I believe updates will pick up speed since I've gotten through that block (fingers crossed!) let me know what you think and if you're looking forward to seeing something happen (predictions, smut, hopes, etc.). I have a looooong ideas list so as long as I have the drive, this story could go on for a while : )
Marco Sullivan, the devil himself, stood there in the doorway with one hand wrapped around a silver pistol, and the other clutching Julia’s petite waist. Frank froze, feeling the weight of his revolver sitting heavy in the pocket of his coat. A bead of sweat ran down his chiseled temple.

“And here, it ends,” Marco sneered, shaking Julia in his grasp. “I’ve got your girl, your job, and now, I’m gonna take your life.”

“You deserve the life you made for yourself, Sully. I tried to help you, but you wouldn’t listen. I’ve only got one thing left to say to you, now,” Frank says, hands lowering slowly, inching towards the gun against his ribs.

Marco barks a laugh and points his gun at Frank. “And what’s that, goodbye?”

A shot rings out and Marco chokes on blood, his grip loosening on Julia. She pulls out of his reach and staggers towards Frank, the kitten pistol clutched in her dainty hands is shaking. Marco stares up at her with an empty gaze, barely holding himself from collapsing on the floor.

“Don’t you ever touch my girl again, you son of a bitch-

“Don’t ever underestimate my girl again, you son of a bitch—

“Keep your mitts off my woman, bitch—

You sit back, pulling your fingers through your hair. Thinking of dramatic lines was currently not
your forte. However, it did keep your mind from going through the horrible possibilities tonight held for you. Holding back a shiver, you grab your mug and head to the kitchen to wash it out. You had designed a full day to keep your mind as busy as possible, but your tiny apartment was already cleaned and you were lacking creativity. You decide it was time to go to the grocery store.

You pull your shoes onto your feet and a long tweed coat around your shoulders. When you step outside, the air is crisp and whips around your legs, flaring the hem of your skirt. A short walk past the park leads you to the small grocer you visit for convenience, Charles’. The shriek of the door hinges mingles with the pleasant chime of the bell overhead and you grab a wire basket from the stack by the door.

You begin to wander the short aisles and Charlie appears from the back door, croaking out a greeting and hobbling towards the register to wait on you. You return the greeting and continue to stroll the small grocer. Eggs, milk, basil, discount zucchini, could you afford chicken? Maybe you should’ve counted your tips from yesterday instead of listening to that late night radio show into the early hours of the night. Maybe Edgar and Petey should’ve tipped you.

After a quick count of your funds, you are disappointed but unsurprised. It would have to be another week of canned turkey and zucchini soup. If you left the eggs for oatmeal, though-

You empty the eggs from your basket and turn, yelping when a big bodied skeleton comes into view. With your hand clutched comically over your heart, Sans gives you a look.

“rude. i’m just standin’ here.”

“Sans! You scared me half to death, just appearing like that! When did you even come in?” you huff.

“a second ago. funny seeing you here.”

“Funny like ‘ha-ha’ or funny like ‘you scare people’?”

“funny like scary is what i do best and that ain’t the half of it.”

“Okay. . . whats up?”
“nothin.”

“. . . alright. Have fun shopping, then.”

“will do.”

You pull a face, sidle past him, and make your way to another aisle, brushing off his odd behavior. Hopefully, he was only stopping to pick up some cigarettes or something. You’ve got your hand around a canister of oatmeal when you notice his heavy footsteps closing in. He brushes past, barely making it through the narrow lanes and heads towards the collection of half-priced books at the front counter. Poor old Charlie shakes at Sans’ presence, but the skeleton just reads the titles on the spines.

With all you could afford gathered in your little basket, you decide it’s time to check out. Charlie jumps when you set your basket on the counter and you try to give him a comforting smile. He doesn’t return it, instead casting a whale-eyed stare at Sans.

“Did you want to check out, s-sir?” he croaks, voice wavering.

“nah,” sans says, straightening. Within the moment, he turns and stalks out of the grocer, the little door bell signaling his exit. How strange. It really was a shame Charlie was so afraid of him. Sans was intimidating, that much was clear, but you hadn’t seen him or his family do anything congruent with other bosses. Not that Charlie should smack them on the ass and call them his pals, but he wasn’t going to lose an ear over making eye contact with them. Come to think of it, he did lose his hand over some minor situation with the last boss of the area.

Now that the pressure had recoiled, Charlie began ringing up your items, hand shaking against the register. You felt bad.

“D-did he take anything?” the old man rasps, looking pointedly at the bookcase. You shake your head, ready to defend the monster but the turn of your eye catches the spine of a familiar title. Your heart stutters and trips a beat, a thrill runs up your spine. Your hand is slow, and gingerly pulls the novel from it’s siblings, almost trembling in disbelief. The cover is ragged around the edges and the face of MewMew’s lover is graffitied but it looks genuine. *Misses MewMew Close’s the Bank*, and it looked like the next in the series.
“Charlie, how much for this?” you ask, hoping he senses your desperation and gives you a discount.

“All those books are 3.75$,” he says, and you sulk. That was going to take half your groceries, unless of course you dine on oatmeal for the next few days, but you weren’t going to prioritize a guilty pleasure over essential food.

Charlie reads your total and begins to pack your things in a big paper bag behind the counter. You sigh, lifting the cover to catch a glimpse of the first scene. A bright pink slip of paper falls from the 1st page and lays itself against the checkered floor, a waft of stale and artificial strawberry running under your nose. You pick it up and upon reading let out a sharp gasp.

Charlie flinches and then begins to curse at you, but you can hardly hear him over the beating of your heart in your ears.

WRITING COMPETITION

After reading this novel, write your interpretation of how a scene may have gone differently. Send in your 3000 word segment and you have a chance to be featured in the next Misses MewMew novel!

You slam the novel against the counter, a glint in your eye. “Just this Charlie,” you say, barely holding back the excitement in your throat. He gets grumpy about having to re-charge you, but after a short exchange of coins, you’re out the door and almost running for your apartment.

Your smile beams and your new opportunity is tucked under your arm. This was your big break, this is the very moment of a new beginning. Picturing your future fantasy, you keen with delight. Your new apartment would be lavish, warm, bright. Fans would write to you daily, asking for advice in their love life and praising your poetic tales. Your handsome new suitor would be lounging in the velvet settee by the fire, reading a book of philosophy and growing sleepy. You’d pull his studious glasses from his chiseled nose and place a tender kiss against his weary eyelids, then his bony brow, across his pale knuckles, under his jutting collar bone, until he pulled you into his lap and-

You shake your head. It seems you’ve arrived at your apartment. Rushing in, you kick off your shoes and throw your hat into the corner, then settle into the cushions of your dirty old couch. You begin to read, and dive right back into the cheesy world of Misses MewMew and her collection of troubled suitors and distant evil relatives. The distraction is a welcome one, as you’ve completely forgotten about tonight and your probable, inevitable death.
Wings had been waiting for the phone all day. Did those humans not care about their daughter? They don’t even answer their own phone and Wings has to give a vague message through some dim-witted butler, then they don’t return his calls until the middle of dinner? The interruption pissed him off and they hadn’t seemed upset in the slightest, making demands and getting uppity.

“*You’re a liar, sir. We have a lead on our daughter within our city, and she is far smarter than to travel to your depraved neighborhood. You’ve made a mistake and I suggest you never call again.*”

They were bad liars. After Wings had given an accurate description of their lovely girl and his knowledge of their family, they became very quiet, eventually hanging up on him. They’d call back absolutely.

After tonight, he’d be very familiar with the lovely thing, if they needed any further proof, he’d mention a hidden birthmark or smatter of freckles. Wings grins coyly, shrugging into a heavy, black trench coat. The restaurant he was taking her to was sure impress and with his charm and her receptibility, he looked forward to laying her down tonight and feeling her soft skin tremble against him. Stepping out of his room and downstairs, he spies Sans waiting dutifully, passed out on the couch. Wings raps his bony knuckles against his brothers skull and the younger skeleton jolts.

“Go get her for me,” Wings orders him.

You’re dreaming. It’s a good one too. Your head lays against his chest and the sea churns around your ankles. The sand is warm and sunset casts an romantic glow over your bodies. Your hearts beat as one as his fingers weave through your hair. You lift your head. Does he love you? He
smiles and opens his mouth to answer. Three, hollow knocks fall from his lips.

_The language of his people, how romantic._

Wait, no, that isn’t right. The fae speak in fae latin.

Your dream falls from your subconscious and you wake groggily, your cheek wet with drool and the pages of your novel sticking to the moisture. Three more knocks bang against your front door and you groan. Peeling your stiff body from the couch, you wonder what time it is. Your mind is a bit hazy, your stomach dimly growls, and you’re pissed the best part of your dream was interrupted. Whoever it was behind your door was going to receive a piece of your mind. With a grunt, you pull open your door.

“Do you have any idea what time it-” your voice dies in your throat.

Sans? What was he- _Sans_. The big brute had never before terrified you so completely, as his order from last night swarmed back into your recollection.

“_wings wants you to be ready at ten tomorrow night. dress nice._”

You are definitely not dressed nicely. And he notices.

Sans gives you a once over, then curls his nose bone. “is that what you’re wearin’?”

No, you don’t even have shoes on. Your cotton dress is wrinkled from your nap. Your hair probably looks like a rats nest. You had to lie, quickly.

“I-I just got out of the shower, actually,” you stutter.

A dark look comes over his face and his sockets turn pitch black.

“_what_,” he growls and it sends a tremor through your spine.
With no way to reply to that, and your body already going through rigor mortis as it anticipated death, you try to assemble a smart thought.

“J-just give me a minute!” you yelp before slamming the door in his face and twisting the bolt.

Your instincts aren’t very smart, but you barely allow yourself to dwell on that horrible decision and rush to your room to find a decent dress to wear. You fling open your closet door and push your small collection of day dresses to one side, knowing nothing of those items will fit. Come to think of it, you’re probably going to be buried in whatever you’re wearing tonight, so did it really matter? Either way, you only had one dress that could pass as “nice”. It was something you had saved from your old life, one of the original pieces you had packed with you. The others either fell apart or you had to toss them because of the attention it got you on the street.

You don’t have time to decide and pull the silvery, beaded flapper off the hanger. Stripping yourself of your current dress, you slide the garment over your body and notice how luxurious the fabric feels. The silver satin is soft against your hips and the beaded tassels at the hem look like misty raindrops. It surprises you how low the neckline is and the thin beaded straps are absolutely scandalous, but again, no time to complain. Would your jacket look alright with this? You fly into the living room and let out a scream.

Sans lays a hand on your shoulder, gripping hard, a dark grin stretching across his face.

“you ever slam that fuckin’ door in my face again, i’ll fuckin bury you alive . got it?” he says quietly.

You nod your head, certain he can feel just how much you’re quivering. His eyelight returns, but he looks no less angry.

“you have three . minutes .”

“Yes, thank you!” you reply meekly, wondering how he got in without breaking a window. You cower back into your room, closing the door as politely as possible, then begin counting.

Shoes. Did you have ones that matched? You ask yourself who you’re kidding, nabbing a pair of black kitten heels from your closet and yanking them on your heels.
30 seconds down.

You’ll nab your coat as you leave, in the meantime, you run to the bathroom to clean up. You splash water on your face, wipe up smudged mascara, and press your face into a towel. You pull your brush from the drawer and swipe it through your hair.

1 minute, 15 seconds down.

You pause to look at your face. You could do with a bit of makeup. You’ll do a better job than the coroner anyhow. The thought sends a spike of dread through your chest and you snatch at your few makeup items from the drawer. You swipe your powder over your skin and use your fingers to pat in some blush.

1 minute, 52 seconds down. It won’t matter anyways.

You swipe mascara onto your lashes and blink owlishly. That looks a bit better.

2 minutes and 10 seconds. The coroner is going to call your parents.

You pause, but grit your teeth and decide this isn’t the time to think of things like that. You take a red lipstick and gently pat your lips, then buff it in with your finger to create a soft look.

2 minutes and 35 seconds down. You’ll be dead soon anyways.

You stop. A shaky sigh rides your breath and you look back at the girl in the mirror. Her eyes are wide and frightened, hair unkempt and flat. You look broken already.

Broken.

It repeats in your ears. You couldn’t stand that look in the mirror. Broken and tired, hopeless. You wouldn’t let yourself be without hope, not again.
Straightening, you begin to work again, this time, pulling your hair back into a neat, romantic bun. You wonder if you can find a pretty pin to stick in the top but Sans beats on the door.

“time’s up, lets go,” he growls, voice muffled by the door.

Avoiding another test of his patience, you promptly exit the bathroom then go to look for your coat in the living room. Sans latches a hand around your wrist and you startle.

“close your eyes,” he demands, looking down at you grumpily.

You find his request strange but do so anyway. Once your eyes screw shut, the floor gives way beneath you, your stomach drops into your feet, and your mind screams out. You gasp at the sensation and your eyes pop open. Your hand reaches out to steady yourself. It finds purchase on a white cloth table and you’re shocked to see you’re in a completely different place.

You stand next to a elegant table which is pushed next to a balcony wall. Over the edge, you see a collection of other diners below, all facing a stage where a man sings the sweetest, softest jazz you’ve ever heard. The table next to you, which you assume is yours, is dressed with a single red rose placed in a crystal vase. The other tables are separated from you by pillars holding large arrangements of flowers. Everyone seems to have not noticed your sudden entrance, chatting quietly. Sans is nowhere to be seen.

The location is beautiful, but you keep little comfort. You’re alone. Vulnerable. If you took this moment to escape, you couldn’t walk home in this dress and had no money for a cab. You didn’t even know where you’d been taken.

You glance around you, flitting your eyes over suited couples in fanciful clothes who were completely uninterested in your presence. Which one of them would be involved tonight? Was this only a temporary meeting place? Were you a pawn, or a distraction? Where was Wings?

You make yourself take a deep breath. There wasn’t any point in panicking. Whatever the plan was, you just needed to focus on coming out alive. You needed to be smart. Don’t take any risks, don’t talk if you can avoid it, and don’t piss anyone off.

You rub your arms and take another look around. Where was Wings?
Softly, you hear your name from behind you, and you turn, already knowing the husky, gravely voice. Walking up to the table is Wings, dressed in a fitted black suit and dress shirt, a comfortable smile cracking his face. He stops just short of you and you catch his gaze flitting up your frame.

“My,” he whispers, “you look stunning.”

You look down at the dress and mismatched shoes, feeling a bit of heat in your cheeks at the compliment. “Oh. . . Thank you,” you reply, a little struck by his lilted tone. It felt out of place.

He steps forward and pulls your hands into his. “How are you this evening?” he asks, running his thumbs over the back of your fingers.

You eyeball him, thrown off by the cordialness. You figure responding with ‘ready to do your dirty work’ would violate rule no. 3, so you settle.

“I’m fine,” you trill and he pulls a face.

“Just fine? We’ll have to fix that, come, sit,” he motions to the table and pulls you to take a seat. He helps you into your chair, pushing it in with an ease you didn’t expect, then takes his own.

“Jock Tribiani is singing tonight,” he informs you, hands folding together on the table top, “I hope you like music.”

You can’t avoid the lifting of your brows. You’ve heard of him from the radio, and knew that he only sings in a few select clubs uptown. Peeking over the banister and at the stage below, you look over the singer with new interest. He’s good looking, in a boyish way, dressed in a bright red suit with a rose in his front pocket. You wonder if Wings had brung him to attention for a reason, and you side eye him.

“I’ve heard of him. It seems he’s very talented,” you say.

“I think so, too. His music is very romantic,” Wings smiles.
You wonder if the both of you are speaking in code, your mind raging with possibilities, when a waitress approaches the table. She lays down a couple of menus and gives a quiet introduction, pouring each you and Wings a glass of champagne. The menu is a black leather bound folder and you make yourself look busy with it, taking the moment to untangle your thoughts.

It seems you are uptown, which you don’t think is in Wings’ territory, which means he’s either brought the both of you here with permission of the territory’s owner or he’s here to cause trouble. None of the patrons or the waitress seemed bothered by him, so he must be expected or “people with his presence” are expected to be here. If you aren’t causing aggravations between gangs… why else did he bring you?

You steal a glance from your menu, flushing when you meet his warm gaze. The corner of his mouth tugs and he drops his gaze to his menu. He’d definitely been caught watching you. You drop your eyes back to the safety of the entree list.

He was watching you think. Was it funny to him that you were completely clueless as to what was going on? Why did the glimmer in his eye feel like disaster? Your gut twists with uncertainty, and you feel your skin tremble.

“Excuse me for staring,” he chuckles, “you’re just so lovely this evening.”

Another compliment, and it sounded completely sincere. What was going on? A blush rises from your chest, you feel compelled to accept. “T-thank you,” you stammer. He sends you a smile and takes a slow sip from his glass.

The anticipation was suffocating. Why wouldn’t he just tell you what was going on? It wasn’t fair, being toyed with and emotionally manipulated. If you didn’t know better, you’d think this was a date...

... A date...

... a date...

What did people do on dates?! Surely, this didn’t fit the criteria. You had to convince yourself. But, the restaurant was dimly lit, and the roses smelt bittersweet, and the music was quite romantic. Even then, it would be a tragedy if this were anything but platonic, a dinner between friends. How was he even interested in someone like you?
Wouldn’t it be better to pursue another monster? Someone he could have children with, and grow old at the same time with. Instincts should point him towards a partner of his own kind, not towards you. People thought about that sort of thing when they went out together. People naturally gravitated towards those of their own kind, right?

Peeking under your lashes, you see him engaged with the singer in the pit of the theater, smiling handsomely and supporting his chin with his wrist.

_Exactly right, you insist to yourself, a perfectly reasonable idea._ It was a responsible thing to think about when... choosing... a mate. Not that you thought of romance in such a primal way, it was just better to think of the future when being pursued! He wasn’t good for you anyhow. You adored his charm, but you had to keep reminding yourself he was dangerous. Perhaps not immediately to you, but certainly to others.

It was decided. You weren’t particularly interested, and you’d have to go about keeping this evening as “friendly” and uninteresting as possible. It would be safer to lose his interest rather than denying him flat out.

“What have you been up to today?” he asks, pulling you from your thoughts.

_Keep it uninteresting._ “I did a bit of writing and ran some errands,” you state shortly.

“Mm, fresh air is good for the mind. What were you writing about?” he presses.

You fiddle with the base of your glass. “Nothing interesting, a drama.”

He gives you a soft, scolding look. “Don’t be shy, I’d love to hear about it. I find drama to be a fascinating example of human behavior.”

You raise a brow. “How so?”

“Most of the time, the characters make obviously poor decisions. They pretend to consider the logical, and then pursue what they desire.”
You’re almost offended, but try not to take it to heart. “People aren’t like that at all. Bad writing is like that, but not people.”

He shrugs. “I’m not trying to aggravate you, I promise. I’ve just found that the predictability of my coworkers has led to my success.”

You smirk. “Your coworkers are like a bad drama?”

He takes the smile and rolls his eyes, nodding slowly in agreement. “You couldn’t imagine the simplicity. Greedy thugs with twitchy fingers are astoundingly dull.”

You smile faintly, but cast your eyes down. “Most people aren’t like that. Predictable.”

He folds his hands together. “What makes others different?”

“Theyir situation,” you argue, “life is too complex to label everyone a certain way. There’s a lot of people in this city who are in need, and maybe that makes some of them do bad things, but I have hope that there are good people, too. Stronger people.”

Wings hums. When he looks up from the table, his gaze holds an ounce of sweetness. “That’s a very kind way of thinking,” he hushes. You quirk your mouth in a gentle smile, your fingers twining together on top of the tablecloth.

“If we haven’t got hope, we haven’t got anything,” you say.

He nods. “Then, what about you? I know about your situation. Do I know everything about you?”

You shake your head. “You know only a small part of my past. You don’t know all of me.”

He grins and lifts his hand to settle it over yours, his thumb running across the back of your wrist. “I’d like to know all of you.”
Your body stills, your face flatlining and your toes cease their curling. You expect your heart to drop into your stomach but it flips in your chest and flies into your throat. How completely unfair, how treacherous the heart was. How did this conversation get out of control? You were meant to keep things light, and now what were you going to do?

As gently as you can, you pull your hand out from under his, using it to adjust the stray twist of hair that fell from your updo. “We know each other,” you say, tossing in a short chuckle to soften the statement. It was an indirect denial, something you were trying to avoid altogether, but your plans have a habit of derailing lately.

He withdraws his hand, folding it underneath the other one. A smile falls across his face. “Of course,” he replies, seeming unbothered. You take the forgiving reply, a wash of relief running over you.

The waitress comes forth with impeccable timing. “May I ask what we’re having tonight?”

Wings smoothly gives his order, something you can’t pronounce, while you try to pick something familiar. She takes the both of your menus and walks off. When you turn back to Wings, he appears to be enjoying the music down below. You decide to watch the performance with him, for a bit.

You didn’t want to assume he was fine with the subliminal denial, but you did feel better that he seemed to have taken it really well. Wings was smart enough to know what you had meant. You weren’t interested in him like that. Starting anything with him wouldn’t lead anywhere, and you wouldn’t feel safe ending the relationship if it started to not work out. . .

. . .

. . . But would it really turn out that way? Hypothetically, of course.

It was dangerous to admit it, but it was nice to be treated the way he treated you. It was nice to have him touch you and want you. He treated you with respect, and that was more than most people in this city have done for you. But. . . it was dangerous to admit all of this, so you didn’t.

Wings was turning things over in his head, struggling with where to go from here. She wasn’t interested. Why would she come to dinner if she wasn’t interested? Did she think he was too vulgar? Was she just getting a meal out of him? Was she playing games?
What made her come here? Surely, she would’ve felt comfortable refusing if... 

Sans.

Wings grit his teeth, his jaw clenching and fingers twisting together. Why did he trust Sans to ask you to dinner in an elegant way? His brother was not the most eloquent of the bunch, Papyrus would’ve been much better suited. Wings was going to dust Sans when he got home. This could easily ruin the rest of his evening plans. Wings would have to be very careful if he was going to take you home tonight.

After your plates arrived, conversation picked back up easily, but Wings was finding it difficult to smoothly turn the mood back around. He meant to flirt, to rasp his voice and astound you with his knowledge of the different quantic realms, but it just never came around to that. Instead, you talked about whatever pleased the both of you, mostly the city, philosophy, and literature.

“I can’t understand your distaste for fiction and fantasy,” you say, picking apart a creamy ravioli, “I figured you could relate to it the most.”

“Fantasy irks me because humans associate magic with everything. And then, they use it to fill in the gaps of reality and it’s not well thought out and I find it frustrating,” he explains.

“An example?” you request, grinning.

“Unicorns,” he provides, bony face scrunching up. “They’re supposedly magical creatures but they can be explained biologically. Magic is much more.”

You take a sip from your champagne and lick your lips. “What is magic, if you don’t mind me asking?”
He rubs the pad of his finger against his glass. “Magic? Why do you want to know about a thing like that?”

You shrug. “Up until now, magic wasn’t real to anyone. Neither were monsters but now you’ve both resurfaced. I don’t know anything about it, so I’m curious. I’m sure you get asked about it a lot.”

He shakes his head. “Honestly? Not really. They’re more interested in business deals. I don’t know if I can explain it properly either.” He puts a hand to his chin, you wait patiently.

When he’s ready, he begins. “Magic... is measured by the will of a person's soul. It is what monsters are made of. We use it to defend ourselves, to attack, and to sense things. It is tangible and it varies in strength from monster to monster.”

“Monsters are made of magic?” you interrupt, “how is that?”

He grins at your curiosity. “It’s wonderful and complicated. Our form is determined by our souls.”

“Your soul? As in your personality?”

“It’s a more tangible thing. It’s the concentrated mass of our will, of our magic. It doesn’t determine our personality, however, it may do so in humans.”

You perk up.

“I have a soul?”

Souls were considered a spiritual thing. You’re mother raised you to believe in the flesh and blood God had made you from. You imagine a bright blue ball of gas within your chest, pulling on your heart strings and whispering to you your destiny.

“Oh, I’m sure of it,” he smiles, hands folding under his chin. “I’m sure you have a very bright soul, too.”
“What does that mean?”

“From what I know, humans have a range of different souls. Of course, I would have to see yours to tell you about it, but often a brighter soul is better than a dim soul.”

“Can I see mine?” you ask, growing excited. But, Wings shrugs, looking apprehensive.

“I could show you if you trusted me well enough. Though, I’d rather not, only because you’d be incredibly vulnerable, and I’d hate to make you uncomfortable.”

“I could handle it,” you defend, excited at the prospect of seeing your soul.

Wings chuckles.

“Mm, I’m sure you could. You’re very brave,” he hums. You feel a warmth blossom in your chest.

Down below, the crowd begins to clap as the singer finishes his last song of the night. He thanks the audience, and throws the rose in his front pocket to a young woman in the front row. Wings slides his fingers under yours, taking your attention.

“It’s getting late, isn’t it?” he says.

The night has gotten rather long, though you’d regret ending it here. You nod. “Could we take a walk? I haven’t gotten a chance to see the park, yet,” you ask.

“That’s a wonderful idea,” he smiles.

He motions for the waitress and instructs her to call the both of you a cab. The majority of people down below are making ways to shuffle out the front, while the band plays a last slow song. The both of you stand and Wings lays his coat over one arm and offers the other to you. You take it easily and he leads you to a small section behind a sway of velvets curtains. An older man in a gray suit sits with a young woman, the two of them going over paperwork. Upon your arrival, he looks
up and opens his arms, looking nervous.

“Don Gaster, my good man! I apologize for not visiting during your meal,” the old man says, shakily pushing himself to stand.

“I preferred it that way, Kleingale, thank you. We were enjoying the evening,” Wings says as the man staggers over, then accepts the handshake given to him.

Kleingale looks you over and gives a warm smile. “What a lovely lady, a pleasure to meet you, dear. I am the grand manager of this old place, Timothy Kleingale.”

He offers you a handshake and you return it, introducing yourself. “The pleasure is mine, sir. You run a beautiful establishment. Dinner was divine.”

He begins to thank you, but Wings cuts him off. “I was wondering if you had those documents ready for me?”

“Oh, yes, of course,” Kleingale fumbles, reaching into his jacket to pull out a thick envelope.

“Ah, thank you. Prompt as promised, good man,” Wings smiles, tucking the envelope into his own jacket. “I’m so sorry to be so brief, but I’m sure you have other things to do.”

Kleingale nods almost a bit too enthusiastically. “Yes, you know me! A busy man, like yourself. Do excuse me. And, miss, it was wonderful to meet you, truly.” He pulls your hand between his own and squeezes it, a strained look in his eye. “Look after yourself.”

You’re unsure how to reply, as you feel he means to warn you about Wings. After all, it does look as if you’re a dinner date and not a friend. You settle on a thankful smile, and you and Wings exit the area. Back in the upper dining area, the both of you make for the stairs, marble and oak, and descend to the first floor. Most of the patrons have cleared out through the front and you do the same, heading for the large open doors where a crowd has gathered outside.

You step outside and feel the chill wind of the city float around you. Your skin prickles on your bare arms and legs, and you really wish Sans would’ve let you grab a jacket. No sooner do your arms wrap around yourself does Wings notice your chill. Without a word, he unfolds his heavy coat and drapes it over your shoulders, then leads you to a parked long black car. The coat is warmer
than you’d imagine, and you wonder why he would need to be warm. You suppose “magic!” is the answer.

With his arm poised at the small of your back, wearing his jacket, and leaving a romantic dinner location, you can’t help but feel a dozen pair of eyes on your back.

“Is that a monster?”

“Shh, that’s Don Gaster.”

“What is that monster doing with a woman?”

Wings holds open the door for you and you almost dive in, moving towards the furthest window. He slides in easily after you and instructs the driver where to go. Meanwhile, you ring your hands as you look out the window.

You hadn’t thought about it until just now, but you probably should avoid bringing attention to yourself. If the local paper took interest in the new monster Don, and the woman on his arm, that could spell disaster for your hiding spot in the city. Not to mention, other gangs would associate you with Wings, and you didn’t know if you wanted to take that chance. You pull the collar of Wings’ coat a bit tighter around yourself.

Outside, the glamour of uptown shined brighter than the silvery moonlight, with golden neon signs and the bright bulbs of theater fronts, the gorgeous flappers that littered the streets, decorated in pearls and feathers. It was a familiar scene. But, you needed to stay out of the light.

You weren’t worried. It would be easy to stay out of trouble, out of the public eye. No one was interested in a diner waitress who lived in a poor, run down apartment.

Wings tucked the envelope further into his jacket
ooof, I struggled with this one. I hope everyone likes the slow, long pace of this chapter, because we are going to build the tension in the next few. Let me know what you think in the comments below! Also, do you guys mind reader having the name Janie, or does it ruin the immersion?
In the quiet hours of the night, the sleek, black town car, its glossy chassis reflecting the lights of the city, crawls to a stop by the curbside that neighbors the park. The door opens, Wings steps out onto the sidewalk, and proceeds to hold the door for you. You step out into the cool, crisp night, pulling the weighted black coat around yourself again. The length of it nearly hit the ground, the shoulders threatened to slip away, and the sleeves bunched up around your wrists. But, the promise of warmth it kept and the spicy after scent of smoke convinced you to endure its size, if just for a bit longer.

In front of you, loomed the great iron gates of the park, slightly open to invoke a welcome-ness. Beyond, stood lofty oak trees, their peaks drenched in silver moonlight. Crickets chirped from within, and a bullfrog sang a rustic serenade. The car door closes behind you and the thrum of an engine signals the car is pulling away, down the street and back to the bustle of the city.

Wings extends his elbow, offering you his arm and smile. You took them both and the two of you ascend into the darkness of the park. Arm in arm, the gravel path crunched underfoot and the quiet evening left room for a lilted conversation.

“What a beautiful night,” you comment, admiring the glow of the moon against the silhouette of the treeline.

“Yes,” Wings agrees, “tonight has been just about perfect.”

You grin and pat your stomach. “I can’t remember the last time I felt so full,” you laugh. Wings smiles.

“I’m glad you enjoyed yourself. I’d be happy to take you out, anytime,” he says.

“I’ll try not to make it a habit, though it was nice to go out again.”
“When was the last time you’ve done something like this?”

“Probably within the week before I left. Rehearsal dinners, bachelorette parties, you know,” you answer automatically, feeling a twinge of bitter nostalgia.

“Oh, I’d love to hear about your bachelorette party,” he purrs teasingly. You grin halfheartedly.

“Honestly, it wasn’t as much fun as I imagined it would be. I ended drinking too much and. . . started to talk about how I was feeling to the other women. It got awkward.”

“I’m sorry. Was your fiance unromantic?”

“Um. . . perhaps. We didn’t have much passion. He bought me gifts and took me out, made pleasant conversation. I tried to fill the role of a comforting house wife, which never took. It just always… felt a bit…”

You find yourself at a loss for a moment, and he waits attentively. How could you explain the awkward pauses between replies, the suffocating silence at dinner, the tired way in which he would kiss you.


“That sounds hard to do. I can understand why you’d leave,” he hums.

You let loose a tired breath. “It was easier when we were younger. Our parents encouraged us to be together and we liked each others looks. But, he went off to college, I did too, and we grew apart. It happens.”

Wings felt a twinge of jealousy. He’s reminded again how many opportunities you’ve had access to, luxuries he’d dreamed of as a child. He wondered what it was like, to have so much available to you for the greater amount of your life.

“What was it like for you?” he has to ask, “growing up the way you did?”
“Typical. I had a nanny. I went to private school. My mother took us to church on Sundays, and on the weekends, I practiced piano in the ballroom.” He snickers shortly at your little joke and you grin.

“Oh, yes. How typical,” he croons sarcastically, pulling a giggle from you. “You play piano?”

“No. My teacher quit after 6 months, tired of my miserable talent. I took up horseback riding afterwards,” you chuckle.

“You know... I don’t think I’ve ever seen a horse,” he says absently.

“Well, maybe someday I’ll invite you to our stables. We can go riding along the coast.”

“I wouldn’t pass it up for anything.”

The conversation slips into a pleasant quietness, just the rhythmic crunch of gravel beneath the both of your feet and the songs of the cicadas.

“I’m sorry,” you start, shaking your head, “I’ve been talking about myself this whole time. What about you? What was your childhood like?”

Wings tries not to let his mouth settle into a hard line.

*Hell, Bitter. Cold and painful.*

“Not as wonderful as yours,” he settles on, pushing his expression back into a pleasant one.

“Did you do anything?” you ask innocently.

*Survive.* “I... helped my father around the house.”
You nod. “Was he a worker? What kind of jobs did they have in the Underground?” You were asking an uncomfortable amount of questions.

“None,” he mutters, and his tone strikes you. He takes a breath and places his hand on your back. He doesn’t give you enough time to notice the dip in his mood “He and my mother educated me and took care of the household. I learnt how to control my magic from my father and helped him to defend the home.”

“What about your mother?”

“She was very ill for a long time.”

“I’m sorry. Did she leave you soon?”

Wings slows to a halt. You see his brow deepen and he clears his throat. He absolutely did not want to talk about this. Not with you, especially now. It was getting late and your time together was dwindling. There was no reason to divulge such a personal matter with you and ruin the perfect mood he was trying to set up. But you were asking, and the best he should do is try not to seem upset about it.

“. . . Yes. She and my father passed when my brothers and I were very young.”

Your face falls. You lift your hand and place it against his arm, meaning to comfort him. “Wings,” you whisper, voice full of pity, “I’m so sorry. I can’t imagine how difficult that must’ve been for you. . . for all of you.”

Wings glances down at the dainty hand you’ve laid against him, and realizes. . . this is the first time you’ve willingly touched him, and an idea begins to bubble up within his skull. Perhaps tonight wasn’t ruined after all.

Allowing his skeletal face to take a pitiful expression, he takes your hand within his own, squeezing it gently. “We were heartbroken,” he murmurs, “Sans didn’t understand, Papyrus was barely old enough to remember them. I had to raise them both, feed them, protect them. I wasn’t old enough to take on that responsibility.”
The pity in your glassy eyes made Wings’ soul twinge. He wasn’t lying to you, but he certainly wasn’t telling you his deeply troubling past because he trusted you. It was nice to let you think otherwise, though. Your fingers were warm, wrapped around his own, your lip protruded in a picturesque pout, and he could surprisingly feel the sad thrum of your soul.

It troubled you to imagine Wings losing so much, so quickly. To be so young and lose all guidance, and then to be forced to take on that role for his younger brothers. You could hardly help but pity him. It was unfair. No one deserved to grow up that way. Especially, since Wings made it sound like the underground was an unsafe place.

“You keep saying ‘protect’. Was the Underground dangerous?” you ask quietly.

Wings frowns. “My dear, we were barely surviving. Monsters often fought each other for food, supplies, and territory. We were only children.”

You look down, almost horrified. Now you really felt bad. Of course he had a rough childhood, which probably lead to him pursuing the dangerous line of work he was in now. What your world considered crimes, his must’ve been considered everyday occurrences. You can imagine Wings and his brothers, dirty and cold, hiding in the alleyways, beaten and hungry. Wings, a child, standing as the only protection against the horrors of the underground, while the rest of the world prospered in an economic boom. It wasn’t fair, especially not to Wings, as he pulled protection fees for your neighborhood and repaired the seedier areas.

You’re reminded how different your childhood was from anyone else’s. You never went hungry, or went without attention. Your whims were entertained, and your bed was always warm. You don’t think you could’ve survived on the streets, let alone taking care of two other people. Your admiration for Wings, and his kind heart, grows.

Wings sees a streak of a tear run down your cheek and almost smiles, touched by your concern. His childhood was hardly unique among monsters. His palm cradles your cheek and you startle as he gently wipes away the trail of moisture. You blink and produce an uncouth snuffle, before you hurry to wipe away the tears that brim in your eyes.

“I-I don’t know why I’m crying,” you chuckle nervously, your fingers brushing over Wings knuckles as you wipe away the tears.

“Shh, it’s alright,” he hushes, wrapping a lanky arm around you to deliver a soothing embrace.
“I just didn’t imagine. . .” you attempt, unable to find the right words, “you were all by yourself. . .”

With your chest pressed against his ribs, Wings could feel the beat of your heart and the sorrowful thrum of your soul seeping into his chest. It surprised him you were so moved. He thought it was. . . sweet.

You find that with your ear pressed against his chest, you’re in a very intimate position. Beneath his ribs, you can hear a dull rhythm, like waves on the beach, or the tip of someone’s finger running along the rim of a water glass. It’s a pleasant humming. You wonder if it’s some sort of heartbeat? Pulling back, you find him smiling down at you.

He tucks a hair behind your ear. “How are you so easy to talk to?” he says.

You give a bashful grin. “You make it easy to listen.”

He smiles and the warmth of it pools in the pit of your stomach. His hand sat lightly at your waist, the other cupped under your jaw. With your body pressed to his and your fingers splayed against his broad chest, you realize the danger that lingers between the two of you. The smolder behind his sockets and the sensational grip on your waist has your chest growing heavy. You didn’t want him to let go. The promise of romance had you reeling and you knew it was wrong. It had been so long since you’d felt wanted, so long since you felt this spark in the air and breathed in the heady perfume of affectionate conversation.

He was so close to you, warm, inviting, confident. The curve of his mouth looked so attractive, and you hadn’t been kissed for a long, long time. It was wrong to want him, to crave such a small token of his affections, but. . .

You wanted to be kissed.

-by someone tall and handsome. You wanted someone suave and cool to press their lips against yours and send you tumbling. You wanted to trip over your feet and have your knees shake in blind affection, to tremble against someone with decorum and charisma and have him crush your breathless mouth to his. You wanted romance. You wanted someone like Wings. . .
But...

... You didn’t want *Wings*.

... 

“Tell me what you’re feeling,” he whispers, his breath ghosting over you as his thumb traced a path across your jaw.

*Too much. Not enough.* “. . . I-” you smile bashfully, turning your cheek from him. “I don’t know,” you hum, disappointment running though you. He takes your chin and gently turns you back to him, a smirk on his face.

“Don’t think, my dear. Just feel,” he asks, his hand ghosting down to rest on the other side of your hip.

It’s a promising request and you have a hard time keeping your mind clear. His proximity places a haze within your mind, hot and heavy like a stormcloud. You feel yourself curl inwards.

“Wings, I’m. . . I-”

“Yes?” he murmurs, drifting forward to close the distance between you. Your lashes flutter and you strain, your lips parting in anticipation. Your fingers curl into his dress shirt and the bone of his nose brushes yours. With a sharp intake of breath, you pull backwards, a shiver racing across your skin.

Your eyes connect with his, and you tremble at the intensity his hold. Slowly, it fades into disappointment and he pulls back stiffly. You clasp your hands together and he slides his hands into his trouser pockets, the both of you avoiding the others gaze.

“I-I’m sorry, I’m just a bit tired,” you excuse yourself. Would he be mad?
To your surprise, he pulls his mouth into a forgiving, short smile. “Don’t apologize, it’s alright. Truly...”

An awkward silence stretches forward as you study the grass, the trees, the path, anything but his face. He clears his throat.

“Let’s get you home, my dear,” he says, holding his hand out towards the exit of the park. You nod and follow next to him, beginning the walk back to your apartment.

You can’t find anything valuable to say and the silence is excruciating as he walks you through the silent city street. You’re afraid. Afraid from another blatant denial. It wasn’t fair you should have to go through this. It would’ve been so much easier to have stayed pleasant acquaintances. And now, you were more confused than ever. How did you get so far out of your headspace? How did he have this drastic of an affect on you? Were you really so lonely as to let a Don kiss you? You knew better. You knew better. A memory of Wings in your apartment flashes, him cornering you with intent to kill. He’d been so casual about it. How was that the same man as the one who courted you this evening?

He was upset, the disappointment on his face had been clear. He had brushed it off gracefully enough, but you shouldn’t count on him to let it go. He could turn on you again.

Soon enough, you’re back at the foot of your apartment, the craggy building beckoning you to safety. Wings stops just before the door, hands still tucked into his pockets. He turns to you and smiles. “Well, I suppose this is where we say goodnight,” he says.

“Yes. Uhm, Wings? I wanted to apologize-”

He cuts you off, lifting a hand. “There’s no need, my dear. I should be apologizing for putting you in an awkward situation.”

You mean to protest but it’s hard to find the right words, so you nod your head instead. “Thank you... goodnight, Wings.”

“Goodnight,” he echoes. Descending the short brick steps, he begins his journey back home. You watch him go, your jaw taut.
Why did you feel guilty?

...

Inside, you climb the endless flight of stairs up to your floor, finding your apartment eerily unlocked. You suppose its for the best, as you left without your keys. Thankfully, everything inside looks in place and you sigh. You're exhausted, you realize as you shuck off your over-sized coat-

You gasp. Wings had forgotten his coat with you. Though, you don’t know how, as it swamps your frame and looks all too big to be yours. If you don’t return it, he’d eventually come looking for it at your place. It’d be better to drop it off at the townhouse, and hope you only see Sans or Papyrus. Otherwise, you might get caught in another titillating conversation, and then you’d never get out. You drape it over the back of your couch, taking care so it won’t wrinkle and get ready for bed. Once nestled beneath the covers, you find yourself dozing off quickly. Hopefully, you wake in time for work tomorrow.

Wings locks the front door behind him, reaching up to rub his face as he enters the home. He needed a cigarette... or twelve. As he makes his way towards the stairs, Wings spies Sans on the couch. Has he been sleeping there since Wings left? Instead of trudging up to bed, he leans over the back of the couch and flicks his younger brother right between the eyes. Sans startles awake, red smoke pouring from his eye socket as his magic drenches the air. He catches sight of his older brother smirking down at him and grumbles, the smoke dissipating almost instantly.

“oh sure,” he snarls, “you can wake me up anytime, but heaven forbid Paps try and get you up for breakfast ever.”

“You should go to bed,” Wings scolds, satisfied. He makes his way to the first few steps of the stairs and Sans calls out to him.
“what happened with the dame? i thought you were bringin’ her home . . .” he asks, voice rough from his nap.

Wings grunts, gritting his teeth. “Nevermind that. I got the pictures, and that’s what matters.”

Sans snorts. “Sounds like you didn’t get laid. You must not be as charming as you think.”

Wings nose curls. “Our evening went perfectly. I was the picture of charm and understanding,” he growls, glaring at the wall, “she’s just… cautious, is all.”

Sans waves at him, already falling back asleep. “Whatever you say, Dingus.”

The eldest skeleton rolls his eyes at the nickname. “Go to bed,” he commands, noticing the awkward angle at which his brothers neck lolls over the spine of the couch. Sans zips lazily to his room as Wings ascends to the second floor. As he passes Sans’ room, Wings can hear him already snoring.

Stepping into his study, Wings closes the door softly and collapses into the leather armchair at his desk, a heavy sigh escaping him. He pulls off his jacket, too tired to stand and take it off properly, and retrieves the envelope of photos from the inside pocket. He slaps it onto the desk and the photos spill out onto the surface. Wings pulls open the left drawer and fishes out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. As he cups the flame, a disembodied hand appears next to the desk lamp and flicks the switch, before disappearing. It reappears in the corner by the standing floor lamp and pulls the chain to illuminate the rest of the room.

Wings takes a long drag, filling his chest with as much smoke as his ribs will allow, before exhaling a slow stream of violet smog. He deflates into the leather seat as the nicotine cloud spews out of him and disperses over the desk, curling over the carved edge like a lazy waterfall. He still can’t shake his agitation, but he does feel better. He spreads the pictures apart so he can get a better look at them. They’re decent quality, and he’s glad to see he’s been cropped out of most of them. The camera lens he made performed decently for the photographer. Even in the dark, the contrast between black and white showed up well on your face.

There were probably half a dozen photos, he didn’t need many. Most of them, you held a neutral expression. In one, you looked down at a menu, the next you were looking at him, from under your lashes. In another, you held a coy expression, your lips tilted in a sweet smile.
He took this one between his fingers.

He wondered if it was the lighting, but your skin looked tantalizingly soft. The candle at the table lit your face romantically and the neckline of your dress dipped deliciously. Your expression is obviously a reaction from your conversations at dinner, but he can’t remember you looking at him this way. It’s strange to see an outsider's perspective, to see this fractional moment of you, especially looking at him this way.

He puts the picture to the side, separating it from the others. It wouldn’t be good to send pictures of you happy, that wasn’t convincing enough. The others were fine, and the paper would pick the best one for the new article in a couple days. The pictures go back into the envelope and Wings begins to write your old address across the front. . .

The fishy smell of the diner is unpleasant, and Petey’s cigar smoke wasn’t a complimentary odor, either. You try not to bat away the offending, smelly cloud as you step into the little corner booth area where Edgar and Petey sat. The both of them spewed noxious fumes like a couple of steam engines, something about a raid last night gave an excuse to the “fancy” smokes, though you knew better than to eavesdrop. Edgar blew a particularly thick cloud as you leaned over to deliver their breakfast, and the stench slithered up your nose and burned. You hastily attempt to cover the short cough that erupts from you, stifling it with the back of your wrist as the cigar smoke stews in your chest. Petey glances up at you over his newspaper, his own cigar hanging off his lip. Edgar mimics the look, before tapping some ashes onto the floor by your feet.

“What’s the matter, honey? To refined for you?” he snarks, scrunching his nose in a smirk.

If you can just walk away at the right moment, you can ride it out until they leave. Remembering not to ignore them, as last time almost left you with bruises, you try and think of something vague and polite. . . Though, you probably know what refined is far more than they would.

“Perhaps,” you mutter, refilling their coffee mugs and planning your exit.
“Perhaps?” Edgar echoes, and a sick grin slides onto Petey’s face. “Well, come ‘ere and try it, babe,” he demands.

You most certainly did not want to try it. Between the awful smell of it, and Edgar's mouth having attached to it, and with it, any number of venereal diseases he traded with whores, you weren’t willing to participate in their little game. A pool of dread swirled in the pit of your stomach.

Your face must be funny to them, because Petey snickers and a puff of smoke slithers out the other corner of his mouth, Edgar grins. You weren’t going to say no, but there wasn’t any way you would be inhaling any of that cigar on purpose. When Edgar snatches your wrist up with a predatory confidence, though, you quickly change your mind.

“C’mere,” he slurs, pulling you towards the booth seat, and suddenly, he has you in his lap, his arm holding you too tightly around your stomach. You hold back a yelp -no one would save you- while your skin prickles and the hair on your arm stands straight. The smell is almost unbearable, now that your so close to the stinking mouth it emits from.

Edgar holds the head of the cigar to your lips, and you flinch. Petey looks on with rapt attention, newspaper forgotten. “Careful, Eddie, she’ll bite ya,” he teases and Edgar just smiles at you, sending a wave of icicles down your spine.

“Nah, she’s smarter than that. Ain’t ya, sugar? Now go on, give her a puff,” he hushes, and press the cigar against your lips. Regrettably, you begin a short drag, only to wretch at the taste that envelopes your tongue. Your diaphragm lurches to expel the toxic smog and you fall into a coughing fit.

Petey and Edgar break into carnivorous cackles, deafening your ears as you choke. You wriggle to escape and Edgar practically dumps you on the floor next to the booth, gasping around his endless guffawing. You hope he chokes as you scramble to your feet and make a break for the back door of the diner, your eyes brimming from the rancid taste and humiliating prank.

Your chest burns for the briefest moment, deep within. You hardly notice as you burst into the back alley, your ribs heaving as the tears begin to drip down your cheeks. You hold back a sobbing hiccup, determined to save your dignity, even as your teeth taste like ash and the skirt of your dress is sporting a new rip from your tumble. The cruelty you endured for this job. . . how could you keep going with this? Maybe Charlie had an opening, or maybe there was something closer to your apartment. Though. . . jobs were hard to find nowadays, with business owners putting more money towards protection fees than into hiring employees. Finding anything else would be tough.
You shake and wrap your arms around yourself. With the way you were thinking, you might as well quit and just write for a living. You almost scoff at yourself. There wasn’t any way you could keep your new apartment if you did that. Your only chance was that writing competition, and with it, you would prove your worth.

The back door of the diner opens behind you, the hinges squeaking shrilly. Kelly stands in the frame and you avert your eyes from her pitiful gaze. “Oh. Hon, I-. . . I’m so sorry,” she hushes. She steps down into the alleyway and unwraps your arms from yourself, leading them around her shoulders. She envelops you in a tight hug and you press into her, taking comfort in her shoulder pressed against your nose.

“You don’t I take their table from now on, hm?” she hums into your hair, rubbing your back soothingly.

You nod. If you have to take their antics for one more day, you might do something you regret, like telling Edgar where he can stick his sick cigar. “Thank you,” you whisper, taking a hard swallow to relieve the pressure in your throat. She gives you a final squeeze, and pulls back to award you a comforting smile.

“Tomorrow, will be better. You’ll see,” she vows, pinching your cheek. You give her a faint grin.

“Ariel and I are gonna hit the town this Friday,” she diverges gently, “there’s a new place south of the trolley, sounds pretty fancy. I’ll buy you a drink, what do you say?”

You raise an eyebrow. “I’d say, where’d you get the coin to buy me anything?”

She giggles, the sound is delicate. “I’ll get a handsome, wealthy beau to buy you a drink, then,” she titters, and you grin.

“I’ll hold you to that,” you hum.
By the time you get home, the sun is beginning to wane across the horizon, threatening the end of the day. You collapse onto the couch and slide your short heels off. The stretch of your tendons has you groaning in ecstasy. You don’t want to ever leave this spot. You just want to listen to your radio until you fall asleep and-

The heavy black coat that had been draped over the back of the couch the night before, slid off its perch and into your lap, reminding you of a very important task you had to accomplish. You sigh, unmotivated to return it. You ran your fingers over the thick, soft tweed, remembering the warmth it held last night. Now, it felt cold, stale. You hoped Wings wasn’t home, that would make this trip a bit easier.

You sigh. Of course, he would be home, though. You might inevitably see him, unless you were very quick. “Here you go, Sans. It’s Wings’ coat. Okay, goodbye!” And if you did see Wings-

. . . your heart flutters, much to your dismay. . .

-you’d only say hello, then excuse yourself for whatever you had in the oven. . . a casserole!!

You frown, knowing it’s technically a lie. However, it’s far better for your health than to hang out with him again. It’s better than him coming over to retrieve it, coming in for a cup of coffee, and then having you fall for him all over again. You shake your head to loosen a quickly developing fantasy and begrudgingly take the coat back to the brothers home. . . but not before you change into a nicer dress.

Chapter End Notes

I'd like to make shorter chapters so I can update more often for you guys, so future
chapters are going to be around 3000-4000 words instead of the usual 5000-6000. I had to cut this one in half because it probably would've been close to 8000+ if I had my way! lol, enjoy
Once on the steps of the townhome, you wait patiently, after rapping your knuckles against the great red door. You glance around yourself, jaw tightening. Being outside makes you feel too exposed, and you don’t like how dark the windows are and how you wouldn’t be able to see anyone behind them... watching you...

The door is pulled open so abruptly, the air about you shifts and rustles your hemline, and your left to the mercy of the very tall skeleton- Papyrus, was it? His skull nearly knocks against the door frame and you’re sure he must always look this cross, as it looks very practiced. You gulp. Splotches of red liquid cover his face. He looks undisturbed by it.

“YOU ARE ALWAYS KNOCK KNOCK KNOCKING ON OUR DOOR. WHAT IS YOUR BUSINESS WITH MY BROTHER THIS TIME?” he spits crossly, hands positioned on his hips.

You stare at the red stains, your imagination running frantically. “I... c-coat,” you finally bleat, extending Wings’ black coat to make up for the words you lacked. He looked from it, to you, his scowl twisting. Papyrus stared at you, his cold eyes sending a shiver down your back. Then, he stepped aside, holding the door open for you.

That wasn’t ideal. You grit your teeth, looking between the entrance and Papyrus’ scowling face. For one, you didn’t want to be here, and secondly, something- or someone- must be the cause of the offending stains, probably within the house.

“DON’T MAKE ME HOLD THIS DOOR OPEN,” he snaps, and it’s all you need to rush past him, afraid to upset him.

A quick glance around the living and dining room areas show that there aren’t mutilated victims
lying around, so your heartbeat settles a bit. The door closes rather roughly behind you, raising your skin from the back of your neck, before Papyrus comes around again. Looking up at him, you decide then and there that he’s the most intimidating of the three.

“HANG THAT IN THE COAT CLOSET THERE,” he demands, shifting his eye lights over to a door in the wall, “THEN FOLLOW ME TO THE KITCHEN.”

You blink. “I-I’m not intending to stay long,” you stutter. He halts, having very decidedly already turned for the kitchen. When he turns to face you again, eye sockets hollow, you wonder if he can help you sew your lips shut. He speaks, making every syllable deliberate.

“IF YOU CAN MANAGE IT, I’D VERY MUCH APPRECIATE SOME HELP IN THE KITCHEN. THINK YOU CAN ENTERTAIN ME?”

You nod meekly and he swiftly turns again and disappears through the kitchen doorway. You relocate the coat closet and take care to hang the coat in its proper place. On the floor inside, there is another, shorter jacket, with a collection of notes laid over the crumpled piece. You decide not to investigate and instead sulk to the kitchen, where you definitely expect to find some poor, dismembered gang member.

The kitchen is unsurprisingly large, with checkered tiles, wood slab countertops, and cream colored cabinets. The walls are a faded looking red and you’ve never seen an icebox that big or a stove so burnt and crispy. . .

. . . Or a kitchen so utterly destroyed. . .

What on earth happened in here?!

Red, saucy splotches cover every surface, the floor is slippery with the carnage. There’s knife or two in the ceiling and a colander stuck in the broken window. Papyrus stands in the middle of it all, hands on his hips, eye sockets empty, and now the least intimidating of the brothers with that silly mess on his face.

“I’D APPRECIATE YOU STARTING ON THE DISHES,” he orders, jabbing a bony finger at the sink, which overflows with dirty pots and pans and utensils. You gulp. Maybe you did want Wings to come find you, and save you from this mess.
Reluctantly, you go to the sink and begin to work. The sink is too tall for you to wash anything properly, so you end up awkwardly trying to pry the pots apart. Where they stuck together in a clump? You hope running the hot water will loosen the cookware and reside to just scrubbing what you can. What kind of meal did he cook, and how could it possibly have been done to cause this amount of disarray?

Papyrus is wiping down the ceiling. “SO,” he begins, “MY BROTHER HAS BEEN IN A VERY GOOD MOOD SINCE YESTERDAY.”

You perk up. “Oh?” you reply. Did he enjoy his time with you?

. . . Of course, it only means he isn’t upset with you, as he said. . .

“I ASSUME YOUR. . . EVENING. . . WENT WELL,” he continues, casting you a look over his shoulder.

Dinner and live music uptown, followed by a moonlit walk in the park and an almost sensational kiss? Oh, yes, it went well. You chastise yourself.

“Sure. It was nice,” you settle, remaining neutral.

“NICE? IT WAS ONLY ‘NICE’ TO YOU?”

His tone makes your skin pimple, and before you can turn your head, the blade of a long chef’s knife whizzes past your cheek and embeds itself into the cabinet door. You gasp, flipping around to defend yourself, but freezing in fright as Papyrus towers above you. The second knife is held within his grasp and he glares down at you with a predatory confidence.

“I UNDERSTAND YOU REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENS TO LIARS IN THIS HOME,” he glowers, his voice rumbling from his chest, “SO KEEP THAT IN MIND AS YOU ANSWER ME. . . WHAT ARE YOUR INTENTIONS WITH MY BROTHER?”

Your mouth runs dry. With quivering lips, you know you should answer him quickly. You don’t believe he missed the first throw. “To. . . to-. . .” you stutter, “-b-befriend?”
His eyes narrow and your gut drops. His gangly hand reaches up near your cheek. You flinch from him, then jump at the crunch of wood as he yanks the first knife from the cabinet.

“THOSE WHO ‘BRIEND’ MY BROTHER SHOULD COUNT THEMSELVES LUCKY. WINGS DOESN’T TRUST EASILY, BUT A FRIEND OF MY BROTHERS’ IS A FRIEND OF MINE.” He leans down and lets the knife clatter into the sink. Claustrophobia gnaws from inside you, as he easily doubles your size and is taking up the greater amount of your personal space. You tremble under the pressure. Thankfully, he steps away, going to the corner to retrieve the mop.

“I BELIEVE I HEAR HIM COMING DOWNSAIRS. YOU MAY GO,” he dismisses.

Your feet move on their own and you dart from the disaster kitchen. As you enter the living area, Wings is just coming down the stairs. He spots you and a warm smile splits his face. When he says your name, the sweet smokiness of his voice brushes away the frightening encounter with Papyrus. He comes to greet you in the living room.

“My dear, what an incredible surprise,” he grins, sliding his hands up and down your arms. “Won’t you join us for dinner? I believe Papyrus is just about done in the kitchen.”

Oh, you knew. You flick a glance at the kitchen, but give him a shake of your head. Stay firm!

“I can’t stay tonight, I came to drop off your coat and I have to get home soon,” you say.

He nods. “I understand. What are you doing for dinner tomorrow night?”

“Laundry,” you say too quickly, “-a-and bills. I’ll need to get them done. Dinner might be leftovers or something.”

He looks down and hums. “That’s a shame,” he says, his thumbs working gentle circles against your skin. “I was hoping to see you again, there was so much left unfinished last night.”

“I know. I’m sorry,” you say, before you can help yourself.

“Then, how about we do something after tomorrow? Dinner here, then to a dance hall?” he
suggests.

You draw in a breath, but it holds in your chest. *Say no, it’s simple. You don’t want to be with him. You can’t put yourself in danger. The answer should be no.* But, you don’t say no. You don’t say anything. Wings takes it.

“Please?” he adds, finishing it with a debonair smile.

It’s hard not to return it, and you find your resolve breaking. You chuff a laugh and look to your shoes. When he looks at you like that, it’s near impossible to think. “Wings,” you start, grasping for resolve, “I have a lot going on, and I don’t… want to impose, or-“

He tilts your chin. “Say yes?”

Damn him. *Damn* him. Handsome bastard that he was, the charming schmuck. Your head knew what you needed, but your heart just isn’t in it to deny him. This was a mistake. You should’ve sent the coat through the mail. You can’t believe you’re about to say this, but-

“Maybe,” you murmur, your insides flipping.

“Maybe?” he presses, his grin widening. When did he get so close to you? When did he start holding your waist?

*Be firm!* “M-maybe,” you agree.

He looks you over, then nods, and takes a step back. “Maybe, then,” he grins, sounding none too discouraged.

“B-because I have a lot to do,” you babble. Didn’t he believe you?

“Surely.” His grin doesn’t falter.

You’re at a loss. His tongue darts against his bottom, bony lip.
“Well, I have to get going!” you say quickly, turning abruptly for the door, a shiver racing across
your skin.

Wings smirks. “Of course. I’ll walk you out.”

As you step outside, Wings palm slides into your own, preventing your escape. You face him, your
hair spinning around your shoulders.

“My dear,” he starts, “I don’t want you to be afraid of me.” His smile is warm again. You blink.
Did he know? His palm slides from beneath yours, and you notice he’s left a crumpled piece of
paper in its stead.

“I look forward to dinner,” he hums, then disappears inside.

You clench the paper in your fist. Outside, the sun is getting low. You need to get home, eat, get
some rest. . .

Don’t be afraid of me. You didn’t know what he wanted, or rather, what he was asking for. If he
understood your perspective, in that he was too dangerous to get close to, was he asking you to
ignore that? Would he protect you if it came to that? That wasn’t something you should count on.
You begin your way home, mind suddenly clouded.

If he was asking for you to not be so shy, that might hold a different set of issues. Was he getting
frustrated? He seemed to think you were coming to dinner absolutely. If you decided to prove him
wrong, and not show up, would he give up? And with it, his manners? Not that you’re going either
way. . .no. . .definitely not. . . But you can’t keep giving him inch after inch. It would be cruel- and
stupid - to let him believe things were going well, then suddenly cut him out after you were in too
deep.

The paper is now moist in your grip. Noticing it, you go to unfold it. Reading the elegant script, a
cheeky smile splits your face.

It was his phone number.
You decide to sleep in on your day off, finding that your rested mind is more open to creative pursuits. Sure, you had laundry, but that could wait until the evening. You were already close to finishing your newest MewMew novel and ideas swarmed your brain for a competition entry. You might rewrite MewMews love scene with Jay, adding a dramatic appearance by Gabriel—previously believed dead—to fight for her affections. Or a tear jerking scene by MewMew, lamenting about the death of her beloved, wealthy aunt, and showing the strength of her character. Everything still needed fleshing out, and the ending of the novel would probably have the largest impact on your decision.

You settle down on the couch, a cup of hot coffee and a bowl of cereal on the side table and your book held tight. The story pulls you in, the dramatic climax finally coming together.

MewMew was currently wrapped in a terrible gang war. On one side, her beloved Jay, who admittedly had issues. He was a hot-headed heartthrob, and often pressed boundaries with MewMew. And while you could go for a bit of forceful kissing for the sake of passionate fiction, it was starting to get obnoxious. On the other side, Harry, Gabriel’s brother, was a man with good intentions and bad deeds. The final confrontation was just beginning and you couldn’t imagine how it would end smoothly.

A couple hours later, with your mug empty, your book clatters against the wall of your apartment. You fumed.

“Unbelievable,” you grumble, standing to angrily take your dishes to the kitchen. Your novel could lie in the corner and think about what it’s done. The ending turned out to be a cheap disposal of good character development, the result being Jay and Harry’s death. There had to be some consistency of characters within the MewMew universe! It seemed like the writers didn’t care about their characters at all, slaughtering them left and right.

You took your anger out on your mug, scrubbing the cracked porcelain with vigor.

Now, if you had written the ending, things would’ve been better. Harry could perish, sure, but Jay’s temper could’ve served as a message of foreboding, instilling a deeper, more sinister side to his
character. Now, there’s an idea.

Stopping, you take a moment to run the idea through your mind. It wandered and twisted, and along the path you let it run, you saw tension, betrayal, shattered romance, a plot thicker than anything the writers have attempted before.

Before you know it, you’re at your desk, pulling out scratch paper and scribbling down the plotline’s major points. The details that unfurled within the plot blossomed in your mind, piecing together in a beautiful symphony of agony and renewal. Reluctance, rebirth, satisfaction, it all came together. It wasn’t more than an hour later that you began typing away on your shaky typewriter. The slashline still stuck.

“so i hear the dame’s dining with us tomorrow night,” Sans grunts, pushing his dinner around on his plate.

Wings hums in response, his glass pressed to his lips. He takes a sip and returns the glass to the table. “And what’s wrong with that?”

Sans snorts. Better get down to business then, no bullshit. “i thought dinner was family time. she must be something special, if you’re waivin’ that rule.” Especially since his girl was practically family, and he hadn’t been allowed to invite her to dinner once.

Wings folds his hands under his chin. “You’ll be here just the same. It doesn’t matter.”

Sans grits his jaw. Papyrus’ face curls up. Wings continues with his meal. San scratches his bony finger against his cheek, his knee bouncing. He might really regret it, if he says anything more.
“i just think it’s funny how-”

“*What* -” Wings growls, “*what is so funny?*” Wings’ glare pierces through Sans, but the light in his sockets haven’t yet gone out.

*Scratch, scratch, scratch.* Sans’ finger scratches against the table, his eyes burn a hole through his plate.

“funny how you’ve been caught up with this girl, though we can’t get involved with anyone, if it interferes with the plan.”

“You think this interferes?” Wings chuffs, pushing his plate aside. “She’s nothing more than a momentary distraction. Don’t underestimate me, Sans.”

“I HATE TO AGREE WITH HIM, BUT I DO,” Papyrus interjects. “HOW CAN YOU TRUST THIS WOMAN SO SOON?”

“We know of her past, where she lives, where she goes. There isn’t *anything* suspicious about her habits,” Wings supplies quickly, before taking a long drink from his glass. “In any case, her family will take her to the other side of the country, and we won’t hear from her again. I’ve considered all of this, don’t think I haven’t.”

“if she’s just a quick lay for you, then why is she still hangin around? haven’t you gotten on with it. . .” It was a cheap jab at his brother, but Sans relished the aggravated twitch of Wing’s cheek.

“. . . She’s been a bit resistant,” Wings mumbles, leaning back in his chair.

“and?”

Wings stands abruptly, his chair slamming against the floor. Purple smoke spews from his sockets and slithers through the cracks in his skull. The room becomes heavy with magic. A chill runs up San’s bony spine.

“*Perhaps, you aren’t familiar with the concept of seduction,*” Wings says, his voice too calm,
eyes too dark, “but I will only accept her total enthusiasm when she comes to my bed. I won’t be taking anything, she will give herself to me.”

“okay, bro,” Sans finally relents, ready to defend himself.

Wings turns from the table, stalking to the stairs. “I’m going to bed. Wake me, and I’ll dust the both of you.” Papyrus and Sans watch him go with wary expressions, listening to the door slam before the youngest skeleton glares at his older brother.

“You Are An Idiot,” Papyrus whispers, glowering.

Sans leans forward. “fuck you,” he whispers back, before standing to retreat to his own room.

“Language!”

“volume.”

A tendril of magic smoke flashes in Papyrus’ eye, but he grunts and stands to clear the table.

...

Later that night, in the early hours of the morning, Sans dips out to grab a snack from the kitchen. As he passes Wings’ room, the doorway reeks of cigarettes, and a soft light creeps from under the door. Sans decides to teleport quietly in and out of the kitchen.
Did you guys see the riddle in the tags before I posted this chapter? If not, there's a new one there now, so comment below your predictions for next the next chapter! Also, I'm going to run these next few chapters about 3000 words, then we'll see if you guys like the shorter chapters for more frequent uploads, or longer chapters for less frequent. Lastly, I just want to mention that SoLyGbM is /very/ dark, and has pretty dubious -if none existent- consent, with all sorts of dark themes and violent imagery, which I don't feel capable enough to replicate within this fic, but I think it's good to stray from her story and make it more into my own :) the bros are gangsters so I will have to include some hard violence anyways, it's appropriate for their characters, but I will be tagging in the Beginning Notes for ya'll <3
You wake with a groan, your neck cramping as you sit up from your desk. It takes a minute for the vertebrae to realign, but it clicks back into place. Your back is not so good. It’s stiff and achy. Your face even feels swollen. With a grunt, you pry yourself from the desk, noticing the stack of typed papers sitting on the edge. You must’ve finished the rough draft for your entry last night. By the looks of it, you wrote way more than 3,000 words. There had to be at least 30 pages. Maybe tonight, after work, you’d look over it and make adjustments.

... After work...

You gasp, then search for your clock. It sits on the bookshelf, but the battery is dead, and the hands are lifeless within the copper shell. You bite your lip. There’s no way it had the right time, and it was too bright outside for you to be on time. Quickly, you fly to your room and change into your uniform, then tidy up in the bathroom. Then you’re bounding down the stairs, pulling on a shoe and shaking your coat around your shoulders.

Outside, you find the air to be nipping cold and misted with a light rain. You huff, almost tripping into a mud puddle. Unable to deal with the morning already, you bitterly make your way for the trolley, dodging puddles and ducking under eaves to avoid getting soaked. But, despite your best efforts, by the time you make it to the trolley, your stockings are wet and your knees shiver from the cold. You take a seat in the trolley with a huff, wondering “why today?”.

Hopefully, the rest of your day would be better. If you could get through it, you’d have dinner tomorrow with no. No, you couldn’t think like that. Were you even going to show? It would be rude, but you felt defiant towards Wings’ confidence of your arrival. ... Were you that obvious, anyways?
It was settled in your mind. You’d go to dinner, however, no dancing. You’d have a serious, private talk with him. You’d tell him the truth, even if it was awkward. It was best for the both of you to avoid each other. Sighing, you loll your head back. If it got out that the two of you were anything to each other... Well, you didn’t want to find out what would happen.

A man sneeze from across the trolley, followed by another. You wish him quiet blessings and he grunts, then, he fluffs his newspaper...

...

Your stomach drops.

*It couldn’t be. It couldn’t be. How did- When did-

You have to look again and your heart shatters.

Your insides begin to twist in abject horror, and you can only stare at the blocky headline and clearly printed picture.

**“MISSING DIAMOND DARLING FOUND IN FELL CITY”**

On the front page, was a clear picture of you, from the restaurant. Wings was cropped out, but there you were, smiling and cheery. And here you were, about to be sick. The trolley lurches to a stop, and with it, your stomach churns. The whistle blows and you rush off, clambering down the steps and running your shoulder into a lamp post, before retching in the street. The dry heave hurts your throat, but you can’t help to gag, the stress gnawing and tearing at your gut like a parasite. You cling to the dirty, metal lamp post, fingers clenched and hands shaking. Saliva drips off your lips and your tongue quivers at the back of your throat as you pant in shallow breaths.

How many stands in the city were selling that paper? How many people knew of you now? Did Wings know about this?! Oh, christ. *Oh, christ.*

It occurs to you, that you’re still late, and you need to get to work before you lose your job. You’d have to deal with this later. *Here, in your threadbare clothes, you looked nothing like that cinderella-esque photo of yourself. No one would be able to tell who you were, or the position your family held.* With your stockings soaked through, your dress haggard, your mary janes splattered...
with dirt and scuffed at all angles, no one would think you were that girl from the paper. *No one*. Things would be okay. Things would work out. You had to trust in that.

It was easier to focus now. You pull back on a gag, your anxiety quelling- at least for another time within your mind. At the moment, you needed to take this one step at a time. Just get to work and push through today, and then figure out what was next. Things had to turn out fine.

You attempt to straighten, ignoring the disgusted look from the passerby’s. Your tongue is still caught at the back of your throat, but you push to ignore it. Making a scene anyways wouldn’t help you stay hidden. *Get up. Get going before you fall apart.*

After rushing to work, your day doesn’t magically fix itself. Tony proceeds to inform you that you’re two hours late, and you’ll have to stay behind and help with the dishes. He then goes to berate your less-than put together appearance, and how it’s been a tough morning and he “needed you to be better today”.

. . . He could kiss your ass. He thought *he* had it rough. He thought *he* had problems? Try again, Tony.

Now, your mood was sour, which was always good for your tips and performance. Ariel gives you a sideways glance as you storm out of the back room. You angrily snatch up your apron and pen pad, too silent. *Just get through it, just get through it.* You tie the strings of your apron a bit too tightly around your waist, and hastily wipe away a hair that falls into your face. Ariel gently lays her hand on your shoulder. You avoid flinching away from her.

“You can’t act like that around *them* ,” she says softly.

You glance at the corner, where Petey and Edgar sit. Your lip snarls. “ *Fuck them ,” you grit out.

Ariel grabs you, facing you to her. She looks terrified. “Honey, what they did to Kelly wasn’t right, but if you go over there like this-”

“What did they do to Kelly?!” you interrupt, your face going numb.

Ariel blinks. “Isn’t . . . that what Tony was telling you?”
You blanch. Red burns behind your eyes and your teeth grit together.

"What did they do -" you snarl, "- to Kelly . . ."

Ariel's mouth opens, but the words won't come out. Fine, _fine_, if she wouldn't tell you-

You slam your notepad against the counter and cross the room to the gangsters in the corner. Ariel squeaks at you, but the blood rushes through your ears too loudly. Your heart is galloping in your chest. Petey and Edgar seem unbothered when you get to their booth.

"What did you do to Kelly ," you spit. Petey and Edgar look at you with disgust.

"Hey, fuck off, we’re havin’ a conversational," Petey snaps.

You swipe their plates off the table, cutlery and coffee cups smashing against the checkered, diner floor. They're on their feet quicker than you can blink.

Petey snatches you roughly by the elbow and Edgar curses at the hot coffee seeping into his clothes. Petey’s grip feels like he could snap you.

"You shouldn’t have done that," Petey growls. His face is dark, eyes blazing. You meet his glare with just as much intensity.

"What did you do to her," you demand, and Edgar scoffs.

"We put that bitch in her place. Making me chase her all the time was fuckin’ rude," he snarled.

You were about to do something stupid. Something really, _really, really stupid_. If they killed her-

Your throat constricts.
“She was whorin’ around,” Petey spits, “we made sure she wasn’t pretty no more.”

You strike him across the face. It stings your hand, but the pain is good, satisfying. The slap rings out and Ariel, Tony, and the cook gasp from the counter. You’ve never hit anyone before, for anything, but the hand mark that blossoms against Petey’s cheek makes you think you need to more often. His fist tightens around your elbow and you’re sure it’s gonna break, but the reddening of his angry face is reward enough. You could laugh, you could *squeal* with delight. It was a small redemption for Kelly.

“*You’re gonna fuckin’ scream,*” he growls, before tugging you towards the door.

And you do. You snarl and scream, and kick and fight. Of course, you don’t win, and Petey throws you outside. Your foot catches on the step and you tumble, the skin of your knees busting as you crash to the pavement. It grounds you, bringing you out of your rage for a moment, and you briefly wonder what you’ve done for yourself.

Edgar loops his arms under your shoulders, and behind your head, dragging you from the ground to shakily stand before Petey. The fury returns, and you snarl as fingers entangle the hair at the nape of your neck.

“*You know, I always say-*” he tsks, “*those who cross me, receive it ten fold.*”

His meaty fist collides with your ribs and the pain stuns your lungs. Your mouth drops open in a silent scream. Your knees give out.

“One,” Petey grins, his smile like a toothy tiger.

You could handle this. Everything was *fine*. They wouldn’t kill you, just rough you up a bit. Then, you could have the rest of this horrible day and-

An image of your nanny, raising a hand, but ultimately ordering you to bed without supper flashes through your mind. Your mother, gripping your arm tightly, after you’d come home too late, too young, but reigning her temper. Your piano teacher, waving his hands and screaming, but walking out before you begin to cry. Violence, for you, was always quelled with *mercy*. 
The second blow strikes you in the stomach, and this time you do scream a weak, scratchy noise. It hurt. It hurt a lot. It pulled across your abdomen, aching like earthquake through the muscle. It hurt to breathe, hurt to move. Your bones strained against the taut flesh when you gasped.

There would be no mercy this time.

This can’t be happening. What have you done? You were so stupid. Really, really stupid. Stupid. Stupid!

“Two!” Petey grins. “Edgar, what comes after two?”

“Three,” Edgar whispers in your ear, slithering down your neck.

The gangster rises from your body, his eyes shining with glee. “Now, are you gonna apologize to me and my friend? Give us both a good kiss and promise to be nice?” he asks.

You gather the blood in your mouth and spit it at him. It hits him in the eye and drips off his nose. With an enraged yelp, he steps back and reels back his palm, then strikes you across the face. You collapse from Edgars grip, and the gangster steps over you.
“Fuckin disgusting bitch!” Petey screams, frantically wiping at the bloody saliva spot. He finishes with a swift kick against your hip.

“You just lost some valuable business, Tony!” Petey screams towards the diner. “You better have somethin’ real shiny to make up for this!”

“Yeah,” Edgar hums, crossing his arms, “real shiny somethin’.”

The rain soaks your hair, and blood soaks your skin. You could die right here, in this puddle, so long as you don’t have to move. A rough hand cups your chin and forces you to crane your neck. Petey smiles down at you, crouched. “And you? If I ever see your fuckin’ face again, I’m gonna carve it up till you ain’t you no more.” He runs his thumb over your busted lip, then releases you, your face smacking the wet pavement.

The sound of Petey and Edgars footsteps fade away, replaced with the light drizzle of rain against the pavement. Everything hurts, everything throbs or stings. Ariel is crying, sobbing your name and blubbering. Tony rolls you over and tucks you into his arms, shakily apologizing. You think you hear Cook praying. Your coworkers take you inside and set you in a booth. The other customers seemed to have disappeared, no doubt taking the opportunity to dine and dash. Ariel fetches a rag to wipe away the blood and dirt, her hands shaking. Tony uses some hodge podge medical supplies to clean up your knees. Did he get those after yesterday? Cook paces the room, spouting off the indignity this community goes through to- blah blah blah.

This is the first time you’ve ever been struck. Your mother, your nanny, your father, never laid a hand on you, never used violence to punish you. You’ve never had young friends get into fights with you, the other boys never fought each other over who got to be the general in their games. It was. . . bizarre. This happened to people everyday, everywhere. Violence. Running rampant through the city. Gangsters and mobsters terrified this city, and now, you were another one of it’s victims. Gangsters like the Hankerstudds, like the Skull Gang, like Don Dee. . .

. . . Like Wings. . . and Sans. . . and Papyrus . . .

Ariel rocked you as you sobbed. She whispered sweet things and stroked your messy hair, while you gasped for air and wept.

_Not Wings, anyone but Wings . . ._
Tony finished patching up your knees, then decided you should go home. After you’d quieted down, he helped you into your coat. Ariel fixed you a bag of food and Tony walked you to the trolley. He said it probably wasn’t safe for you to come back to work... And that he was sorry...

On trolley, people looked down when you passed, a silent apology and a knowing look. The people on the street did the same, some looking on with horror, most with pity. The people in your apartment building did a double take, probably wondering if it happened within their safe little area. By the time you had locked the door to your apartment, you were numb. You left the bag of diner food on the floor by the door, stripped your coat off, tugged your shoes from your feet, and hobbled to your room. Whether you slept or not, you don’t know. All that you really remember is your ears ringing and your vision turning to stars.

Wings glanced at the clock. He took a sip of his drink. He lifted his cigarette to his lips and let out a long, smoky breath.

You hadn’t called. You hadn’t called in the last two days. It was almost 5 o’clock, almost dinner time, almost time for him to see that gorgeous, coy little smile of yours. He wanted you, and you wanted him, but you kept holding back. He understood, naturally. He was a monster and a Don, and you were trying to get by. He just had to make you see past that, understand all the pleasurable little things he do could do with you.

He glanced at the clock.

5:01 pm

He sighed. You weren’t coming.

Taking a long drag, the butt of his cigarette burned down, and he snubbed the end in a crystal ashtray before spewing deep purple smoke. He sulked from his room and downstairs for dinner,
where Papyrus had made something he’d heard about on the radio. Wings didn’t care to remember. Having you there might’ve made the meal a bit brighter, but now they had to talk about business, and plans.

Once downstairs, he lifted a bottle of merlot from the liquor cabinet and went to sit down at the dinner table. Papyrus and Sans already sat in their seats, waiting for their older brother to join them.

“You’re late,” commented Papyrus, as Wings slumped himself at the head of the table.

“Not in my own home, I’m not,” Wings grunts, materializing a hand which holds a corkscrew.

Sans and Papyrus share a glance when the cork pops, and Wings pours himself a tall glass.

“She didn’t show,” Sans points out.

“How did your deliveries go?” Wings asks, taking a sip.

His younger brothers stare. “Fine,” Sans says, then quietly helps himself to the dish on the table.

Papyrus grits his teeth. You didn’t show. And after all that batting of your eyelashes, and teasing his brother with your little visit. Shame on you. Wings clear his throat and Papyrus rushes to answer him.

“Fine,” he grunts, picking at his plate.

“Good. Now, we’ll need to keep an eye on their rivals. Sans, I want you on—”

Papyrus tunes out, which isn’t very smart but he can’t bear it. You make his magic boil. How dare you? Even after he had that chat with you, you were stupid enough to betray Wings. It made him boil. And now he had to watch his older brother pout, like an undignified child. Wings was always terrible when he was in a bad mood. His temper shortened, as did his replies, and Papyrus felt very unwelcome to speak to him for anything. Additionally, he never praised Papyrus for anything! Even this delicious- what was it?- “tar tar sauce” that he had made? Papyrus doubted he’d get any
recognition tonight, with the mood you’d put his brother in.

It made his soul rot, so much so, he had a hard time listening to this week’s plans! Luckily, he tuned in again, just in time to hear his assignment.

It’s dark when you wake up. You don’t feel any better than earlier, in fact, maybe worse. The aches have had time to settle, the swelling has had a chance to take hold, bruises blossom across your skin and feel like their own punches. You had to see yourself.

Standing, you stumble towards the door. It takes more strength than you remember to twist the knob, but you manage. You stumble towards the bathroom and flick the light on. In the mirror, beneath its cracked and tarnished edges, you see yourself the worst you’ve ever been.

A large, black bruise settles across your cheek, extending up your temple and under your eye, which is swollen and puffy. On your opposite jaw is an equally disturbing bruise, deep purple with pink splotches, and along the bone, your skin is pricked with broken capillaries. Your lip held an impressive split. Your ribs must be twice as terrible. You grip the edge of your skirt and timidly lift to reveal your skin. A hiss escapes your teeth. Along the bones are bright pink, splotchy bruises, in the middle is a deep purple imprint of Petey’s knuckles, accompanied by the second blow.

You gulp, humiliation running through you. What had you been thinking? What was the matter with you? Had today really been so terrible as to stupidly take it out on gangsters? You let your dress drop and groan.

That reminded you, Fell City knew about you. They ran that paper all over the city, who knows how many read about you. You could only hope it wouldn’t cross into California, then you’d really be screwed.

You wander to the kitchen, bringing a frozen bag of peas out of the ice box. You wrap it in a towel and hold it to your swollen face. The cool sensation does little to ease the pain, so you collapse on
the couch and flick the radio on. Immediately, you’re met with an unfamiliar, exuberant voice, talking in a sultry voice about cooking. This must be a really late night/early morning show, because it is filled with innuendos about “sticky, naughty batter” and “the ecstasy of plugging in the bad, bad blender”.

You can’t really tell if the voice is male or female, either.

A loud banging on your door startles you, and you turn down the volume of the radio show. The knocking continues, with less patience and you hurry to open the door. You slide the lock but your hand freezes on the knob. You don’t want anyone to see you like this.

You brace your foot against the back of the door, then open it a crack. Your hair might be visible, but your face is hidden. “Hello?”

“**HUMAN**,“ bellows a frighteningly familiar voice. You gulp. *You missed dinner, didn’t you?*

“Hello, Papyrus,” you mumble, accepting that this day just won’t get better.

“**FACE ME, YOU COWARDLY SHREW. I NEED TO SPEAK TO YOU,**” he growls.

“Sure, whats up?” you ask, decidedly not moving.

“**. . . LET ME IN, OR THE DOOR WILL SHATTER.**”

Okay, he didn’t think it was funny. You sigh through your nose. You definitely believe him, and value your door. You back away, allowing it to swing open, but step into the living room and let your back face him. Luckily, he helps himself to come in and shuts the door, hard, behind himself.

He comes to stand behind you, his shadow blocks the light. “**WHERE WERE YOU THIS EVENING,**” he grunts.

You cross your arms, covering the bruise on your elbow. “I got caught up in some things,” you mumble.
Papyrus scoffs. “ENOUGH TO MISS DINNER? DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT A
tremendous honor it is to sit at our dinner table?! We don’t invite
anyone. EVER.”

And Wings invited you? You almost smile.

“So, when you get invited to things, you’d better be grateful, and go
to them and– . . . would you face me?! I’m talking to you!”

Before you can react, he grabs your shoulder and spins you around. His eyelights return when he
sees the bruises on your face. You whine and hide your face in your hands.

“Please,” you whimper, “don’t look.”

Papyrus is silent. Gently, he curls his fingers around your wrists and pull your hands from your
face. You avoid his eyes.

“What happened to you?” he asks.

Your cheeks burn. Hopefully, he didn’t tell Wings. You didn’t want him to see you like this,
broken and beaten. Ugly.

“The Hankerstuds,” you mumble.

Papyrus hums, and releases your wrists. “They are a classless sort,” he says, then
straightens his tie. You don’t reply. What was there to say? Papyrus seems to be thinking. He taps
his foot and looks about the room. His arms are crossed, and he examines every nook and cranny
with concerning interest. Before you can wonder when he’ll leave, he speaks again.

“Well. . .” he starts, his voice surprisingly much quieter, “I suppose in light of this event, you
get a pass. But don’t count on it next time. . .”
The radio broadcaster coos out a sultry line about whipped cream and Papyrus gives you a look. “YOU LISTEN TO MTT?” he asks.

You rub your arm. “It was the first thing that came on, I haven’t had the chance to change it.”


“I AM GOING,” he announces, seemingly not ashamed for his enjoyment of the weirdly erotic cooking show.

You hardly finish bidding him goodnight when the door slams behind him. Is there another way for him to close doors? If he says the show is good, though, maybe you’ll give it a listen. You turn up the volume and grab your leftovers from its spot by the door. After situating on the couch with an old stack of pancakes, you give the show a meager listen. The dishes are fairly simple, strawberry shortcake, spaghetti, chicken noodle soup, a cheese casserole. However, the host always finds a way to insert a sexual theme, either with a joke or acting a bit too enthusiastic about the taste. You end up falling asleep again, but vow to explore why someone like Papyrus likes this cheap erotica.

Your apartment is lit again when you wake up, the morning light streaming in from your tiny window. By how restless you feel, you couldn’t have slept more than five hours. You’re still sore, still in pain, and now your arms feel stiff. How much longer would this last? Perhaps Charles had some pain killers at his grocer. That or some good meal might make you feel better. Although, with you being out of a job now, spending money, even on essentials, really made you nervous. You stand from the couch and trip over your feet, barely catching yourself. Yeah, eating was a good idea.

You don’t bother covering the bruises with makeup, but change your clothes and put your shoes on. Grabbing your purse, you head for the door. But when you open it, you’re surprised to see a gift next to your door. Its a short, cylindrical candy box, with red and white stripes and decorated with a bright red bow. Curious, you pick it up to examine the tag peeking out from under the red ribbon. It’s addressed to you.
You break your frown and flip the card over.

My condolences on your recent situation. I thought something sweet might cheer you up.

A tender smile breaks your face. It’s incredibly thoughtful. What trouble did he go to to get it here so early? Even when he isn’t here, he manages to make you smile. You gently shoo the thought away, but with less fervor than usual.

You unfurl the bright red bow, and pull the lid off the present box. Inside is colorful array of candy, round and shiny. They didn’t look like chocolate, or hard candies, just... candy. You place one in your mouth and chew through a pleasant texture. The flavor is distinctly not-licorice.

How strange. Good, very good, but strange. You hum and place the present inside your apartment, then lock the door and make your way to Charles’ grocery. You’d have to thank Wings for the gift later.

The present makes you feel better already.

Chapter End Notes

hmm, I will admit, I'm not brave enough to have violence extending past this caliber. Will there be more? Hopefully. It was almost fun to write? It was very immersive to write so maybe it was immersive to read? :) Give me your thoooooughts, the good the bad and the ugly, I'm not sensitive to negative feedback
You enter your apartment after a quick trip to Charles’ Grocer, struggling under the weight of the can-filled paper bag. Your pantry was rather sparse, and seeing that you no longer had an income, the cheap cans of beans and chicken soup were looking more appetizing. You rounded out your poor man’s pantry with a small carton of orange juice, just to keep the scurvy away. You sigh wistfully as you line them up in your pantry cabinet.

What were the chances that Petey and Edgar would come back to carve your face up? They said it themselves, they were taking their business elsewhere. Why should they dictate where you worked?

You knew it was just desperate thinking, they didn’t seem the type to bluff. They would cut you up if they saw you again, and they’d call it “honoring their word”. It left a bitter taste in your mouth to know you wouldn’t have anything decent to eat, for however much longer, all because you had to act noble. And you could blame those gangsters all you wanted, but in the end, you ran your mouth, and that had consequences. . . That was the lesson you had to learn.

You scrunch your nose, hands clenching around the empty paper grocery bag. You didn’t want to blame yourself for your beating. You wanted reality to be different. You hated that things were so backwards, and so twisted that you lost your sense of self worth. You didn’t want to give this city your spirit. But, maybe, you didn’t have that choice. You had to learn. You had to be smart. Things really could’ve been a lot worse for you, because they hadn’t even gotten to “ten” yet, and your injuries were already brutal. Perhaps, it was a merciful beating.

Making a disgusted noise, you can’t stand to think anymore, and wander into the living room to distract yourself. From the corner, by the door, the candy-striped box of sweets catches your eye. Wonderful. The perfect, tasty distraction. Retrieving it, you hold the present delicately as you turn it over in your hands, listening to the candy tumble inside. You take a stiff seat on the couch, becoming nervous somehow. Your thumb fiddles with the tag, tracing over the elegant script.

Truthfully, it made you giddy that Wings sent you something. It scared you, too. You’ve had men send you gifts before, but knowing it was from Wings made it different. That was the scary part. It was something as simple as candy, delivered in the night after a terrible, awful day. But it made you think of him, made you think of his arduous gaze and clever smile, and of his bony fingers dancing across your waist.

You lift the lid and toss a candy between your teeth, chewing hastily and focusing on the strange
flavour.

It wasn’t fair that you should admire him so much, and that he should like you, too. It wasn’t fair how at ease you felt with him, especially while knowing who he was. Comfort was wholly inappropriate. You liked when he talked to you. You liked when he flirted with you. You were happy when he surprised you, and that he carried himself with manners and dignity, and that it made you forget the poverty and the crime rate, and that the rent was due tomorrow and you were short again, and-. . .

. . .

. . . It really wasn’t fair. . .

Your eyes shift to the phone on the bookshelf. You really liked forgetting the world outside, especially when it came with a sultry, husky voice.

. . .

You turn the candy over in your mouth.

. . . It would be polite to call. . . just a cordial thank you for the gift. And then, you’d exchange pleasantries and excuse yourself. That would be it. Completely.

Carefully retrieving the slip of paper from its safe spot by the radio, you roll the numbers through the dial and take a seat on the couch, the cord stretching between the space. Calling felt wrong, but you really did need to thank him. You didn’t want to seem ungrateful, especially since you planned on finishing the box. It rings once before being picked up. On the other line, you hear silence for a long moment, and you wonder if you dialed right.

“. . . Hello ?” Wings hums and you sigh in relief.

“Hi,” you reply, curling your toes, “it’s me.”

“Oh, my dear, how are you feeling?” he asks, worry lacing his tone.
“I’m . . . resting,” you say, touched by his instant concern. You find that your walk must’ve loosed your taut muscles, though. You feel much better since waking up.

“I was calling to thank you for the gift you left this morning.”

“Oh, good. I thought it would help. Papyrus said you didn’t look very well.”

You wince. You didn’t want him to think of you that way. “Um, yes. I . . . got caught in a bad spot. I really am feeling much better, though, so, no need to worry.”

“I’m very glad. I’m sure that candy is helping quite a bit.”

“Haha, in a way. What flavor is it anyhow? I haven’t been able to pinpoint it.”

“I’m afraid to say. It’s a bit different for everyone, but monster candy is distinctly not-licorice. Do you like it?”

You pause.

“Monster candy?”

“Yes? Oh, I’m sorry, it slipped my mind! I should’ve left another note, explaining it’s magical properties. Monsters would give it to their children after they’d gotten into fights, to patch up the bumps and scrapes. It’s a healing candy,” Wings rasps through the receiver.


“Of course,” he hums. Gently, you lay down the receiver and bolt for the bathroom. Flicking on the light, you gasp.

Your lip has stitched back together, your bruises are a faded greenish blue, and your swollen eye
has calmed. Not to mention, the taught binding of your muscles isn’t there, and when you lift your
dress, the bruises across your waist look even and faded. You laugh, pressing your fingers against
the skin, feeling a tender pressure rather than aching pain. You let your skirt fall and return to the
living room.

“That’s incredible,” you smile, the phone tucked against your ear again, “it was horrible this
morning, now it’s probably half faded!”

You hear him chuckle. “That’s wonderful. Be careful not to take too many. Maybe only four for
you today. Too much magic isn’t good for you.”

“I’ll try and pace myself, then,” you smile. You think for a moment. “Would it be alright if you
told me more about magic? I feel oblivious.”

Wings is quiet, and you briefly wonder if you’ve pressed an issue. You remember Sans was very
defensive about the idea. Thankfully, he gives.

“What would you like to know?” he asks, his voice low and steady.

A thrill runs through you. “Well, it just seems like it’s such a large part of the world, how is it that
humans can’t sense it?” you start, “what would magic even feel like?”

“Hm. . . well-”

“Also, how is it that you couldn’t escape a magical barrier when you’re made of magic? Why
couldn’t we find the barrier, either? And, if you’re made of magic, how is it you can use magic?”

Wings’ laugh interrupts you. “You’re right to be curious. Magic is more attuned to the soul, rather
than a biological component, but still holds a place among every living being. I’m afraid it’s a
much more complicated idea than you might think, and I’m not sure I can explain it properly over
the phone.”

Your shoulders relax. “Oh. Well, that’s allri-”
“I’d much rather you visit my study to understand it fully. I have a book lying around somewhere that could help illustrate my point, let me see-”

You hear the groan of a chair against the floor and a shuffle in the ear of the receiver.

“Uh, your study?” you repeat. You pause, understanding that he means to invite you over, again.

“It should be right by- ah, yes. The Principles of Worldly Magic,” he hums, not having heard you, “It’s a good read, granted you have a strong cup of coffee, which I’d be happy to provide. Mm, come to think of it, maybe a pound cake would be good, too. What do you think, my dear? How does coffee and cake sound?

You pause. It sounded wonderful. You could imagine being in a quiet little space together. Curling up on that huge velvet couch, your shoulder leaning against his shoulder and your feet tucked underneath you. The fireplace would feel nice, considering it was getting colder outside. With your belly full of coffee and cake, you’d both read silently, enjoying each other’s company. Occasionally, you’d have a question about magic, and he’d explain with fascinating detail and charm, leaving you dazzled by his intellect.

Or, you can sit at the table, not touching, having polite conversation, and doing researching.

... You purse your lips. Papyrus and Sans really didn’t seem book-ish, so you understood him in that aspect. He also seemed to understand that you were saying “no”, which made you feel worse. Were you even, really, saying no? A part of you really did want to find the time, if that made it better.

Remember, you had to be smart. As much as it pains you, the plan was to not get involved. Stay casual.

“It sounds... nice. I’m just not sure when I’d have time,” you bluff. Truthfully, you had a lot of time. More time than ever.

“Oh. I see...” he says, and you wince. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to impose on you. It’s just that neither of my brothers appreciate literature like you do, and they’re both very self-involved. It’s just been a bit lonely, and I suppose I got carried away.”
“Well. . .” you say, before you can stop yourself, “-I’m sure I could pick up the book at least? Then, maybe when I have a little more time, we could discuss it.” That felt like a good compromise. Now, you could visit and keep him company for a short time, and then leave before things got out of hand.

“If that’s convenient for you, I wouldn’t mind at all,” he rasps. “I’ll have it ready for you, so stop by anytime. . .Of course, I’d be happy to see you as soon as I can.”

You gulp and run a hand through your hair.

“A-allright! Thank you, Wings. If there’s anything else, I’ll give you a ring?”

“Please do, my dear. I like to hear from you.”

You smile. “Well, I like talking with you.”

He gives a deep chuckle, breathy and raspy. “I like the way you’re talking to me right now.”

You almost choke and have to cover it with a nervous laugh. “I think I’d better go,” you whisper, as your knees squeeze together.

“Alright, my dear. Call soon,” he hums, obviously smiling.

“Sure,” you agree, “Goodbye.”

The phone is replaced on it’s stand and you lean back into your couch, running your hand through your hair. . . down your thigh. . . gripping at your knee. . .

That voice did things to you. Bad things. Very bad things.

The phone rings, startling you. Picking it up, you half hope it’s Wings, but another voice comes
“It’s Ariel,” comes an exasperated tone. “Listen, Kelly wants to go out for a drink, and I told her it was dumb, but-”

“Sugar! Please go out with us, I’m sick of staying in bed!” Kelly yelps through the receiver, causing you to pull back from it.

“Kelly-” you start, your hand rubbing the back of your neck. “-is that such a good idea? Aren’t you in pain?”

“Yes,” she whines, “but I can’t afford to pay the doctor and the pharmacist, so it’s all going to the bartender! Are you in, or out, sweet pea?”

You sigh. Obviously, it wasn’t a smart choice, but easing her pain with alcohol would be better than her suffering, or spending rent money on medicine. You glance at the box of monster candy. Maybe, you could give her some at the end of the night, to ease the pain and the promise of a hangover. She’d probably end up going anyways, so you might as well keep an eye on her, and have a drink while you’re at it.

Kelly whines for you to answer and Ariel chastises her, but you answer promptly.

“I’m in, Kel’. Let’s go have a drink,” you agree, smiling. She squeals in delight.

“Great! We’ll be over in 30 minutes! Get dressed, we’ll see you soon!” she giggles, then the line goes dead with a buzz.

Your brow furrows, and you place the phone down again. Did they even know where you lived? You get half-way to your closet before the phone rings again. You pick up the phone, your hand on your hip.

“Hello?” you say.

“Dollface! What was your address again?”
yes, it's been a while. I have to apologize, I meant to upload sooner, however, I've been in a 5-week summer school program at my university and it's been pretty intense! It's a whole semester crammed into 5 weeks, so there hasn't been a lot of time to write! I AM glad it kept me away from it, though, because I came back with a new perspective, and I think that's important. Also, this chapter is meant to be twice as long, there's another scene attached to this google document, but I wanted to update so nyeh. Hope you enjoy!

Also, let me know what you think about kelly and ariel? There's no wrong answer, so you can hate em or love em!
hello :) it's late, and this chapter needs editing, but I'm tired and have no self-control. So I give to you this 4500 word chapter. Enjoy.

Kelly and Ariel arrive a bit early and you wince at Kelly’s beaten skin. She looks half as bad as you did, with a hard bruise under her eye and across her cheek, and the skin on her brow split jaggedly. A collection of dark blue bands around either elbow show where Petey must’ve grabbed her. Ariel gasps when she sees you, reaching out to grasp your chin and turn you left and right.

“It’s practically gone! What did you do?” she exclaims, marveling at the faded bruises. After the third candy, you were happy to notice things had faded into a splotchy yellow, with your ribs still a sickly teal. You figured most of it would be gone come sunrise. You gently pull her hand from your face and smile.

“A friend dropped off something for me, it helped quite a bit,” you hum.

“I think I’d like some of that!” Kelly gawks. You assure her you’ll give some to her by the end of the night, then notice she holds a roll of fabric. You ask what it’s for.

“Oh! I had this lying around and I didn’t know if you needed a dress!” she explains, moving to unfurl the garment. She grasps it by the shoulders and lets it unfurl before you.

It’s a simple, elegant thing. It’s made from black velvet, and would probably hit above your knees or a bit higher considering Kelly’s height. The hemline is scalloped and dressed with a delicate black lace, that gives way to a curtain of fringe. The neckline is square, and modest, and the sleeves are long. You take it in your hands, and admire Kelly’s eye for fashion. Considering you haven’t seen her outside of uniform much, it shouldn’t surprise you she’s so well dressed.

Even now, she wears a soft blue flapper, with petal sleeves and feathered fringe. Around her throat is a band of lace, and she wears a pair of linen gloves, though there’s a fraying hole in the knuckle.
“Thank you, Kelly, that’s sweet,” you say, thankful you wouldn’t have to wear the silver dress in public. Thinking about the papers made you nervous about wearing it again.

“Where are we going anyhow?” you ask.

“I heard of a bar near here, actually,” Kelly replies, hands on her hips. “They supposedly have magic drinks, so I figured it would interesting.”

“I haven’t heard of it,” you say, curious.

Ariel waves it off. “Probably a rumor, to appease your Don. I hear he’s a monster, is that literal?”

You bite your lip. Do they really need to know your relations with Wings? You’re not sure what they would say. You decide to be vague.

“I’ve met him. He’s a monster.”

Ariel pulls a face and Kelly looks intrigued.

“Well, honey, that is interesting,” Kelly hums, “I’m not sure I could move here knowing that. You must be real brave.”

Ariel shakes her head and crosses her arms. “Yeah, are you sure you know what you’re doing?”

You pout, your brow dipping. You were a grown woman, of course you knew. Besides that, they didn’t even know Wings. You defend him. “Well, truthfully, he’s far better than any Don in the city. He’s very kind and well-mannered, in fact.”

Both of their faces curl up at your statement. You wonder if you’ll regret that. Thankfully, they seem to ignore it, apparently unable to come up with anything agreeable.

“In… any case,” Ariel grunts, “we should get going. The night is young, ladies.”
“I’ll get changed, then,” you say, and take the dress to your bedroom to change. Once dressed, thankfully with matching shoes this time, Kelly energetically leads the group to the streets of the dark and dangerous city.

Outside, the three of you huddle together, but keep conversation light. Kelly leads the group along the streets of half-burned out lamp posts and boarded up windows, dipping into alleyways with quiet assurances. Ariel, acting the typical skeptic, whined and poked at every suspicious corner. You mirrored her complaints inside your mind, casting glances over your shoulder at every turn. Surely, you trusted Kelly enough. She wasn’t stupid, but you wondered if her penchant for a good time got her into more trouble than she let on.

“I’m perfectly certain of where we are,” she miffed, leading the three of you around another darkened, winding alleyway.

The thunderous rumble of a trash can tipping over, and the squeal of a cat has all of you shrieking.

“Kelly Grace-! This is miserable!” Ariel squawks, clutching her fingers together with shaking ferocity.

“It isn’t much further, fuddy duddy!” Kelly huffs, and presses on in the labyrinth of brick walls.

You and Ariel hurry after her as she disappears behind another corner, only to round the edge and practically crash into her backside. She stands in the middle of a dead end alley, and at the far end of the craggy brick is a mysterious, black door. A bright red neon sign hangs above the door and stains the alley in a crimson color. It reads:

The Devil’s Advocate

The door is heavy and carved handsomely, adorned with a silver knocker in the shape of a gargoyle’s head. The silver ring is held between his sharp, grinning fangs, and a round bauble hangs from the ring. You feel him beckon you forward, though the gargoyle never twitches. You see Kelly gulp.

“S-see? I told you,” she says, laced with false confidence.
The three of you cower silently, making no approach towards the ominous entry. Ariel squeezes your shoulder for her own comfort.

“Well, go on, then,” she goads Kelly, “go and knock.”

Kelly pales, then pulls a sour face. “I led you here, someone else can do the knocking.”

“You led us here, so you should do the knocking!” Ariel sputters, releasing her hold on you.

You feel as though an argument is approaching, but you can hardly focus from the pull you feel towards the door. As the apple called to Eve, the club called to you, too. A strange fixation was placed into your mind- no, your heart. You were sensible enough to be skeptical, but something somewhere told you there was nothing to fear, and you listened. It felt like an enchantment was taking hold, but left you with the final choice.

Ariel and Kelly hiss your name as you step forward and lift your hand. Your fingers wrap around the ring’s bauble, and you flinch as though the gargoyle would snap its teeth, but he remains still. With an apprehensive touch, you rap the knocker to the door, releasing a triad of deep, thunderous notes. Kelly and Ariel are well behind you, and after a moment, the door groans, and pulls inward. Kelly inhales a short breath as a towering, snow white bear reveals himself behind the frame. His rounded ear flicks as he stares down the three of you. Across his wide, black nose is a noticeable pink scar, and his dark, rounded eyes assess you for a moment longer.

“Evenin’,” he says, his voice like the rumble of a storm. “you ladies here for a good time?”

Gently, you nudge Ariel and Kelly, tempted to snap their gaping jaws closed.

“I believe so, sir,” you murmur.

He steps aside, and waves you in. “Don’t let me stop you. The party’s just gettin’ started.”

You lead the charge inside, Ariel and Kelly close at your heels, and yourselves in a dark tunnel. At the end is an entrance covered by a beaded curtain, and from behind it, you can glimpse a crowd of figures and hear the sweet jazz pouring through. You press on and pull the curtain to the side for your friends, then step in after them.
The inside of the speakeasy is handsome. Once through the curtain, the floor turns into dark hardwood, and the area is observed to be an upper landing. A black, wooden railing stands against the edge of the floor, and down below is a dance floor. Partners jive to the band, who play on a raised-semi-circle stage. Dark red curtains hang on the wall behind the stage, parted to reveal a marquee sign spelling “DA”. These dark red curtains hang from the ceiling and drape over the tall, black pillars that hold up the ceiling and upper floor. To either side of the jazz pit, the upper floor is littered with people. Some lounge in elegant, studded, red velvet couches, settees, and black linen covered tables with dark wooden chairs.

The upper floor is lit dimly while the dance floor is light by a crystal chandelier, which glistens beautifully above the pit. A large bar area is to the right, and Ariel and Kelly break for the crowded scene, but you spot a smaller, less crowded bar on the lower floor, off the dance floor. You call out to Ariel and Kelly and inform them.

“Go down and get some drinks! We’ll keep an eye on you from up here and see who gets them first!” Ariel says. You hold up your thumb, then make for the grand, dark, wooden staircase on the edge of the landing.

Couples laugh to themselves as they ascend on the other side of the stairs. You could spot a few monster folk in the crowds, but no one discernible. The band seemed to be made mostly of monsters, with a mallard looking fellow on the trumpet, a goopy someone on bass, and another heron-esque figure taking a break at the piano.

You take a stand at the bar and try for the bartender's attention, but he looks incredibly busy as he mixes drinks for others. The white marble counter-top is smooth and clean beneath your touch, and you tap your fingers to the beat of the band. Currently, they’re finishing a swinging little number, heavy on the trumpet, upbeat, and sultry, like the last moments of a sunset. The music fills your belly, and vibrates through your chest.

It’s been a while since you’d been out. Between your job, writing, and having hardly any money, going to a place like this just wasn’t in the cards. It didn’t help that you weren’t terribly close with Ariel and Kelly. You peek over your shoulder at where they should be, but don’t see them anywhere on the floor above. You breathe a sigh through your nose. They tended towards being unreliable, though you think you could someday be closer to them. Kelly was still sweet, and Ariel had a maturity to her.

The bartender continues to be busy with others.

You tap your fingers against the counter-top, listening contently to the wonderful music. Your foot
taps, your shoulders gently sway. You still remember how to dance well. Edwin was a wonderful dancer partner, he would dip and spin you for the peal of applause, though you were always dizzy afterwards. Back then, you blamed it on puppy love. You wish you had a dance partner now, someone to gently stroll around the dance floor with.

“Come here often?” comes a soft, smoky voice.

You turn, a smile already forming. “What are you doing here?” you ask Wings, as he leans his hip against the counter.

“I could ask you the same. After all, I was here first,” he smiles, holding a short glass.

“I thought you had work?”

“I needed a break,” he says, looking down into his glass, twirling it in his hands. “I took care of the pressing issue, but I needed a distraction. I haven’t gone out in quite some time.”

“Neither have I,” you hum, “I hope I’m not interrupting.”

Wings gives you an easy grin. “You will always be a welcome distraction,” he says. You smile at him. He holds your eye easily but you can’t hold his tender gaze, so you cast it sideways.

“Oh, what does a girl have to do for a drink around here?” you sigh, heart fluttering.

Wings immediately calls out to the bartender, who turns in a flash. “David, can you get the lady a drink?”

“O-of course, Don Gaster. I’m so sorry, sir,” the bartender sputters, before turning to you. “What can I get you, madam?”

You announce your drink choice, only momentarily thrown off by his immediate attention. He springs into action and you look to Wings.
“I guess being Don has its perks?” you say.

“It awards me with just the right amount of attention,” he smirks, then lifts his glass to his lips and knocks back the last of his drink. You catch yourself watching his throat, as if expecting the amber liquid to come rushing through.

“At the risk of sounding ignorant, how does that work?” you ask.

Wings glances at his glass before he understands your meaning. “Ah, well, you see, it’s converted into magic. Everything we eat and drink turns to magic.”

“So monster candy causes an excess and the imbalance is what causes sickness?” you ask.

“Very good, my dear,” he purrs, grinning at your cleverness. You take the compliment humbly.

“I’m very excited to get my hands on that book,” you admit. “Magic is fascinating.”

Wings nods, folding his hands together. “For you, I’m sure. I’m an expert on the subject, so you’re within good company for questions.”

You rest your cheek against your palm and smile. “Because you’re a monster?”

“That, yes, and I’ve studied the matter for decades as former royal scientist,” he boasts, quirking a proud brow.

You have several questions, and you balk a moment as you try to pick one. “You were a scientist? Isn’t that the opposite of magic?” Your drink arrives and you quietly thank David as Wings goes to explain.

Wings sets his glass aside and pulls his full attention to you. “Well, really magic is still a science. It just means that I’ve studied it and experimented with it. I’ve become disciplined in it. It’s actually really interesting, as it doesn’t quite fit into the natural or physical sciences, but rather is it’s own category that transcends others. Simply put, it’s metaphysics: the fundamental nature of reality, the connection between mind and matter. Quite honestly, it’s amazing that monsters are the sole
manipulators of metaphysics, considering everything else is based on... um...”

You’re in the middle of sipping your drink when he stops himself. He slowly smiles.

“Excuse me, I almost went on a tangent that would’ve lasted a century,” he chuckles, his fingers twisting together.

You perk, desperate for him to go on. “Oh, no, please!” you beg, “it was interesting, please continue.”

“You’re humoring me,” he chuckles, fiddling with his fingers. You shake your head earnestly.

“I promise, I’m not. You speak about it so well, it’s easy to listen to,” you say.

He eyes you, but eventually wanes into a smile. “That’s refreshing, thank you,” he says quietly, before taking a sideways glance around the dance hall. “Though I’d prefer a quieter space to explain things. How about a rain check?”

You nod. “Alright, that’s fair. Though, I do have other questions.”

“Shoot,” he agrees, then thanks David as the bartender sets down another glass.

“You said you studied for decades, how old does that make you?”

He laughs. “Isn’t it impolite to ask a gentleman’s age?”

“Fortunately, it only applies to ladies,” you grin, “are you avoiding the question?”

He makes a throaty noise, then takes a sip of his drink to buy some time. He sets his glass down and glances at you with a glint in his eye. “You know, I’ve often wondered the very same thing,” he finally says, and you raise your eyebrow and tilt your head.
“What, you don’t know your age?” you chortle.

“Age affects monsters differently,” he defends, grinning, “we are born, we mature, and then we live until someone dusts us.”

You wonder what he means by “dust”.

“Surely, you had some measurement of time Underground? You have to sleep sometime,” you say. He nods.

“Sure. The days were determined by the star-lights, which fade and illuminate to imitate day and night cycles. Though, our days were like living in constant twilight, I wouldn’t call it daytime,” he says.

“But, hypothetically, couldn’t you compare the length of a day underground to the length of a day on the surface, and then roughly determine your age?” you press, a cheeky grin tugging at your lips.

“I’m not old,” Wings finalizes mirthfully, and you laugh.

“Alright, fine, you’re not old,” you concede, sharing a gleaming smile with him.

He tries to give you a scolding look, but its negated by the handsome curve of his lips. He was very dashing when he looked at you like that, with hooded eyes and an easy, affectionate expression. You wanted him to look like that all the time, wanted him to look at you like that.

You glance away, shy from your own thoughts, though a smile threatens your lips. You were going to damn yourself, weren’t you? But, then again, where was the harm? Your banter was playful and light; harmless. Tonight, you were supposed to have fun, and the flooded dance floor was begging you to come and tap your feet.

You glance towards the dance floor, and then back to him with a shy, hopeful expression. “The band’s really swinging tonight,” you mention, your voice quieter.
His brow bone lifts in a subtle way, and he looks pleasantly surprised. He looks out at the throng of dancing people, then back to you with a coy expression.

“Well, what are we waiting for? My dear, may I have this dance?” he asks, grinning as he sets his glass down, and holds out a hand.

You pray your palms stay dry as you gently lay your hand in his, curling your fingers into his with a smile. “Of course,” you say quietly, trying not to look too eager. You hardly think of your unfinished drinks as Wings leads you onto the parquet dance floor, the band dipping out of it’s swinging fast number. The heron monster on the piano starts petting the keys, a fat cigar in his beak, and the gooey monster plucks a handsome, deep tune on the cello. The mallard playing trumpet releases a fun brassy tune. You feel the rhythm tempting your feet to move, but when you step close to Wings and feel his hand rest against your back, you can hardly hear past the thrumming in your ears. He smiles down at you, and you both begin to move, hands pressed together, feet stepping in time. Your memories of dance halls come back easily, and you melt into his lead, tip toe-ing a fox trot. You smile at the floaty feeling of dancing, happy to be swinging again.

“I haven’t danced in so long,” you tell him mirthfully, and he chuckles.

“Me either. We should do this more often,” he says, and your mouth goes dry.

You hum and go silent, thinking of a careful response.

“I’ll probably come again with my friends. They go out for a drink more often than I do,” you say.

He hums in response, but you’re surprised when he looks no less deterred. In fact, he smiles, quirking a brow. “Actually, I meant the two of us,” he clarifies, and you weaken.

Couldn’t you just have a nice dance? Couldn’t the two of you just hold each other and sway across the dance floor? You didn’t want this to go sour. You wanted to be like Cinderella- to have a magical night, and then wake up without anything changed.

“I know,” you reply quietly, casting aside your gaze.

He doesn’t speak, and you don’t look for his expression, afraid to see disappointment. For a
moment, the two of you are contempt to dance, soaking in the smooth croon of jazz. And though, you don’t see his face, you feel that he’s calm, still genteel as ever, considering your quiet words. Finally, he gently presses you closer by the small of your back, and bends his mouth down to your ear. A shiver runs across your skin as his breath fans across your cheek.

“My dear, what am I missing?” he asks quietly.

You’re at a loss for words. Nothing you could say would make things better. Your fear kept the two of you apart, and there wasn’t a way he could change that fear.

“Because, I think we make a wonderful pair,” he continues, running his thumb along the back of your hand. “Don’t you think we dance well?”

You sigh a hopeless laugh. “Well, sure, but…” You lean into him, pressing your cheek against his shoulder as your thoughts scramble. “... it’s complicated, Wings.”

He hums, the hand at the small of your back doing wonderful, soothing things. “It doesn’t have to be. I can fix ‘complicated’.”

“And, how’s that?” you murmur, wishing the song would last just a bit longer.

He chuckles. “Because I don’t want to cage you, like other men. I’m not vying for your affection so I can hoard it for myself. I’d rather not try and control you, I have my own matters to deal with and you are certainly capable of leading your own life. So, if that’s what you’re afraid of, I assure you, you’re in very good hands.”

You’re quiet. Your fear wavers in your mind as you consider his confession. Wasn’t that exactly what you were afraid of? Wings must’ve been smarter than you gave him credit for. He knew exactly what to say.

You spare him a glance and he catches your eye. He smiles. “We can keep things as casual as you like,” he says.

“Casual,” you repeat, and his smile widens.
“Of course.”

You bite your lip and look over his shoulder, trying to quell the giddy tension in your chest.

“And we’d be casual dance partners…” you murmur.

“Oh, yes,” he agrees, pulling you close again.

“Hmm. Well, I’ll think about it.”

He laughs. “Please do, my dear.”

You try to hide the smile that pulls at the corners of your mouth, tucking your face into his chest. Time without consequences. It was what you’d been hoping for all along. You wished you would’ve talked to him sooner, to clear all of this up. He wasn’t asking for your commitment. He just wanted you, and your company. And wasn’t that what you wanted, too?

The songs melted into each other, and you vaguely remember Ariel and Kelly were somewhere in the bar. They were going to pester you relentlessly if they saw you dancing with Wings. Hopefully, they would be tipsy enough to overlook your dance partner, but really you didn’t mind. You and Wings made handsome conversation as you gently swayed, and after a handful of songs and another drink at the bar, he excused himself for the night. You assured him you would get home safely and went to find Kelly and Ariel.

You found them upstairs, lounging on the red velvet seats with a small group of strangers. Kelly sat in the lap of a gentleman, with a watchful Ariel across the low table sipping slowly on a gin and tonic. They both welcomed you happily, and you caught a strange look from Ariel. But, if she had any questions, she kept them to herself, and didn’t ask you anything. Kelly introduced you quickly to the group and you fell into place on the sofa, chatting idly with the strangers.
Wings returns home much brighter than when he’d left, almost smirking to himself as he quietly shut the front door. Shucking off his coat, he thought again of the tender way you smiled up at him, of your hopeful voice at his suggestion.

_Casual._

Why hadn’t he thought of it before? Of course you didn’t want to get involved with a monster like him, you were smarter than that. He knew what he was, and people understood his line of work. He hadn’t expected you to hold to your better judgement, though, and again you impressed him.

Wings places his coat on a wooden hanger and tucks it back into the closet by the door. You were surprising. You were curious and thoughtful about magic, and indulged him in his scientific passion. You were responsible and clever, and resisted his charms with grace. He let his smile spread across his face.

Oh, yes. He liked you. And now, with this new understanding between the two of you, it only made things so much easier. He was sure that you both would have a lot of fun together, especially under the soft, black sheets of his bed. The crawl of arousal throughout his bones was pinched by an unwelcome bit of guilt, but he quickly pushed that horrible emotion out of his chest and made his way up the stairs.

Guilt had been the plague that sent him cowering to the bar, and now that he had a good drink in him, he was loose enough to argue away his self-doubt. When you had called that morning, he had been expecting your father, with confirmation of the ransom agreement. After his conversation with you, a few hours passed until your father called, and agreed to pay the ransom. Wings had instructed him to send someone to the trolley, north of their territory, no sooner or later than one week from today.

Once Wings had hung up the phone, an itch in the back of his mind left him twitchy and fidgeting. Over the course of a few hours, it grew into a noxious cloud of self-doubt, and his head felt heavy. Papyrus noticed the sour change of his mood immediately and brewed a fresh pot of coffee. He understood the pattern by now. And yet, the hot cup of coffee did nothing to soothe Wings nerves, and rancid thoughts.

_If you slip, you’ll be just like him._
Don’t let yourself slip, or you’ll end up in the gutter too.

Not like him, nothing like him.

He realized he’d worried himself into a fit again, and left the house in a silent flash, desperate to quiet the tumbling anxiety. A stiff drink did him good. And when he saw you, standing alone at the bar, it all came rushing back. And, against his better judgement, he went to talk to you. Out of spite, or out of pure selfishness, he couldn’t decide.

Undoing the last button on his shirt, he stripped the fabric from his bones and slid under the sheets of his bed. As he lay his head back, he knew sleep wouldn’t come easy tonight. Perhaps he deserved it. He rolls over violently, determined to fall asleep soundly, and quiet the obnoxious thoughts the day had produced. He was nothing like Asgore and there was nothing else to consider. He contented himself with thinking of his hand against the small of your back, your warm body against his, and the softness of your hair against his cheek. Eventually, sleep found him, and he drifted off for a few hours of much needed rest.
where there is smoke

Chapter Notes

surprise darling, i bet you thought you'd seen the last of this work

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Magic and Monsters

Since the creation of the cosmos, magic has guided and fueled the creation of all things through its counterparts, time and space. While some creatures were born in physical forms, that derived energy from other physical properties, monsters were born as pure beings of magic. A monster's entire form comes from the concentrated mass of their soul. The soul of a monster projects itself to create a vessel, with which the soul can use to interact with the environment. This is why fighting causes immense stress and pain when a monster receives injury. As the projection is a direct link to the soul, and in damaging the vessel, the soul within is damaged consequently.

Magic and Ancient Humans

Ancient humans do not possess souls like monster souls. Because they do not need to project a vessel, the small magic they possess stays very concentrated within the chest cavity. However, as humans had no way to access or control the soul’s power, it remained as a vestigial part of their being. The only exception to this would be a mage, an ancient human who possessed the power to wield magic, but this book will not cover historical events.

The ancient human soul also had preferences for certain types of magic. These preferences were often an indication of the spirit and, when viewed, each soul produced a unique color. As such, by examining the human soul, certain inferences could be made about the humans thoughts and behaviors, and could be used to predict the decisions of the human.

Soul colors will be briefly examined in a much later chapter.

Monster Biology and Vessel Formation
You look up from your textbook. “Humans actually have souls?” you ask.

“Of course,” Wings replies, glancing up from his desk to smile.

You hum, then flip to the table of contents. “I always thought it was more of a spiritual thing. I don’t think anyone knows they actually have a soul.”

“It might be better that way. Monsters know from experience that humans and magic are complicated,” he says, scribbling away.

You flip through the pages until you arrive at a very short chapter. The first section details a small history between humans and monsters, mentioning the war, but dismissing the history as inaccurate, due to official history being lost to time. A few paragraphs later, you begin to read about soul colors.

Human Soul Concentrations and Colors

There exists 7 official color categories for human souls, though it is important to note that colors exist on a spectrum. Some souls may have a soul color that is yellow, but lean towards a warmer orange color, rather than towards a green color. The soul would still be considered a yellow soul, with tendencies towards orange. This is important to note. Often, souls will lean towards a complementary color, and be unable to define themselves purely by one color.

The meanings of each color are closely related, and influence each other. The colors concentrations of souls are listed below, with their general trait.
Red, for Determination
Orange, for Bravery
Yellow, for Justice
Green, for Kindness
Cyan, for Patience
Blue, for Integrity
Purple, for Perseverance

Every trait is assigned to an origin of willpower, and is the driving force behind a human’s soul. Each soul is unique and will never shift in color, and. Take the earlier example of the yellow soul. A pure, yellow soul has their willpower stem from a sense of justice, but most souls will lean towards kindness or bravery, which are very closely related to justice. Those who have a strong sense of justice, are either also kind or brave.

As a second example, integrity is a trait that holds onto personal values. Integrity is often upheld by patience with self and others, or the stubbornness of perseverance.

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The chapter ends there. You check for missing pages but everything is in order.

“Where’s the rest of it?” you ask Wings.

He looks up again, and hums at your question.

“The rest on human souls,” you elaborate, “there’s practically nothing here.”

He shrugged. “We didn’t have a lot of interaction with humans, so what we have is what we have. I’m sure someone will expand the entry someday.”

“I wonder what my soul color is,” you hum, a smile edging onto your face as you close the book.
“What do you think it is?”

“I don’t rightly know,” he says, resting his chin in his hand. “I’d have to see it.”


He raises a brow bone, but can’t help the smile that grows. “Here? Right now?” he asks, sitting back in his chair as you come to sit on the edge of his desk.

You lift your hands nonchalantly. “Well, sure. Is it something you can do?”

“Yes... It is,” he replies apprehensively. He scratches a finger against the desk and doesn’t meet your eye for a moment. He eventually returns your gaze but… he looks a bit cheeky.

You raise an eyebrow while your lips threaten to return the grin. “What’s the matter?”

“I’d love to indulge your curiosity, my dear, really I would, but…” he pauses, and works his jaw, looking for his words, “exposing your soul is an… intimate exchange among monsters. It isn’t something you do so casually.”

You immediately drop his gaze and press your lips together. Your fingers tighten together as you catch his meaning. “Oh, I- I see. I’m sorry to have asked.”

“Please, don’t be. You had no way of knowing. Plus, it’s honestly rather flattering,” he says, then gives you a cheeky grin.

You grin back at his teasings, then notice the papers laid out on his desk. Your grin drops from your mouth. Tentatively, you reach out your hand to touch the paper. “Wings,” you murmur.

He folds his hands together comfortably. “Do you like it?” he asks.

“It’s...wonderful,” you say.
Apparently, as you’d been reading, Wings had taken a break from paperwork, and decided to roughly sketch your picture on a spare sheet of paper. The drawing wasn’t perfect, but it defined your form well enough. The proportions were to scale but he spent more time on your gentle expression. Your head was tilted in the picture while strands of your hair fell across your shoulder. One leg was tucked under you, and your fingers looked so dainty, gripped against the cover.

“Beautiful,” you compliment, and he hums.

“Oh, yes,” he agrees, raising his head to give you a tender smile “Beautiful.”

Your cheeks flush gently and you can hardly contain the giddy grin that stretches across your face. It’s a bit difficult to think after that, but you try to save face by delving back into pleasant talk.

It had been like this for a few days now, the two of you being utterly comfortable together, and you were beside yourself with glee that you decided to trust Wings. It was exciting to be wanted, but now that you could return the affection, things were even better. Playful banter and titillating conversations were peppered with compliments and gentle gazes. Sleep took you easily lately. And while you remembered to keep things “casual”, your heart only yearned for more.

But, that was a problem for future you.

Waking up, you begin your routine, feeling well-rested and content. You make a hot cup of coffee and have some breakfast, daydreaming as you admire the large vase of flowers on your desk. It had been a gift from Wings, of course, and was so lovely and cheery in your dark, little hovel of an apartment. It brightened your mornings to be reminded of him.

“Oh! Wings, how sweet!” you exclaimed, admiring the bouquet as he stepped inside.

“I figured you’d like them,” he smiled, “beautiful things for a beautiful woman.”
You had smiled brightly at him. “Well, isn’t that just like you to be so thoughtful?” He had smiled too.

He had come to pick up an old classic novel you owned, and though you were a bit embarrassed by the rugged appearance of the cover, he took it graciously and discussed it with you over coffee later. Your chest felt lighter when you thought back on the quiet evening you had together, and even lighter when you imagined indulging in that fantasy by the fireplace.

Your head was in a daze, even as you walked to the trolley. Thinking of your grocery list turned into cooking together, while paying bills turned into walks in the park. You found yourself smiling as you made up funny conversations in your head, lost in the thought of it all. When you arrive at your station, there’s an energetic skip in your step as you hop off the trolley. The walk through the bustling city doesn’t get on your nerves as much, and you make your way to the post office with your envelope of papers.

You had finished your contest entry and were anxious to send it off. Three-thousand words turned into four thousand, and then five thousand, so it was a bit nerve-wracking to send it in when it didn’t conform to the guidelines. In any case, the worst they could do is not run it, and you’d be no worse off.

You worried your lip between your teeth. The thought wasn’t as comforting as you hoped it would be, and shakily handed the hefty envelope to the postal worker, a clenched smile across your mouth as you sent it with prayers of good luck.

Once you had dropped off the package with the post office, you set out to the trolley station to return home with your good mood in one piece. You had to wait a bit at the station and took up a spot on the bench, picking at your nails and enjoying the good weather. Autumn was on its way, and while last week had been a bit ugly, the sky had warmed and the clouds had parted. Perhaps it was all a matter of time until it returned to cold and rain, but you were content with the current pattern.

Across the tracks, a trolley slows into station, ringing its cheerful bell for its passengers. You watch them for a moment, seeing young men, single mothers, and blue collar workers shuffle off and into the city. A slate blue suit catches your eye as a man shuffles off with the rest of them, his clothes looking pressed and bright compared to the others. He carries two black suitcases and wears his black duster over his shoulder. To see a businessman use the trolley and not a personal car is unusual, and you watch curiously as he juggles the suitcases to pull a wrinkled piece of paper from his pocket. After reading it, he turns his head to the next station and your breath catches in your throat.
His profile is sharply defined by a rigid roman nose, high cheekbones and a coiff of perfect, golden hair. He starts off in that direction and you reason with yourself that it shouldn’t- couldn’t- be him. He bumps into a pedestrian and whirls to shout something at them, turning his face for a brief moment. Across the station your fears are confirmed, and your gut turns over, your body going rigid. You look as if you’ve seen a ghost and you stand quickly and walk the other direction, just to turn your face from him.

Your trolley whirls into the station and you can’t help glancing over your shoulder, but you can’t find him again. His figure has disappeared into the crowd, and when the passengers exit the trolley, you’re all too eager to board. You take the seat furthest in the back, hoping to remain fairly hidden, and tremble as others board.

Suddenly, cooking and walks in the park turn into shallow parties, cake tastings, drunken afternoons watching him play polo with his friends, silent car rides, and awful small talk.

Why was he here? How did he find you? How could he-

No. He couldn’t have been here for you. If he knew where you were, he would’ve gone to your apartment and waited for you. He couldn’t know-

The newspaper article flashed through your memory again, and you wince. He was here for you, christ, what were you thinking? You should’ve found every newsstand in Fellcity and burned them all to the ground and buried the ashes. Why did this have to happen now? After all this time, why now?

You had a semi-stable apartment, friends, a wonderful budding romance, and a shot at your dream. Him being here ruined all of that and you were just getting started. Now you’d have to start all over, go somewhere new, make another name.

Part of you laughed bitterly. Oh yeah? With what money?

You could borrow. Wings was plenty-

You wince again, quickly losing hope as you banish the thought. You’d never be able to pay him back, and it was wrong to even ask. You knew he liked you, but you’d never take advantage of his kindness like that. You’d have to sell your furniture, your bed, your carpet, your drapes, all of it. You could sleep on the floor for a while, you didn’t have a job to wake up for. You figured you
had a month, two at most, before Edwin found your neighborhood. Saying goodbye would be the hardest part. Ariel would understand, Kelly might be sad.

You didn’t want to think about saying goodbye to Wings. The thought drove a rock down your throat. It was best not to think about it yet. You still had time. There was still time.

The ride home felt longer than usual, and you hurried off. Rushing into your apartment, you took off your hat, but then stopped in the entryway. For a moment, it was like looking at your apartment for the first time. The ragged wallpaper, the groaning furnace, the scuffed hardwood which was barely concealed under the threadbare rug, all your things that you had earned. All things you’d have to sell to get away.

You took a few steps further into your living room, and your hand came to rest on the edge of the beaten desk against the wall. Your eyes held onto your typewriter. It was broken, and rusted, and the paint was chipped and worn off quite a few keys. It had been over priced at the flea market and you bought it anyway, and it was yours. Everything here was yours, truly and deeply yours. These old, ragged things were bought with long shifts at the diner, canned suppers, and crying into your pillow, unlike the finer things you used to have. And it was all gone to waste. Your jaw clenched and your fingers curled into a fist, which you placed against your chest and cradled it with the other hand.

How dare he. He didn’t have any business coming after you, and uprooting everything you've worked for. Because of him, you had to leave again, running from your past. What did he hope to accomplish? You wouldn't return with him. You wouldn't marry him. This was your home now.

You almost laugh to yourself.

As crazy as this city was, it really did feel like home. Your creaky mattress and rusted pans brought you more comfort now than your old life. There was a simplicity to it, a certainty that you were on your own, and that everything you had, you had made for yourself. Your heart swells with sadness as you imagine selling it off, saying goodbye to your most valued possessions. And as you bargain with yourself, tears begin to rise, and you firmly push the feeling away. There wasn’t anything to be done. If you stayed, you would be found, and everything would be in vain.
You heavily lay yourself across your couch, pressing your palms into your eyelids.

Fatigue envelops you and suddenly, you’re exhausted. Your contemplation was sapping your energy, and you felt like a good book and a nap would take your mind off of things. From your bookshelf, you pull your borrowed textbook out and prop yourself against the couch arm. You lay your cheek against the back of the cushions and prop your book against your knees.

_Soul CHECKS_

_When engaged to another monster, often, there is the ability to analyze the opposing soul-

When Papyrus hears the gentle rap against the door, he can’t help the tense jump of his shoulders. He grits his teeth, feeling a spike of annoyance inside his skull. He still didn’t trust you, and your frequent visits did nothing for his nerves. Thankfully, he could console himself, knowing you’d be swept away in a couple of days, returned to your cushy, annoying, rich person life, with your pathetic, rich, annoying, human husband. Then, things could return to normal, and he could again focus on the important things, like cleaning up this slum of a territory.

He was quite proud of himself for the work he’d already accomplished. On top of keeping the entire household tidy, organized, and everyone well fed with absolute culinary genius, Papyrus had coordinated the clean up of the park, future building plans, the landscaping, the maintenance, even the new up keep of the apartment. The humans were undoubtedly grateful, so much so, they bowed their heads in respect and scurried out of his way when he visited the landlords for plans and funding.

A firmer rapping on the front door pulled him from his self-congratulations, and he cocked his jaw in irritation. With a sigh, he abandoned his task of scraping burnt sauce off the stove to attend their “visitor”. He ducks his head under the entryway and leans over to open the door, gripping the handle just a bit too hard.

Instead of glaring at your vision of lovesick foolery, he’s met by an unfamiliar human gentleman,
tall for his species, blonde, and wearing a crisp blue-grey suit. Papyrus momentarily admires the neat appearance of the man before his magic builds in his bones, and he stands a bit taller, narrowing his eyelights. Papyrus bares his teeth, and the gentleman’s shoulder shake, but he remains stone faced.

“ANSWER SWIFTLY. WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON OUR DOORSTEP,” Papyrus demands.

The human trembles, but fights it by adjusting his tie. “My name is Edwin Jaeger. I’m here to retrieve Jane,” he says evenly. Papyrus’ sockets darken and the human gulps.

This would not please Wings. The plan was supposed to happen differently, you were not here, and this man was.

Papyrus gripped Edwin behind the shoulder and tugged him inside, causing the man to stumble over his feet. He barely catches himself, dropping the black briefcase he carried with him. Papyrus slams the door and the thunder of it jostles the house. He turns and the human brushes himself off with shaky palm.

“T-that’s completely unnecessary, I’m being compliant,” Edwin fusses, then stoops for his briefcase.

Papyrus takes a step forward and snatches the handle and Edwin staggers backwards. Papyrus advances on him, and the blonde retreats in kind.

“SIT,” Papyrus commands, jutting his chin towards the living room. Edwin glances over his shoulder and complies, taking a deep breath as he finds himself a spot on the loveseat. He folds his hands in his lap, and tries to look brave. The skeleton could hardly contain the mocking snicker that bubbled in his throat.

Papyrus looks up and sees Wings at the top of the stairs, a scowl on his face and ready to scold his younger brother for the noise. When the older skeleton sees Edwin sitting quietly on the couch, his scowl pauses, then deepens into a cold, calculating glare. Edwin turns over his shoulder and pales when he sees Wings, looking timid again.

Wings lifts his chin and stares down the blonde stranger, before he makes his way slowly down the stairs.
“Well, well,” he croaks, “who do we have here?”

Edwin makes no attempt to introduce himself, watching warily as Wings reaches the bottom of the stairs.

“I’ll assume you’re our expected guest,” Wings hums, stepping into the living area, “but you’re early. Was I not specific enough with my instructions…”

From his tone it isn’t a question. Edwin clears his throat and sits a little taller. “You were perfectly clear, but I’d rather retrieve Jane sooner. So, where is she?”

Wings’ mouth curls into an angry sneer. His eyelight darkens and the cracks across his face deepen. This ass thought to cut into Wings’ time by mere whim, and then had the gall to order him around? It seemed this man didn’t comprehend his position, but men like him always learned. “She’s not here,” he Wings grits out, stalking towards Edwins seat.

The flash of fear in the human mans eyes gave Wings an edge triumph, and he thought this human looked rather ugly this way. Edwins lip curled up in a feeble attempt to intimidate, and though he glared, the poison of panic settled behind his eyes and in the twitching slope of his brow. His fingers tightened together and his shoulders tensed. Wings stood comparatively lax, with a smirk beginning to settle on his face as he observed this mans discomfort.

“What do you mean she’s not here?!?” Edwin growled, pushing himself abruptly to stand against Wings, but found himself yanked back into his seat by a slew of skeletal hands that gripped harshly into his suit jacket.

“Sit. Down.”

Wings’ voice was dark and clear, and a menacing grin had split his face. The fight left Edwin quickly, and he couldn’t hold back the tremble of his shoulders, looking almost disgusted at the tight grip of skeletal hands that dug into his shoulders and well-pressed suit. His baby blue eyes flicked back to Wings, holding steady, and watching fearfully. Wings held his gaze, happy with the pitiful look on the man’s face, and then turned towards the fireplace with a dark chuckle. He stopped at the foot of the hearth, his tall figure silhouetted by the glow of flames.

“Do you think I have people just disobey orders, Jaegar?” Wings asked, digging a pack of cigarettes out from his pocket. He places one between his teeth, and uses his lighter to set it
smoking. He takes a short puff, and violet smoke curls around him.

“Do you think I’m in my position because I allow people to come and go from my home as they please?” His fingers wrap around the handle of the fire poker by the hearth, and it pulls from the iron holder with a slow, grating, metallic sound. Wings feels Edwin shudder under the bruising grip of the hands, and something wretched in Wings’ soul is delighted.

The fire poker stirs around in hot coals, and Wings allows the metal to ripen within the tall flames. He takes another drag of his cigarette, and the smoke curls out his nose and through his teeth when he speaks.

“I’m not inclined to trust those people. And, you know what happens to them?”

The poker is glowing a burning crimson, and is dusted with ash and soot. Wings pulls the hot poker from the fire and turns his head over his shoulder, giving Edwin a look at the tendrils of smoke leaking from his sockets. The poker hangs in his bony grip, heat rippling off the sharp point of iron. Edwin begins to tremble, his eyes wide and his jaw set hard. He gulps.

Wings smiles, feeling dark glee twist around his soul, and sheaths the poker back into its place in the rack. The smoke dissipates from his eyes, and he turns, and stalks to Edwins seat on the couch. Wings takes another slow drag, and then leans over Edwin, supporting his hands on his knees, and releases the stream across the man’s face. The blonde holds back a cough, and turns his head, hands clenching against his lap.

“But, you’re a good man, aren’t you, Jaegar?” Wings grins. “You came alone, and I know you have every piece promised in that case. So, I’m going to let you think about this exchange.”

Edwin looks like he wants to say something, but when Wings pulls his cigarette from his lips, and drives the singed butt of it into Edwins thigh, it dies in his mouth, and he hisses at the burn. Wings chuckles, and straightens. He makes his way to Papyrus and takes the case from him, patting his brother on the shoulder, who looks very pleased at the exchange between Wings and the human male.

“You know-” Wings continues, “I have half a mind to throw you in our basement, along with the remains of the last man who disrespected me.” He turns, case in hand, and passes the living area. Wings smirks at Edwin. “But, in truth, I don’t like you. Your presence is like a festering in my home, and I’d rather have you out as soon as possible. I’m going to make a phone call, and you will behave yourself in front of my brother, understood?”
Papyrus releases a nasally chuckle as Edwin refuses to acknowledge Wings. “NYEH-HEH, IT SEEMS LIKE THINGS ARE MUCH CLEARER FOR YOU NOW, HUMAN,” he gloats, his hands coming to settle squarely on his hips.

Edwin sits quietly, a dignified pout takes his mouth and refuses any reply. Wings smiles, and his magic releases the man, and he makes his way upstairs. It takes a great deal of effort not to slam the office door to splinter, but he manages and instead throws the case against the edge of his desk. It pops open with a violent thud, and bill stacks spill onto the floor, but Wings isn’t concerned with it. With more force than necessary, he slumps himself into his desk chair, gritting his teeth too tight. He snatches up the handle of his phone, and impatiently dials your number, but misdials one of the numbers at the end. His fingers tightened around the handle, and he takes a second to calm his breath and stay his strength before dialing again with more control.

He was supposed to have two more days. No one ever broke his instructions, and he chides himself for not expecting it. Edwin was some pampered pretty boy with an heir complex. That was likely the cause of his disobedience. Wings chastises himself again. He should’ve expected it. Pressing the receiver to his ear, he rapidly taps his fingers against his desk, feeling himself become fidgety from his agitation.

He fingers the edge of one of his papers, almost tearing at it until he realizes the contents. It’s his old sketch of you. Gently, he picks up the paper and holds it in front of him. After a moment, his chest fills with a sigh, but he holds it there, not letting it go.

Two more days.

A click in his ear pulls him from the thought, but he doesn’t feel himself recover from ache in his ribs.

“mmhello?” comes your sweet, soft voice, groggy from what seemed to be a mid-day nap. The ache tugs deeper.

He croons your name, icing out the ache and tucking the drawing as quickly as he can into his drawer. “-how are you, darling? Any chance I could trouble you with a favor?...”
as an excuse, I put a great deal of time and effort into this chapter, so if that almost makes up for the fact that I havent updated since July, then please forgive me and enjoy :) also, if you find any mistakes, dont be afraid to let me know! -edited: 1/20/2020-
The Fall from Grace

Chapter Notes

edited: 1/24
I like it better this way! I should've waited until the morning to edit this and post, but I
was really impatient and didn't want to lose my motivation, or question how I went
about this. I've probably tried writing this chapter twice before, and didn't feel like it
was good enough. Thank you to everyone who has come back to enjoy this work, your
praises make me feel like a million bucks, and I couldn't be happier that I've found
motivation in writing this story again! Hopefully, this edit will make things a little
easier to understand about Janie, and improves word choice!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You rub your sleepy eyes as Wings describes his reason for calling you. He’s entirely too vague,
which doesn’t sit right with you, but you agree to see him anyhow.

“Sure,” you hum, holding back a yawn, “what kind of, um… what kind of favor?”

“ Well, it’s complicated, but I know you’re the one to help me with it. I know it’s a bit much to ask,
I’m sure you’re busy, but you’d really be helping me,” he croons, his voice as smooth as cream.

You shake your head, even if he can’t see you. “No, no, I’m not busy.” You cradle the phone
against your shoulder and stretch yourself like a cat, letting out a little squeak as you strain.

“ Wonderful. I should see you soon, then?”

You glance at your clock, and hum, cradling the phone in your palm again. “Soon is good, yes.
I’ve just woken up from a nap, so I’ll need a moment to open my eyes, but I’ll come to you after
that.”

“Alright,” he hums, “I await that lovely face .”
Your lips split into a smile as a giggle bubbles out. “Goodbye, Wings,” you bid sweetly.

He doesn’t respond, and the silence stretches on. A beat too long passes and you wonder if he’s already hung up, but his voice comes through eventually. “... Goodbye, my dear...” he says, his voice quiet and raspy. The receiver clicks and you finally let out the lion-like yawn you’d been holding back.

You replace the phone in it’s seat atop the dial, and stand with another great, big stretch. The stars that dance across your vision don’t bother you, and you set yourself to wake up with a cup of coffee.

...Oh, right, you couldn’t afford coffee anymore...

Perhaps Wings would grace you with a cup when you arrive for this mysterious favor. That sets you to think on it a bit further as you travel to your bathroom, aiming to tame any mussed hair you could have. What could this favor be that only you could help with? It sounded like some sort of riddle, truth be told.

You run your hairbrush through your hair gently, observing the wrinkled appearance of your dress, too.

... You hazily tried to think of what would be of service to him. Perhaps he needed your opinion on a letter? Immediately, you dispel that thought, assuming any important letters would be too confidential for your opinion. Maybe he needed a small pair of hands. ... but what did he need you for when he had magic? There had to be some other reason, why would he be so vague instead of asking it outright?

Your hands pause in your hair as an idea passes through you. Perhaps... he was being vague, because there was no favor. A glance outside your window shows the sun is on the verge of setting, and the time made it a good bit past dinner. The “favor” could just mean your company, after the day had quieted and the night made for a more intimate setting. Your stomach flips over itself. The idea consumes you, and you can fathom nothing else. Nothing would be more exciting to imagine. And, after all, it seemed more likely that after all this time you’d spent together, teased each other, touched, and flirted, that your relationship would eventually fall into a less casual arrangement.
Your hands press into your cheeks and you attempt to rub out the blush that forms, but it only exacerbates the rosey, warm glow of your skin. There’s a tiny, upset voice in the back of your mind, scolding you. You’d promised yourself it would never get to this point, that things would always stay casual... safe. But you couldn’t find any regret in your heart, and even that thought didn’t scare you. A dozen pictures float through your mind as you dream about what the night has in store for you, and to what extent Wings is suggesting. His words play over in your mind and the thrill of understanding their carefully veiled meaning sets your affection to dance, and your heart to sigh. You cannot bring yourself to stop.

You concede that whatever the case, you needed a dress change, and you scurried to your closet to pick something. There wasn’t much to choose, and you vye between looking expectant, or playing it coy with something understated. You decide on your floral printed dress and throw on a cream-colored cardigan to keep you warm. With the addition of your hat and a pair of shoes, you try not to look too flushed as you lock your door and flounce down the stairs.

The voice in the back of your mind has quieted, and you assume the little thing has simply given up on trying to keep you safe. You smile at the visage of the townhouse at the far, far end of the park. How could you be safer anywhere else, if not in Wings arms?

As you stand in front of the Gasters door, your heart pounds in your chest, and you have to remind yourself not to seem too eager. You timidly rap the door knocker, hoping it isn’t Sans or Papyrus would open the door, as anyone other than Wings might embarrass you enough to set you straight again. It was better that this meeting was on a need-to-know basis.

Not a moment too long, the knob turns and the door gently pulls in, and Wings reveals himself with a smile. “Hello, my dear,” he croons, and holds out his hand, “I’m glad you could stop by.” His smile looks a little nervous, and it warms your heart. Was he really fretting over inviting you? It was so unusual to see him worked up by anything, and you filled with pride knowing it was because of you. You bring your hand and curl your fingers around his own, rubbing your thumb against the bone of his knuckle.

“Me, too,” you say tenderly, smiling warmly so as to comfort him.
His grin falters into something bashful and he gulps, his gaze flitting around nervously. Your heart aches for him, and you gently squeeze his hand. “What was it that only I can help with?” you ask lowly, and his hand twitches.

“Eh-heh,” the anxious chuckle bubbles out before he can catch it, and he pulls the door open wider with his other hand, his grin seeming to pull too harshly on his face. “It’ll become clear if you step inside, my dear.”

He gently guides you with your hand in his, and you step across the threshold into the warmth of his home. He leads you in front of him and places his hands around your shoulders to lead you on. “It’s just in the living room,” he ensures, and your enthusiasm dims. Why wasn’t he flirting back?

You step through the entryway, and into the living-dining space, where Sans leans casually against the dining table, and Papyrus stands attentively at the foot of the stairs, and...

...In your chest, the air solidifies, as your body tenses when your gaze locks with a handsome pair of pale blue eyes. You feel your eyes glisten as they stretch as wide as saucers, you can’t even move your hands to clench. Your fingers are frozen in place, just as your knees are locked, and your feet have planted into the floor. All at once, your enthusiasm plummets from your heart, into deep dread. It hurts . It hurts so much .

Your arms begin to tremble and a puff of air leaves your lips, as your lungs struggle to remember their basic function. Your mind races, a whiplash of thoughts as it jolts out of shock and into processing.

“Jane,” Edwin whispers, a sadness tipping into his face, “you’re so... thin...”

“How... how did you -” you gasp for words, lost in your unorganized mind, shaking as your arms curl towards your chest to defend yourself. Your eyes blink rapidly, as if he’s just a ghost who’ll disappear if you close your eyes, block it out.

“Mr.Yaeger is here to take you home, my dear,” Wings says softly, and you remember him behind you gripping your shoulders to keep you in place.
Your heart breaks and your breath leaves your chest. *No... no no no*. Your skin crawls where his fingers rest against your shoulder and a shiver crashes over you as you spin out of his grip. You meet his eyes with your own full of betrayal.

“*You...*” you murmur, feeling tears beading up against your lashline. “*You called him. Why? Why would you do that?*” you whimper, your chest heaving from the ache beginning to build.

Wings looks forlorn, and opens his mouth to draw in a breath. But it sticks in his chest, and he grits his teeth and squares his shoulders. You don’t recognize the passivity that settles across his face, and *that*- that scares you beyond anything you’ve seen in this city.

“I have to go,” you murmur quickly, almost to yourself as you jolt for the door.

Wings quickly steps forward and catches you lightly by the shoulders. You shrink into yourself and try to take a step back, but he speaks quickly and softly, trying to calm you. “Now, now, let’s not panic. Mr.Yaeger has come all this way to find you, it’s best to hear him out.”

“Please, let go of me,” you plead, turning your face from him.

Sans pipes up from across the room. “jus’ listen to him for a minute, don’t rush out just yet, miss.”

Edwin stands as you attempt to flee, stepping across the living space. “Jane, let’s just talk, please.”

“We’re just trying to help you,” Wings hums.

“Stop it,” you bite, hands curling into fists, “you, out of all people, should’ve known not to do this. I don’t understand, why? *Why* would you call him?!!”

“I know. I know this is a lot-” Wings starts, holding you as you begin to try and wriggle out of his grasp.

“IT’S BEST TO SIT DOWN,” Papyrus’ voice commands from the stairs.
“don’t be difficult.”

“Jane, listen to me-”

The room is getting too hot, too fast. The arms that you once found comfort in feel claustrophobic, restraining, like the bindings of a marriage proposal you couldn’t escape.

“I said, let go of me!” you grumble, pushing at his arms that cage you, desperate to have the suffocation lifted, to breathe easy again.

“I-” he starts, but you flinch, your desperation mounting as your instincts feel your body's inability to flee, and your hand flies forward to defend yourself, closing your eyes and shrinking into yourself.

“Stop it!” you yelp, and the back of your knuckles strike openly against the plane of his jaw, sounding like a dull thwack. Pain blossoms across your knuckles and he instantly releases you, taking a staggering step back as a hand goes to cradle the source of injury. The look on his face is of utter bewilderment, but you can hardly care over the thunder of your heart, beating in your ears as a drum would. You clutch your throbbing hand and your ribs shakily rise and fall; both ache tenderly.

The room is silent, and Wings is looking somewhat distant, trying to contemplate the impact to his purpling cheek.

“YOU-” Papyrus sputters from across the room, “-YOU JUST HIT MY BROTHER!” he snarls, taking a step forward to seek an equal rebuttal, but Edwin jumps in front of him to shield you.

“Gentlemen, please,” he speaks quickly, then turns to float his hand over your skin, careful not to touch you. “Come on, Jane, I think it’s best we leave.”

“I’m not going anywhere with you,” you whine, a tear spilling over your cheek, as you hug your arms into yourself. “Just go back to California and leave me alone.”

Edgar blinks and his eyebrows dip into frustration. “What?”
“I never asked you to rescue me, you have no right to be here,” you sniffle angrily, refusing to meet his eye.

His jaw slackens and he shakes his head, turning angry. “I have no-?! Are you mental? Jane, honey, what are you doing here?! You know, your parents think you’re dead, right?! This is the first time we’ve heard anything from you in three years! They have been so worried about you, I—”

“I’m doing fine, Edwin! If I wanted to leave, I would’ve done so!” you snarl, hands clenching into fists as you finally set a frigid gaze on him. “What did you even think was going to happen, huh? I left for a reason, you think I’m going to return, just like that?”

He raises his hands and gestures around the room. “Oh, no, you’re right, how idiotic of me. I absolutely figured that you’d want to get out of the ghettos, and filthy streets of a monster city, where whores and drug addicts sleep in rundown apartments, and mobsters make a misery of daily life, and no one can get a job, it seems like such a dream now that I’m here!”

“You are such an asshole,” you grit through your teeth, and turn to leave, but he grabs your arm. It only adds to the fire in your stomach and you yank yourself from his grip as he continues.

“And, I think I deserve to know the reason you left, considering everything I had to go through afterwards,” he growls.

“You wouldn’t understand, Edwin. I’ve tried to help you, and my parents, to see things my way, but none of you ever listened,” you plead.

“No, I deserve to know!” he insists, arms crossing stiffly, and you grit your teeth. You could guarantee he would stand there until he got an answer, and you wanted this over with as quickly as possible. Staying silent would only prompt him to pester you until he received some faint excuse, the unfathomable reason why. You feared his reaction, too. No excuse would be good enough, and for this reason, you were hesitant to provide your answer. Gathering your courage, you push back your reluctance, and force out a tiny reply.

“I wanted to be a writer...” you murmur, fingernails digging into your palms, staring down at your shoes, anticipating the inevitable sneer that would appear across his face. And, though you expected it, it still felt like a dagger through your heart when his eyes rolled and he took a deep sigh, settling his hands on his hips, before laughing mockingly.
“This is about your writing?” he says lowly, and your face settles into beaming red. “You left me the night before our wedding and moved.”

You bury your face in your hands to hide the tears that spill over. “I knew you wouldn’t understand.”

“-to the most dangerous city on the face of this continent, so you could be little miss novela?” he mocks.

You’re exhausted from the energy of this house, you want nothing more than to leave this place behind and cry yourself to sleep on your rock hard mattress. It’s made worse by the fact that all of the skeleton brothers are just watching you and your ex-fiance try to resolve years of questions and arguments in one conversation, but what could you expect them to do? You didn’t want to see their faces, to see what they thought of you. They probably thought you were crazy, like everyone else, for abandoning a life of pure luxury to live in the sludge of the country.

Edwin runs his hand roughly into his hair, gritting his teeth and pulling back his frustration. “Fine. If you want to write, fine. We’ll get back to California, your father can get you some typewriter, and you can write your little stories, like you want.”

“No!” you cry, lifting your face from your hands to glare through glistening lashes, your cheeks red and wet from your tears. “You just don’t understand! Without this, I have nothing!” Edwin opens his mouth to speak, raising a finger, but you cut him off before he can beat you down.

“Writing is the one thing I have! You and your father have the mining company, my father has his own company, and everyone else has something of their own, and what have I made for myself? Nothing! Do you understand how embarrassing that is?! Everything I’ve ever had was given to me, and I don’t feel like I deserve any of it! I hated myself, because all I had going for me was our engagement. And, when I tried to change things, to do something for myself for once, no one ever took me seriously! So, yes, I left! And I’m glad I did, and I’m not going to leave anytime soon!” Your chest heaves, and bud of hope blossoms that he’ll understand you, finally. It was hard to articulate just how you felt, especially while a sudden burst of bravery had clouded your mind. The year after you left, you tried a million times to organize your wild thoughts, but you didn't really understand them at the time, and so had resigned to letting the issue rest until you had settled in the city. Now, years later, you still didn't know how to feel, but you felt like there was so much more you needed to say, and not enough patience to.

He puts a hand in his pocket and the other against his temple, and sighs. “Jane, if someone takes care of you, that's their choice, and you shouldn't feel guilty. You should just be grateful.”
Your jaw drops, and a scoff leaves your throat. Your chest aches and angry tears burn your eyes. It made your fingers curl into your palm. It made your blood run hot. You wonder if a good sucker punch to the gut would help him understand. You jump when Wings’ hand curls gently around your wrist, and your fist loosens in response.

“I think it’s time for you to leave, Edwin,” Wings rasps, standing tall and authoritative.

Edwin sputters, and Wings gestures towards Sans. “My brother will see you to the trolley. I think it’s clear that you’ll be leaving the city alone. Sans, would you, please?”

“Now, wait just a minute!” Edwin hurries to salvage his control, but Sans blinks forward and slaps his hand on the blonde’s shoulder.

“looks like your time is up, pal. tough luck,” he says in a deep, indifferent baritone. Edwin, wide eyed and suddenly frantic, looks to you and speaks rapidly.

“Jane! These guys are crooks, they can't be trusted-” and in a blink, the man and the monster are gone to some other place, and the silence hangs between you and Wings.

His hand encircled around your wrist is suddenly heavy on your mind, and you pull your hand from him. There was one last thing to address before you left here and never looked back. You square your shoulders to Wings, hoping to steadily voice your thoughts, but the words crack as they escape you.

“I r-really thought we-,” you whimper, tripping over your words and wincing. You grit your teeth and will your lip to stop trembling, and as his expression shifts into a pained look, it’s only harder to speak. “You had all my trust, and you abused it to make yourself feel like a hero.”

His face breaks. “No, not at all. I had only good intentions for you,” he says, “this is a wicked city, and I don’t want to see it consume you. I understand why you want to stay, but is it really what’s best for you?”

“That isn’t your decision to make,” you argue, “You overstepped your boundaries, you tried to control my situation, as if you could possibly know what's best for me. I can't understand why you would do this- how you couldn't know that this would hurt me.”
“I wasn’t trying to control you, honestly,” he pleads, his hands curl and uncurl.

“It’s too late for that,” you murmur, then turn for the door. You can’t do this anymore, even though you’re saying goodbye, your heart screams in your chest and yearns to take it all back. You want there to be some perfect thing for him to make it better, but there isn't. There’s only a stinging sense of betrayal, and you don’t know how to smother it. There’s nothing in this moment that he could say to keep you here, in this too warm house where you used to feel safe and happy. Why did you have to pick up the phone?

Your name runs through his lips and he catches your hand, twining a couple of his fingers into yours. “I-I’m... I can make this right,” he hushes, struggling over the words. His eyes plead with you to stay and you want to melt into that look, but...

“It’s too late for that, too,” you whisper, sliding your fingers from him and breaking for the door before you fall apart. He utters your name, unsure of what to say but determined to plead with you, however, you’re already gone, slamming the door behind you and hurrying down the steps. You don’t bother to close the wrought-iron gate behind you, as you can hardly see where you walk behind teary, blurry eyes, and the darkening sky of the city. Your steps are hurried, and you barely contain the flood of tears behind sniffs and gasps. By the time you unlock your apartment, your cheeks are raw from wiping away the wet tracks of your tears, and when your door is chained behind you, it bubbles out until you break into hushed cries.

You shakily kick your shoes off your feet and rip your cardigan off your burning body, all the while, gentle sobs shake your shoulders and fill your eyes with hot tears. You make it to your bed and slump into the mattress, pulling a pillow into your face to muffle your cries.

Chapter End Notes

If you noticed any mistakes, don't be afraid to tell me, so that when I edit this tomorrow, I'll know in advance. Also, I am NOT dead, this story will never be dead, I am filled with PERSEVERANCE to finish this and all the ideas I have for this story. Thank you to everyone so far who has stuck around, given kudos, comments, subscriptions, and all the support on this work, it really means a lot to me as a writer (especially b/c this is just a guilty pleasure fic teehee) it's 2 am now, and this will be edited when I receieve a full 8 hours of sleep. Put some meme's in the comments below so everyone can have some comic relief after all that tension, example:

Janie: it's too late for that, too
End Notes

If you happen to find an error, please let me know so I can fix it :)

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!