Summary

After monsters were freed from Mt Ebott, you are given the responsibility to serve as the social worker to Frisk, their ambassador. While you work on their case, you start to get to know Sans, one of Frisk's guardians.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
When you were a kid, you used to assume that adults were exaggerating when they said they would always remember exactly what they were doing when a world-changing event occurred, regardless of how long ago it was. After all, a lot of them could barely remember what they had for breakfast two days ago when asked. It seemed ridiculous for them to be able to go into such profound details. Plus, it always seemed like nobody was doing something completely normal when the events happened. No one ever says, “yeah, I was probably just at work when it happened, I don’t know”. Every detail, down to the flavour of coffee they were buying at a local coffee shop, was of the utmost importance. From a young age, you vowed to never allow yourself to become one of those adults.

Now, it seems like you are going to have to break that promise.

As these stories usually start, it was just a typical day of work. You woke up, got dressed, had breakfast, grabbed your phone, almost lost your keys and made your way out of the door; nothing noteworthy there. When you got to the office, you started to work through the regular mountain of paperwork.

Now, if you were telling this story to someone in the distant future, this would probably be the time to make a lame joke about how it was the least significant of the mountains you would be seeing that day. Because, of course your brain would decide that this is a detail important enough to take note of.

Anyways, that brings you to now. Outside of the continual clacking of typing and the fwoop of flipping pages, the office is silent. The phones aren’t even ringing, which seems like a first. It is at times like this that you wish you would remember to bring a pair of headphones with you so you could listen to some music. Going over the Morrison case files isn’t exactly what you would call pleasant, so having something to help keep your mind up in a more positive thinking space would be appreciated.

“Turn on the tv!”

You startle at the sudden shout, causing you to accidentally type a whole bunch of gibberish as your fingers smash at random keys. After you erase that, you spin around in your chair and you see Kyle, the intern who mostly works as a receptionist for the agency, running around like a chicken with its head cut off as he looks for a remote.

From a few desks down, someone irritably asks, “What’s the big deal?”

“Just watch!” With that, Kyle finally manages to switch to the local news channel, turning the volume up high.

“Officials say that this strange civilisation, which refers to itself as ‘the Kingdom of Monsters’, emerged from under Mount Ebott yesterday evening through the help of a local eleven year old child. This child, who allegedly goes by the name of Frisk, has been proclaimed as the monster ambassador to humans. Our sources are currently in search for more information, and more coverage will occur as we find out more about what is going on. Back to you, Je—”
Kyle puts the channel on mute, and chaos spreads through the office. How is it that there’s been a hidden kingdom that nobody knew about just a few kilometers outside of Ebott? And in the place that is an assumed suicide hotspot? The reporter mentioned that the people called themselves monsters. Does that mean *monsters* monsters, like Halloween and scary stories, or does monster mean something else in the language used by the civilisation? Some of the other wording would imply *monsters* monsters, such as the fact that this Frisk kid is supposed to be the ambassador to *humans*.

Speaking of Frisk, why does that name sound familiar? It’s not like Frisk is a name that you see a lot, like Emma or Will. In fact, you doubt you’ve ever actually met someone by the name of Frisk. The closest you can think of is Fritz, and that was the name of an exchange student in high school. You have a feeling that this is going to bug you for the rest of the day or until you figure it out, whatever comes first.

The rest of the day, the tv stays on so that nobody can miss out on what’s happening. People coordinate breaks to check social media so that everyone can stay on top of stuff. #Ebott, #Mt Ebott and #monsters, among other tags, are taking over the internet. Kyle agrees to take notes of important details for those who have to leave on house visits or to go to court. In fact, this is the most cooperative everyone has ever been. You should bring that up to the next meeting when they ask for suggestions on how to help the agency run more smoothly as a community of workers: monsters escaping from under a mountain seems to do wonders. You would wish them the best of luck in replicating that scenario.

By the time you make your way home, you have an absurd amount of texts and messages on social media. It seems like anyone outside of Ebott that has ever met you wants you to give them the full scoop on what’s happening. One former classmate even asks you if you’ve gotten to meet any monsters yet. During supper, you end up copy-pasting the same response to almost everyone.

“Hi, it’s nice to hear from you again.” As if any of them would have bothered checking in on you today if it weren’t for the fact that they think you somehow have insider knowledge to the situation.

“I was at work when I found out about it, so I can’t say that I know much.” Honestly, if it weren’t for Kyle, you probably wouldn’t have found out until you received the texts from everyone and their dog.

“All I know is that it’s been confirmed that monsters are real and they have been trapped under Mt Ebott. A local kid was involved in freeing them and is now the ambassador.” Even though you don’t know how they did it, or if they will be allowed to actually serve as a diplomat. Child labour laws are a thing for a reason.

“If you want any more details, try online or with the news.” Because that’s definitely where you got your information and how you confirmed everything that you sent. There are trashy, internationally-based viral content sites that know more than you about the whole situation.

“I’ll try and let you know if I find out anything else.” Most likely not, for most of them. Not only because some of these people haven’t bothered contacting you in years, but also since you simply won’t have the time to give individual updates. You are not going to spend all your free time responding to questions that could be just as easily googled.

With that all taken care of, you disable notifications and get ready for bed. Tomorrow is going to be a long day, and that doesn’t even include the fact that you have at least three home visits to conduct. With all the excitement over what’s happening at the mountain, you know you are going to be drawn into it eventually.
It’s just a matter of when it happens.

Chapter End Notes

I would like to preface this by saying that I am not a social worker, nor do I have any experiences with social services. I am trying to make this as accurate as possible (or at least off of what I can find from the Canadian system), but I admit there could easily be some mistakes that I make. If you find any, please feel free to let me know.

Usually, social service workers have a reputation in Undertale fics for being one of the potential bad guys. It’s understandable, since their role in the narrative is to serve as a source of conflict by creating the fear that Frisk will be taken away from the monsters that have become their family. I wanted to play a bit with this idea, because from the perspective of a social worker, they are just doing their job in making sure that Frisk is safe to be living with these unknown people. Their responsibility is to ensure Frisk's well-being, regardless of how they feel about it.
The Mournful Morning

Chapter Summary

You wake up and have a wonderfully cheery day.

Just kidding.

You actually have to deal with finalising everything for the funeral of your friend and former coworker, Amanda.

Chapter Notes

Just a head's up, I have no plans for an update schedule. At all.

I am very impulsive when it comes to writing, so I can easily go between writing absolutely nothing and non-stop typing. I would hate to tell you guys that I will update at a certain interval, only to not follow through with my word.

So, prepare yourselves for sporadic updates, I guess.

You wake up early — too early, in your opinion — to your phone blaring what used to be your favourite song as an alarm. It is no longer your favourite, mostly because you have started to associate it to waking up after not enough sleep. You silence the alarm and immediately flip back over to sleep until your next alarm goes off. Sleepily, you think to yourself that there is nothing like the satisfaction of knowing you can do that.

Wait a minute.

Crap.

Today is Friday.

You can’t do that today. Not with the meeting at the funeral home that you have to go to before work.

Your mood dampened, you pull yourself out of bed. With all the news yesterday, you had almost completely forgotten that you had the final meeting to finalise arrangements for Amanda’s funeral tomorrow. It is still hard to believe that she entrusted all this responsibility to you. Sure, it makes sense to have someone outside of her family to take care of it; most of her family lives on the other side of the country, even though she had wanted to be buried in Ebott. Out of most of your coworkers, you were also probably the closest to her. Heck, if it weren’t for Amanda, it is hard to say if you would ever have gotten a job at the agency to begin with.

Making sure that your social media notifications are still disabled, you make your way across town to Ebott Funeral Parlour. You don’t think you can deal with all the questions about monsters right
now. It’s not like you’ve learned much yet anyhow. You may not have the healthiest of sleeping habits, but that doesn’t mean that you would stay up gleaning information for various acquaintances. Plus, you doubt there have been too many updates since when you last checked last night. Chances are, the government is going to try and get a handle on the situation before information is passed onto the general public.

You open the door to the funeral home, a small tinkling bell announcing your presence. An older man looks up from his desk at you. “Hello,” he greets with a gentle, professional tone, “Welcome to Ebott Funeral Parlour. How can I help you today?”

“I have a meeting with the director regarding Amanda Jamison’s funeral.”

“Of course. He will be with you in a few minutes. Until then, please feel free to take a seat as you wait.”

You nod, making your way to an ivory floral recliner in the opposite corner of the room. Idly, you pick up one of the coffin catalogues on a nearby table. You have no plans to actually read it, but flipping through its pages might make waiting here feel less awkward.

It is still hard to believe that Amanda is actually gone. Her death wasn’t necessarily unexpected, but you haven’t adjusted to it yet. Although, the fact that she had finally been starting to do better right before she died probably doesn’t help you in your stage of denial. She had even convinced you to make plans for a girl’s night for tonight, complaining that if she had to stay at the hospital for another week without leaving for a while, she would go on a rampage. Even though the mental imagery of your sweet tiny friend, who looked even smaller after months of chemo, causing havoc in the oncology department of the hospital was amusing, you readily agreed. After all, you couldn’t think of the last time she had had enough energy to even want to do something like go out.

It just sucks that you weren’t able to fully honour what you could consider her last wish. On the (not so) bright side, at least she died before the week was through; she would have hated it if she was the one who wasn’t able to keep her end of the deal.

You hear someone call your name, so you put down the magazine. The funeral director, whose name you couldn’t remember to save your life, ushers you to into his office. “Good morning.”

“Good morning,” you reply curtly, trying not to scrunch your nose at the overwhelmingly strong fragrance of roses and lilacs, which fail to cover the lingering scent of formaldehyde and cleaning solution. The sooner you can leave this place and return to work, the better. “Shall we get on with this?”

The director seems slightly startled by your abrupt tone, staring at you in silence for a few seconds before grabbing some paperwork. “Of course, ma’am.”

The more the two of you talk, the more you wonder why you had even bothered with this meeting in the first place. Maybe you just happen to be unusually organised when compared to the average person, but you don’t hear anything you didn’t take note of already; nothing has really changed from the last time you spoke. It’s basically like going over a checklist verbally. Except, the person relaying the checklist chooses to speak at an agonisingly slow pace. You find yourself tapping your fingertips on your knee, slowly starting to lose patience.

After what seems like an eternity, the director hands you a copy of the paperwork and shakes your hand. You are free to leave.

During the drive to work, you decide to flip on the radio for some background noise. To your
dismay, you can’t find a single station that is playing any music you enjoy at the moment, so you settle for a local talk show. Unsurprisingly, the topic at hand is monsters. You tune in during a call-in segment, which means you get the not-so-pleasant experience of listening to uninformed adults broadcasting their opinions to the world.

“The government needs to secure them in one location for the safety of everyone.” Gee, maybe a camp around a mountain would do? Come on lady, in the exception of their monarch and ambassador, who have supposedly already been dragged around to meet with various officials if the internet is to be believed, nobody has been allowed to leave. This is basic information at this point. Do some research.

“Monsters are going to steal our jobs and hurt our children!” Really? Generic racist statements? Monsters haven’t even been here for two days yet.

“Do you think they want to kill us?” Well, considering a young preteen survived under the mountain and is now serving as their ambassador, the logical assumption would be no.

“I wonder if they can have… ‘relationships’ just like humans?”

Okay, that’s enough radio for the day. You did not sign up to listen to people speculating on how monsters reproduce. You don’t even want to know where that conversation may lead.

You are a bit late for work, but you don’t worry about it too much. Your boss is aware that you had to take care of things for the funeral, so you just go straight into the office. At lunch, you will need to remember to remind people of the details so they can be ready. Amanda was one of those people that was just naturally likeable, and her death hit the office hard. More than once, you had walked into the bathroom this week only to hear sniffling from an occupied stall. It goes without question that almost everyone will be in attendance tomorrow morning. Some, such as you, even rescheduled house visits to today so nothing can interfere.

The rest of your day is lousy at best. Ignoring the fact that you are already irritable and generally down in the dumps from your meeting at the funeral home, dealing with your job today puts you in a terrible mood. Two out of three home visits end badly, and you have the responsibility of calling the cops during the second. What kind of idiot decides to shoot up right before a child welfare worker shows up at their door? At least the Mah family seems to be adapting well to their new foster baby. Today is the kind of day where a silver lining, no matter how small, is needed.

Goodness knows you are going to need all the silver linings you can get in the next little bit.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone is curious, you can find my Tumblr [here](https://example.com).

It’s mostly me reblogging Undertale and Deltarune stuff, but if you have any questions or anything you want to talk to me about, you can find me there. Also, I always post links to my work here, so you’ll be able to find out when I actually update from there.

Until next time!
The Frisk Files

Chapter Summary

A few months later, your boss arranges a surprise meeting. You finally figure out why Frisk's name sounds familiar.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Months go by, and life starts to return to normal. Monsters are settling in on the Surface, as they call it, pretty well. As an act of reparation for humans locking them Underground all those centuries ago, the government decides to give monsters the land surrounding Mount Ebott, which had been considered federal property, as their own territory. Without delay, efforts to construct the monster capital begins. Acceptance of monsters seems to increase with the promise of gold to workers who would be willing to assist with creating infrastructure that both accommodates diverse types of monsters while still following human regulations. It is amazing how promises of money can help people be more open minded.

New New Home, as the monster capital is rather unfortunately named, seems to thrive on tourism. With all the media coverage surrounding monsters and their fight for proper citizenship, they seem to be gaining a great deal of popularity. From what you hear, there are even official tours of the Underground, led by various spokespeople (spokesmonsters?). There has also been a recent trend on social media of taking selfies with monsters on the streets. A great deal of them seem to contain a gangly skeleton monster or a rectangular robot with long legs and hot pink boots for some reason. Personally, you think it would feel a bit degrading to be treated as little more than an attraction at a fair, but as long as the monsters involved are fine with it, it’s absolutely none of your business.

As for you, things have been weird since the funeral. For the first few weeks of work, you keep on looking across the room to ask Amanda for advise or to borrow her hole punch (it has always worked far better than your own for some reason, even though both are the same model), only to see an empty desk. Laurene, Amanda’s mother, has been keeping in pretty steady contact with you. Losing her youngest child has been tough on the woman; if she can find comfort in messaging you on occasion, you won’t bring yourself to denying her. Besides, you have a feeling your friend would have been happy knowing that you are both there for each other.

One quiet morning, your boss François calls a surprise meeting. As your coworkers wait around the room for him to arrive, you all share perplexed glances. If there is something that François can’t stand, it would have to be unscheduled anything. The man lives for routine, which is a good thing in his position. With how often people have to off-site for work, it would be a complete nightmare otherwise.

“Hello everyone,” François greets in his mildly accented English, “I hope this wasn’t too much of an inconvenience. I am afraid that I wasn’t given much notice myself.” Pausing to take a sip of coffee from the large travel mug that you have never seen him without, he runs a hand through his thinning hair. You have a sneaking suspicion that he doesn’t want to be here right now.

“Earlier this morning, I got a call from Judge Andrews.” A series of nods of recognition goes around the room like a wave. Judge Andrews is another name that has been going around the news
recently. She has been responsible for a large amount of legal decisions surrounding monster integration, whether for better or worse. Rumour has it that the judge has a bias against monsters, not that any of her rulings seem to indicate one way or the other. “It has been brought to my attention that our agency has not been doing due diligence in the last few months, which is something that needs to change.”

Murmurs of confusion break out. François prides himself on running the agency so that everything is beyond reproach. It seems impossible that anything could have slipped past him. Let alone anything that could have garnered Andrews’ attention.

“Now,” he says, raising his voice above the clamour, “I don’t blame anyone here for what happened. With the recent passing of Miss Jamison, we have all been more occupied than usual.” That’s for sure. Until a new child welfare worker can be found, almost everyone has had to take on an additional case. You were one of the few that didn’t, and that was mostly because you already had so much on your plate. “However, it is my intention to remedy this as soon as possible.”

Placing his coffee on the nearest desk, he picks up a thick folder. “As it turns out, there is one of Miss Jamison’s cases that we have not yet reassigned. Normally, I would select someone to take over, but this case is… unique.” He shows the name on the folder, and when you read it, it is like someone socks you in the stomach.

Frisk.

You knew you recognised their name.

You can remember all the times Amanda would tell you about this sweet kid that just seemed to have the worst luck when it came to finding a family. She used to go on and on about how this kid was remarkably driven in all aspects of their life, no matter what they were going through. If it weren’t for a conflict in professional interest, you wouldn’t have put it past her to adopt Frisk herself.

Your boss continues. “For the last several months, Frisk has been living with a pair of monsters. It seems that they are looking into become the ambassador’s legal guardians.”

That could be a problem. Even though the government has recognised monsters as an indigenous culture, they still aren’t classified as citizens. Maybe the case could be treated as an international adoption?

“Before anyone makes any decisions, it would be best if I gave a brief description of their case. To the best of our knowledge, Frisk, who identifies as non-binary according to Miss Jamison’s notes, was entered into the system at the age of two months. They were found in a baby carrier outside of a church with a note stating their name and basic information. They’ve been in the foster system ever since.” Out of the corner of your eye, you notice Kyle cringe slightly. What could that be about?

“Frisk ran away from their most recent placement in the middle of July this year. The foster parents never reported their disappearance and Miss Jamison never found out as she was unable to make another visit before she died. I’m sure you can piece together what happened to Frisk since.” Considering that the first news report about monsters just so happened to be in the middle of July, it shouldn’t take too many brain cells to put two and two together.

“Due to the nature of this situation, it will be necessary to take some additional security precautions. Judge Andrews has contacted King Asgore for me, and we shall soon be receiving detailed reports about the prospective guardians.
“So, do I have any volunteers?”

François is answered by silence. You consider speaking up, but decide against it. Sure, you may already have an idea what Frisk is like thanks to your conversations with Amanda. Sure, it might be nice for Frisk to be able to deal with someone who knew their former case worker. However, as the facts stand, you don’t think you would be the best person for the job. First of all, you already have a lot of cases to take care of. A few too many for your own good, if you were to be completely honest with yourself. From the way François has been talking, you get the impression that this is going to be a fairly time-consuming case.

If that wasn’t enough of a reason, you have next to no political knowledge; anything that you know about the government tends to be directly related to your work. Chances are, becoming Frisk’s case worker will force you to become involved. After all, you would need to have a solution should things not work out with the monsters that want to become their guardian. You can’t just put an ambassador in a group home. Plus, if that were to happen, how would you arrange things if they needed to leave the country for some reason?

You don’t think you are ready for that kind of responsibility.

“No volunteers? I see.” He quickly scans the room. Like you are back in high school and you don’t want to answer the teacher’s question, you avert your gaze, refusing to make eye contact. In the end, it doesn’t matter: François calls you out by name. “Do you have any objections to working on Frisk’s case?”

Just say yes.  

*Just say yes.*

“I… I guess not.” Crap! Well, you guess you walked straight into that. No turning back now.

“Fantastic. Please meet me in my office right away. As for the rest of you, you’re free to go back to your work.”

The group disbands, and you receive a few comments from coworkers telling you how brave you are. How they don’t think they could be confident enough to work with monsters or their ambassador. How you will be making a difference in history. You just smile politely and nod, thanking them, before leaving to talk with François.

The things you get yourself into for your job.

Chapter End Notes

Well, it looks like work is going to become a bit more interesting. I wonder what could possibly happen?

My Tumblr!
The Cellular Communications

Chapter Summary

You talk with your mom and an old friend. You also are clued into some of the unpleasant ways humans have been treating monsters.

Chapter Notes

Have another random chapter that I had no plans of writing.

Also, I'm starting to regret my decision to make alliterative titles, but now I'm too committed to quit. Coming up with a title was probably the hardest part of this entire chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When you get home from work, the first thing you do is collapse on your couch.

The meeting you had with François? It lasted for almost three hours, not including lunch. Then, right before you were planning on leaving for the day, Kyle tells you that François has been trying to find you. As for why your boss didn’t clue into the fact that when you haven’t been in his office today, you have been at your desk, you will never know. The reason why François had to send the intern looking for you? It turns out Judge Andrews received the reports from King Asgore’s people and forwarded them to François, who printed them all out to give to you. You also doubt you will ever understand why this couldn’t have waited for tomorrow, or why he couldn’t just forward Andrews’ email to you instead.

That’s life, you guess.

Now, the only thing you want to do is rest and eat. Preferably, something quick that doesn’t take much effort. Something that, if you are remembering the contents of your kitchen correctly and how you need to stock up on instant meals, will probably end up being take out. You should probably get up and see if you have any coupons for anything.

…

…

…

Yeah, that can wait. You don’t really feel like getting up for anything right now. Not even food. You may be hungry, but the couch has taken precedence for the moment.

Of course, once you make that decision, your phone, which is in your purse across the room, decides to go off.

“I’m coming,” you groan, rolling onto the floor without a shred of grace. Somehow, you just barely
manage to reach your phone before it goes to voicemail. “Hello?”

“Hi sweetie,” your mom chirps cheerily. “I was just wanting to call to see how things are going.”

“Fine.” Well, relatively speaking, of course. However, it isn’t exactly like you can go into details with her about what is all happening at work right now. “How about for you and Dad?”

“Just the same old. Oh, did I tell you that he’s working on renovating the downstairs bathroom again?”

“No, but it’s about time.”

You mom chuckles. “You’re telling me. Do you remember when he finally built a real door for it instead of that silly curtain?”

“Oh, did I tell you that he’s working on renovating the downstairs bathroom again?”

“No, but it’s about time.”

You mom chuckles. “You’re telling me. Do you remember when he finally built a real door for it instead of that silly curtain?”

“Of course! How could I not?”

“True… Have you made any new friends as of late?”

So much for her earlier statement of ‘just wanting to see how things are going’. You barely manage to suppress an overly dramatic sigh. How many times must you go over this with her? “Mom, I know you’re worried and all that, but my social life is really none of your concern.”

“It’s just that after your friend’s death, you’ve seen so —”

“All right, I’m going to stop you right there.” You are not going to let her bring that up as an excuse to fret over you unnecessarily. “Things have been kind of crazy these past few months. Between dealing with the funeral, work and monsters appearing and everything else, I’ve just been kind of busy. But I swear, I’m not a complete hermit. I see more of the world than my house and the office.”

This time, it is her who lets out a sigh. “Like the grocery store and the houses you visit for your job?”

“Don’t forget the gas station,” you add jokingly.

“Of course. How could I ever forget that?” And to think that you have questioned how you grew up to be such a snarky adult. Clearly, it is hereditary.

“Anyways,” you say, wanting to move past this conversation, “is there anything else you’d like to tell me? I was kind of hoping to order some pizza or something.”

“No, I’ll let you get to it. Goodnight dear.”

“Goodnight Mom. Love you.”

“Love you too.” She hangs up before you. Now that you are no longer on the couch, you decide to look around for any coupons you may have gotten in the mail. Even though you wouldn’t say that you order out super frequently, you always keep your coupons, just in case. You decide on a place and go straight to their website to order. Thinking ahead, you add some more food to your list so you can have leftovers for the next little bit. With that done, you head over to your bedroom to change into some comfier clothes. You return to the livingroom to wait, popping into the kitchen along the way to grab yourself a drink.

A few minutes later, your phone goes off again. Hoping that it’s an update on the arrival time for
your food, you lean over and grab it. Instead, you find a text from an old university study buddy.

Ivy: Hey, have you checked the news recently?

You: Define recently

Ivy: Last 8 hours

You: No, why?

Ivy: New stuff with monster rights

Ivy: People outside of the area found out about the no monster service thing that some of the local businesses have

Ivy: It’s basically segregation all over again, you know?

Ivy: There’s been massive protests and stuff at the capital for the past several hours

Ivy: Isn’t that crazy?

Before you respond, you decide to check up on this yourself. Sure enough, there are live news feeds showing masses of people with signs. A lot of the signs showcase the symbol of the monster monarchy, but with the circle in the middle being replaced by a peace sign. You also see large print-outs of some of the pictures taken right after the arrival of monsters, with King Asgore shaking your mayor's hand. Surprisingly, you spot a handful of anti-monster protestors there as well. They must be insane, trying to push against peaceful activists.

You: Impressive how quickly that news spread. I didn’t even know that anti-monster establishments existed

Ivy: Have you been living under a rock? They're everywhere!
Ivy: I can’t even go to my favourite coffee place anymore because the owner put up one of the anti-monster stickers

Ivy: You know that they basically brought me through university with their cold brew

You: I guess none of the places I go to in my area have done that yet

Would you even notice if they did, though? It’s not like you have been actively looking stuff up about monsters. Well, you will be now, but that’s only because of work and it will most likely only involve looking into their culture. For all you know, you could be frequenting a place like that on a daily basis without knowing. Ivy did say something about a sticker. It’s probably worth a minute of your time to look it up so you can know for the future.

Ivy: That’s pretty lucky. Might give me an excuse to visit you in person for a bit too

You: That would be nice. It’s been awhile

Ivy: No kidding. Ever since Libbie was born, I feel like I hardly get out anymore

Ivy: Speaking of, she needs to be fed again. See you soon, hopefully

You: See you

Just as you press send, a knock at the door alerts you that your food is finally here. You fumble around for a few seconds before finding your wallet to pay. A young delivery man, college aged if you were to hazard a guess, tiredly hands over your meal and the debit machine to pay. Before he leaves, you also throw in a ten dollar bill as a tip, smiling as his face brightens.

Settling back onto the couch, you chow down and continue reading the news feed that is still on your phone. Someone from the government has been cited as saying that officials are going to be investigating the claims of segregation more thoroughly. Of course, that statement doesn’t necessarily mean much for now; depending on the government’s priorities and pressure from voters, an investigation could take months or even years. Interestingly, you note that the article doesn’t mention any monster perspectives on the situation. Perhaps with the busyness of the protests, they haven’t gotten to sending a reporter to New New Home to ask for some opinions
from those who are actually affected by businesses refusing to serve monsters.

Eyes starting to tire, you decide to scan through the rest. You stop near the bottom of the webpage when you see a bolded title: ‘Businesses Confirmed to Refuse Monster Customers’. You feel a pit in your stomach, recognising many place names, some with asterisks. Like Ivy mentioned, her (former) favourite cafe is on the list. The last place on the list is the place you ordered from tonight. Beside it, you notice an asterisk. With one more scroll, you find the explanation for the little star.

‘*Reports of physical violence against monsters at this location.’

You drop your food mid-bite upon reading that.

You can’t bring yourself to eat any of the rest of it.

Chapter End Notes

My Tumblr! Feel free to visit at any time.
Chapter Summary

You meet Frisk's guardians for the first time. It could go better.

Chapter Notes

Finally!

I actually finished writing this chapter before chapter 4 was a thing and I've been wanting to post it for a while.

The day has finally come.

Sure, it has barely been a week since you “volunteered” to take care of Frisk’s case, although with the amount of work you have had to get done, it might as well have been a couple of months. Until further notice, some of your other cases have been transferred over to your coworkers. You feel bad for adding to their workload, but what else can you do? The pressure is on; should anything go wrong with Frisk because of their family situation, there is a great possibility of international scandal involving your agency. Even though Frisk’s safety is the important thing at the end of the day, you still would rather avoid causing problems for your coworkers.

What really makes life difficult for you is the fact that you are disturbingly and unprecedentedly uninformed about the potential guardians. Apparently, certain documents which are commonplace for humans to have, such as financial records, criminal background checks and even basic identification cards, were practically non-existent in the Underground. As it so happens, that kind of paperwork is unnecessary for a low population confined to a relatively small living space. Or at least, unnecessary when compared to humans living on the Surface. Luckily, both of the monsters in question had what you would compare to government positions before the Barrier broke, so you at least have some information about the pair. Nowhere near enough, but some is always better than nothing, you guess.

On the plus side, if they were able to work jobs that gave them ties to King Asgore, you can assume that they are somewhat trustworthy.

Then again, you know what people say happens when you assume.

Before you leave for New New Home — seriously, who is the monster responsible for naming it that? — you decide to make yourself a quick list of special questions to add to what you would normally ask during a first home visit. Specifically, how they do they plan on balancing Frisk’s childhood and human heritage with their ambassadorial role and monster community. Even though the rest of the world doesn’t seem to object to Frisk representing a previously unknown nation, you can’t help but worry how that kind of pressure will affect the kid. Because, once you put aside the fact that they somehow freed monsters from the Underground, that’s exactly what they are: a kid.
No matter how mature they seem, no matter how eloquently they can speak, no matter how many legislative decisions they assist in making, they are just a young child. When you were their age, the most stressful things you had to deal with were tests at school, music recitals and sports tournaments. Practically nothing when compared to the stress of knowing that an entire people is depending on you.

Considering that New New Home is too, well, new for you to use your GPS to help navigate, you find Frisk’s current residence rather easily. What first stands out to you is how it is decorated. Now, unless a building looks like it is one stiff breeze from collapsing on itself, or it displays some other type of safety hazard, you tend not to think too much of how people choose to do up their houses. Choices in paint colour and lawn ornaments really have no impact on a person’s ability to act as a parent. The worst it can mean is that they should be questioning whether or not they need glasses. As for seasonal decorations, usually there is a good reason for people to have them up at weird points in the year. Maybe they lost whatever equipment they need to take them down. Maybe they feel like doing it as a joke, like Christmas in July. Most likely, they just haven’t gotten the opportunity to take the time and remove all of them, meaning the decorations stay up longer than intended.

However, you have no idea which one of these cases it could be for this house.

Construction of residential areas didn’t start until nearly August, so it’s not like you could say that perhaps the decorations came from previous tenants; to your knowledge, there wouldn’t be any. So why are there Christmas lights all over the place? Or a wreath on the door? And… is that fake snow covering the roof? What else could it be? It is still autumn, for goodness sake! How is there snow?

“Not important,” you remind yourself, muttering under your breath as you prepare to ring the doorbell. You straighten up, forcing a polite smile. You cannot allow yourself to act abnormally just because you are dealing with monsters and their ambassador. Officially, this is no different than any other case. You have to remember that.

“COULD YOU PLEASE GET THAT?” Someone yells across the house, helping make your smile a touch more genuine. See, this is normal.

The door opens. Behind it, a small monster reminiscent of a skeleton stares at you. “Hello, my name is —”

Boom!

What the heck? Did they just slam the door on you?

Counting to ten, you recollect yourself and think this through. Maybe the skeleton was expecting someone else? Sure, you called earlier to remind the potential guardians that you would be visiting at this time, but perhaps the monster that opened the door is not aware of that? They were pretty small, and wearing slippers, a hoodie and basketball shorts; they could easily be a kid themself. It would explain why they didn’t let you in: you are a stranger, and a human at that. Although, you do not recall any of the paperwork mentioning another child living here.

Wait a minute. Didn’t you read on the official monster website (because of course that is a thing) that monster children are always dressed in stripes because it can be hard to differentiate ages between certain types of monsters? You may have only seen them for a few seconds, but you can confidently say that you only saw solid prints without a single stripe or other pattern in sight.

You double check house’s address and confirm that you are indeed at the correct location. Just
before you ring a second time, you hear a new voice. “this is new,” the voice mumbles, and barely a second later, the door reopens. It’s still the small skeleton, grinning wider than you are. You open your mouth to reattempt introducing yourself, but they cut you off. “you the social services lady?”

“Yes, I am.”

“frisk said to expect a woman with really short red hair.” You aren’t the human I was expecting is clearly what the monster means by that.

Hoping that your expression doesn’t falter at the thought of your friend, you nod. “Yes, that would have been Amanda Jamison, Frisk’s former case worker.”

“former?”

“She unfortunately passed away a few months back. I’m here as her replacement.”

“i see.” Despite the fact that neither their expression or tone changed, you can’t help but feel a chill run down your spine at the statement. You stand awkwardly on the porch, still being stared at by the skeleton. Finally, they offer a hand. “i’m sans, one of frisk’s uncles. nice to meet you.”

You raise a brow briefly at how Sans described his relation to Frisk before accepting the handshake. The two of you hold hands in silence for a moment, and you start to wonder if you are expected to initiate the actual motions of the handshake. Sans blinks suddenly, which is weird enough on its own since you weren’t prepared for the sight of bone sliding over empty sockets like eyelids would on a human, and he gives your hand a small jerk up and down before letting it go. Without a word, he gestures for you to come inside.

“SANS, WHAT COULD POSSIBLY BE TAKING YOU SO LONG? WAS IT ONE OF THE TEENS FROM SNOWDIN PLAYING THAT RING AND RUN GAME AGAIN?”

“It’s called ding dong dash, paps. and nah, it’s just the social worker.”

Another skeleton turns around the corner. You can’t quite put your finger on it, but you know you’ve seen… wait, isn’t that the skeleton in all the selfies? While you were busy piecing this knowledge together, you fail to notice the tall monster reaching around you until you are already being slowly squeezed to death in midair.

“You must be miss social worker! I, the great papyrus, monster mascot extraordinaire, am so glad to make your acquaintance! How was your drive here? I do hope you didn’t get lost. The surface is so big, so I wouldn’t hold it against you if —”

Mercifully, Sans comes to your aid before your lungs collapse completely. “uh, bro, i think you should stop hugging her. she’s startin’ to turn blue.”

Suddenly, you can feel the air rush back to your system as his grip loosens. You are now eye-level with Papyrus, who is holding you under the arms like you are a cat. He examines you carefully, before bursting into an ear-bursting apology. “Oh dear, I am so sorry. I guess I was a bit too eager to meet another one of frisk’s human friends.”

“about that…”

“Sir, do you think you could please put me down?” You will have to try and find more information about monster cultural practices. Are hugs customary greetings, or does Papyrus simply have no concept of boundaries?
“SORRY.”

“No harm done. May I ask where Frisk is?”

“They’re in the kitchen finishing their homework,” Sans supplies with that constant grin, although the answer seems rehearsed. Now that you think about it, it’s almost uncomfortable how his smile hasn’t changed at all. Even when he first opened the door, it was plastered on his face. You’ve seen people show more expressions while wearing actual masks. It’s almost disconcerting how good he is at that.

Then again, it could just as likely be that his smile is just a feature of his skull, no different than having a freckle or dimples. You don’t know how monster biology works.

“MISS SOCIAL WORKER, ALLOW ME TO SHOW YOU SCENIC OUR HOUSE! AND SANS, WHILE YOU ARE STANDING OVER HERE, DO NOT FORGET TO FEED ROCKY.”

You glance around the entryway, expecting there to be some sort of small animal scurrying around. Try as you might, all you can see is a small table with a plain grey rock surrounded by sprinkles. You can’t even see a food bowl that would indicate to a pet. Just the rock.

Wait a minute.

Rocky? As in…

But how do you feed it? And why sprinkles? Is this some sort of monster thing that you don’t understand? *Who names a pet rock Rocky?*

Not wanting to think about that anymore, you follow Papyrus, who is already going into a bizarre amount of details about various items in the house. Sans sticks to staying behind you, and you swear you can feel his eyes — or eye sockets, you guess — watching your every move.

For some reason, it is getting harder to remember that this is no different than any other case.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone was curious, when Sans went for the handshake, he forgot that Papyrus had taken all his whoopee cushions hostage so he wouldn’t be able to give his classic greeting.

*My Tumblr!* Come over and say hi at anytime!
Chapter Summary

The home visit continues and you encounter a problem that could force you to find Frisk a new home.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

One of the first things you note about the house itself is that it is spotless. It is almost like an expensive showhouse, with nothing out of place. Actually, that isn’t exactly true; you think you saw something small on the floor near the tv when you were taken through the living room. It almost looked like a sock with some sort of small paper on it. The existence of the mystery object, especially when paired with the pet rock, is reassuring, however; it would indicate that the skeletons are just nervous about the visit and wanted to make a good impression on you. Many first-timers do the same thing.

“AND FOR OUR FINAL STOP, HERE IS THE KITCHEN,” Papyrus announces cheerfully. “HERE, YOU CAN FIND VARIOUS FOOD-MAKING APPLIANCES. CURRENTLY, YOU CAN ALSO FIND FRISK.”

Upon hearing their name, Frisk looks up and gives you a small wave, tapping a pencil on the table with their other hand. Their face quickly scrunches up in confusion. “Who’s this?”

Before you can greet them yourself, Sans, who hasn’t said anything save for the odd pun during the tour, speaks up. “it’s your new social worker.”

“What happened to Miss Manda?” The tapping stops, an expression of realisation blooming on their face. “Was it the cancer again?”

You nod somberly. “I’m sorry.”

“Did you know her?”

“Yes.” A lump builds in your throat. Trying to change the subject before you lose control of your emotions, you ask, “What homework are you working on?”

“Math,” they reply in disgust with a crinkling of their nose. That response answers what would have been your next question; clearly, they do not enjoy the subject. Sans looks over Frisk’s shoulder at their work — wait, when did he get across the room? — and ruffles their hair.

“not bad kiddo. you’ll be able to decimal-ate your worksheets in no time.”

Papyrus groans at the pun, a reaction you are very tempted to copy. “MISS SOCIAL WORKER, PLEASE TAKE A SEAT AT THE TABLE SO WE CAN TALK AND YOU CAN ENJOY MY VERY SPECIAL SPAGHETTI.”

“Thank you,” you say, pulling out a chair. Then, the rest of his sentence clicks. “Spaghetti?”
“OF COURSE! WHAT KIND OF HOST WOULD I BE IF I DID NOT OFFER YOU ANY?”

You bite the inside of your cheek. Normally, you don’t accept food during house visits. It is actually fairly frowned upon in social work, as your goal is to keep things as professional as possible. However, there is also the matter of cultural sensitivity. For all you know, it could be a grave insult to refuse the offer of food. There are cultures like that, after all. You could ask, but you also don’t want to come across as an ignorant human. Maybe, the best decision for today would be to just roll with it.

A large bowl is presented to you and you cannot believe your eyes. Is this really spaghetti? You have seen (and as a child, eaten) playdough food that looks and smells more appetizing! Some of the noodles are burnt, but other sections are just a mushy paste. The sauce isn’t as much of a marinara as it is squished raw vegetables. There is also half a carrot impaled inside a meat… shape that is not quite a ball, almost like a strange food recreation of Excalibur. Bewildered, you stare at Frisk, then Sans, but neither of them visibly react to the bizarre creation placed in front of you.

“MISS SOCIAL WORKER, HAS MY WONDERFUL PASTA ALREADY RENDERED YOU SPEECHLESS IN AWE AND WONDER BEFORE TASTING IT?”

Speechless, yes, but you aren’t sure about the awe and wonder part. Or the wonderful part. Also… “Are those… sequins?” Please, let your eyes be playing tricks on you. Let it just be weirdly shiny vegetables cut into tiny disks, or something equally as harmless.

“OF COURSE! THEY’RE MTT BRAND TOO!”

You poke at a sequin with your fork, bringing it up to your finger to touch. Maybe it’s just like edible glitter? Nope, definitely not. That is without a doubt a cheap craft sequin, made of plastic and everything.

To think that everything had been going relatively well so far.

Voice cold and harsh, you question the skeleton that has been beaming at you in anticipation for a response. “Do you normally make your spaghetti with sequins?”

“NO, THIS IS A NEW RECIPE. ON METTATON’S LATEST —”

You refuse to allow him to continue. “Are you aware that humans are incapable of eating sequins?”

“No, but these are MTT —”

“That doesn’t matter! Had you fed this to me or to Frisk, you could have put our lives in danger. In fact, I could and should write you up for negligence in your duties as Frisk’s guardian. This is more than reason enough to remove them from your custody.”

“Oh,” he murmurs, his expression turning right into that of a kicked puppy, any air of confidence gone down the drain. Deep, deep down, a small part of you, which you had thought was destroyed after years of working in the system, hurts seeing this. You refuse to let the feeling get the better of you, of course; it had to be said, for Frisk’s sake. “WHAT IF I TOOK THE SEQUINS OUT?”

“The damage is already done. And that’s providing there was nothing else detrimental with the spaghetti to begin with. It certainly doesn’t look fit for human consumption.”

The room goes silent at your harsh words and you can feel Sans glowering at you without needing to look. Ignoring the tense heaviness in the air, you address Frisk and Sans. “Please enlighten me as to what kinds of foods Frisk has been receiving while in your care.” Perhaps this situation can be
rectified if Papyrus hasn’t been in charge of all the meals.

Frisk answers, allowing you to turn your attention away from Sans’ empty-socketed glare. “Mom cooks for us a lot, and sometimes Sans takes me to Grillby’s for burgers.”

Mom? Who does the ambassador feel close enough to consider call their mother? And a better question, why would Sans and Papyrus be the ones seeking to adopt if Frisk has such a maternal figure among monsters?

“the kid means toriel,” Sans clarifies, a tinge of irritation present in his voice, which you choose to overlook for the time-being. Toriel, as in the queen? You will need to look into this further.

“Does Toriel have any knowledge in human dietary needs?”

“yep.” You wave your hand in the air, a silent request for more details, but Sans just keeps smiling at you. Although, unless your eyes are tricking you, the corners of his mouth seem to be twitching a bit.

Well, as long as Frisk is getting proper food somewhere, you might be able to let this pass (for now). “I see. I have some more questions to ask.”

Today, you decide to focalise on getting to know the skeleton brothers. Unsurprisingly, Papyrus does most of the talking. You find that when you specifically ask Sans to answer a question, he sticks to blunt, one word answers. You don’t notice any more puns from him either. Frisk occasionally pops in, excitedly telling you about what life on the Surface has brought them.

Papyrus, as it turns out, really is the official mascot of monsterkind. When you inquire into what that entails, you find out that he is essentially a secondary ambassador. He tends to work a bit more with the sharing of cultural information than Frisk, assisting some of King Asgore’s PR people. He also spends time volunteering with the construction of new regions in New New Home. Back in the Underground when he was training for the Royal Guard, which as you understand it is kind of like a blend between the military and the police, he used to work on a lot of puzzles. Some of those skills transferred over nicely for construction projects.

The more he talks, the more that earlier feeling of hurt begins to rise up. It’s obvious that Papyrus is a wonderful person and that he loves Frisk. If you had to remove Frisk from his and his brother’s custody, it would wreck him. Emotionally, it would probably also wreck Frisk. Unfortunately, in the end, what matters most is his ability to take care of Frisk. If there is any doubt from you, you have no choice to find Frisk a better home. Of course, this is only the first visit; he still has a chance.

Sans is harder for you to read, and not only because of the vague answers he provides. You learn that he works multiple odd jobs, some better than others. He refuses to list all of them, which is weirdly suspicious. That will need to be something you have to try and learn more about some other time. From before he started acting strangely, you figured out that he has a fondness for puns, possibly because it drives Papyrus crazy. Typical sibling stuff. He is definitely protective of Frisk. When he went to sit down at the table, he made sure he was between you and them. He was quick to question your claim of being Frisk’s case worker when it went against previous knowledge. It occurs to you that he is probably so cold towards you because he suspects you want to take Frisk away. Nothing new in your line of work, really. He wouldn’t be the first guardian to be hostile towards you for that reason, nor will he be the last.

“Well, this should be all for today.” You stand up and the skeletons soon follow suit. Frisk had wandered off to the living room about half an hour ago to play some video games, although it
wouldn’t surprise you if they were listening to your conversation. “Thank you for your time and for allowing me into your home.”

“what’s the verdict?”

You are thrown off by Sans’ sudden question. “I’m sorry?”

“does frisk get to stay or not?”

With a pleasant smile perfected from years of working retail, you start to go over your regular spiel. “For now, yes. Although there are some things that will most definitely need to change, namely the quality of food that Frisk receives, given the unusual circumstances of this case and the fact that Frisk seems to be happy and healthy, I don't see the need to take immediate action. I will be back in a week from today to conduct another house visit. During that time, I would highly suggest that you work on the food situation. Also, until more progress is made with your citizenship, I would recommend continuing frequent visitations. In my opinion, it will help your case.”

“OF COURSE MISS SOCIAL WORKER! I WILL TAKE YOUR CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM IN MIND.”

Constructive criticism is probably the most positive way you have ever heard someone describe your concerns. “Good.”

“AND DO NOT WORRY! BY THE TIME YOU RETURN, I WILL HAVE IMPROVED MY CULINARY SKILLS TO MAKE YOU AND FRISK THE PERFECT SPAGHETTI!”

You just continue to smile, making your way out the door. “I’m sure you will.”

For Frisk’s sake, he had better.

Chapter End Notes

Not gonna lie, I went easier on Papyrus’ spaghetti than I was originally going to because it hurt to write.

Also, how would you guys feel about a Sans POV chapter? I've got one partially written, but it needs a lot of work. If preferred, I could put any alternative POVs into a sidefic instead of having them in here. Please feel free to share your thoughts and opinions.

My Tumblr!
Enigma

Chapter Summary

Sans thinks over the social worker's visit and its impacts.

Chapter Notes

Here's the Sans POV chapter, as promised. This is brought to you by a mild case of food poisoning, minor insomnia and major stress writing! Have fun guys!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With you gone, Sans collapses onto the couch to think. This afternoon was nothing like he expected. From the very moment you showed up on his doorstep, dressed in a dark grey suit and holding a matching clipboard folder, he knew that something was wrong.

Of course, in some ways, he should have expected it; ever since the kid told Tori that they had "places to go" when she asked if they wanted to stay with her, this timeline has been off. Nothing like the good old butterfly effect kicking in because of an eleven year old's decisions, after all. Frisk has been meticulous, one could say, when it comes to messing with variables each time they make it to the Surface. In some ways, Sans can't help but think that the kid would make a stellar scientist one day because of it. Not that he should be encouraging Frisk to experiment more, though. It's bad enough the amount of notes he has to sift through in his lab, which thanks to some sort of universal fluke remains untouched by timeline shenanigans. He honestly doesn't know how he would even manage getting through it all if it weren't for his personal shorthand; there's a metric crap-ton of stuff there (which according to Sans' standards, is at least thirty times more than a metric skeleton).

Based on his notes, which Frisk has confirmed as being accurate, this is the only time they refused to stay with Toriel. When Sans asked why, they didn't give an explanation, sticking to the strategy of giving him puppy eyes until he agreed to let them stay with him and Paps. He allowed it, obviously. If the kid with the powers to change history and go back in time on a whim is asking to be put in a position where Sans can keep a closer eye socket on them, who is he to complain?

To get back on topic, Sans had a bad feeling about the visit when it wasn't Amanda who showed up at his door. Now, he may not have known the tiny redhead that well in the past, but her rich emerald Soul spoke pretty well for itself. You, on the other hand, are completely unknown to him, something which becomes more and more rare with the frequency that Frisk Resets. Once he got over his initial shock of seeing the wrong human at his door, Sans made it his mission to figure out the probability of you taking away Frisk on purpose.

Naturally, that meant the first thing he did after confirming your identity was to Check you. To Sans' irritation, nothing about your Soul serves as a good indicator for him to work with. HP, ATK and DEF are pretty average for a human adult, even if your DEF is at the lower end of the scale. LV 1 and EXP 0; it is nice to know that you aren't some sort of murderer, but Sans is pretty sure
you wouldn’t have been allowed to work with kids if you were, so that isn’t particularly helpful either. Your Soul colour has a bit of fading around the edges that looks pretty recent, and he can’t find too much corruption of your primary trait.

Speaking of your primary trait, until he knows a bit more of you as a person, the lemony hue of your Soul could either be a very good thing or a very bad thing for Frisk. Throughout his years as Asgore’s Judge and brief times on the Surface, Sans has figured out that justice is a lot more subjective than it should be. There are always variables which blur the line between right and wrong. Even if all of monsterkind were to think that the fair thing to do would be letting Frisk live with whoever they want, it doesn’t matter if you aren’t of the same opinion.

A tapping on his shoulder brings Sans out of his thought process. “oh, hey kiddo. what’s up?”

Frisk holds a finger to their lips, tilting their head to the kitchen where Papyrus is looking up some cooking videos. “Legendary fartmaster stuff,” they whisper.

“... i see. wanna go upstairs and talk for a bit?”

Frisk nods, already running their way up the stairs. Stars, it is a good thing that Papyrus has more than enough energy to keep up after the kid. Sans doesn’t know how he would deal with it on his own. Not well, probably.

“SANS!” Papyrus calls from the kitchen, “DID YOU KNOW THAT HUMANS ALLOW THEIR SAUCE TO COOK SLOWLY OVER LOW HEAT? THEY CALL THIS TECHNIQUE ‘SIMMERING.’”

“huh, sounds in-simmer-esting.”

Sans hears frustrated stomping and can’t help but snicker at imagining the horrified expression on Papyrus’ skull. “BROTHER, THAT WAS POOR, EVEN FOR YOU.”

“eh, what can i say? it can get a bit tough to cook up perfect puns at every occasion. anyways, me and frisk are gonna be upstairs for a bit. try not to set the kitchen on fire, ‘kay?”

“FOR THE ANGEL’S SAKE, IT WAS JUST THOSE TWO TIMES! AND I WASN’T EVEN THERE LAST TIME UNDYNE SET HER HOUSE ON FIRE! THAT WAS ALL HER AND FRISK!”

Still two times too many, Sans thinks to himself as he shortcuts upstairs. Frisk is sitting cross-legged on their bed, hugging a bright yellow pillow to their chest. “so, whatcha think ‘bout the new lady? i’m assuming that’s what we’re talking about.”

“Yeah,” Frisk says, scooching over so he can also sit down on the bed. “She really bugged you, didn’t she?”

“gee, what gave you that impression?”

“Sans,” they sigh exasperatedly, making them sound much older than their barely twelve years. Then again, how old would the kid even be if past timelines were taken into account? Sans doesn’t really want to think about that. “Don’t you think I can tell these things by now? Your eye lights kept disappearing and you looked like you were half a second away from dunking her for most of the visit.”

Yeah, that might have been the case. That doesn’t mean that he is going to fess up to it, though. “have you ever met her before?”
Frisk shakes their head. “Even in the timelines Miss Amanda died, it was always after she had started helping me and Mom out. And by the time the agency got to sending someone new, it was usually too late.”

Frisk doesn’t need to elaborate. Usually, Amanda was the only thing preventing Frisk from being taken away from Tori. And when Frisk was taken away from Toriel… well, let’s just say that Sans doesn’t blame the kid for Resetting and sending monsters back Underground.

“well, it looks like we’re going into this one blind, huh?”

“Yeah.”

The two of them sit in silence. After a little bit, Frisk starts sniffing, getting up from the bed and heading towards the hall. Sans meanders after them, soon realising what caught their attention: a mouth-watering aroma coming from the kitchen.

“hey pap,” Sans shouts as he makes his way down with Frisk, “how’s it going in there?”

“EXCELLENT! EVEN THOUGH THESE HUMAN METHODS OF SPAGHETTI MAKING ARE VERY DIFFERENT FROM HOW UNDYNE TAUGHT ME, THEY SEEM TO BE WORKING OUT VERY WELL. MY LATEST MASTERPIECE SHOULD BE READY TO EAT IN ABOUT TEN MINUTES.”

“can’t wait, bro.” Huh. Who knew that Papyrus would be able to pick up some better cooking skills so quickly? Admittedly, when you had went after his brother for his cooking, Sans was pissed, to put it mildly. Sure, some of what you said might have been true, even though he thinks you could have said it a lot better. Paps looked close to crying at your rebukes, and the last time that his baby bro had gotten teary-eyed was when Frisk wouldn’t wake up after the Barrier broke. If making Papyrus feel awful about his spaghetti, one of his passions in life, wasn’t bad enough, then you had to go and make things even worse by threatening to take Frisk away. At that moment, Sans saw red. But now, if the smell is any indication, he might have to let that go.

That doesn’t mean that he is going to start trusting you yet, though.

Chances are, trust is something that won’t be happening anytime soon.

Chapter End Notes

Well, here you guys go! Maybe now that this is out of my mind, I will actually be productive (probably not, but I can dream, right?).

As always, please feel free to let me know if you find any typos and/or weird formatting stuff.

My Tumblr!
The Deskside Discrimination

Chapter Summary

Your coworkers have some questions for you. You also make plans for the weekend.

Chapter Notes

Before we get into this chapter, I would just like to thank each and every one of you for reading this. It completely blows my mind when I see all your comments and kudos and everything. I hope that you all continue to enjoy reading this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So, what’s it like?”

“I’m sorry?” Glancing up from a half-finished report, you find Marianne, one of the old-timers of the agency, hovering over your desk. In your peripheral, you notice that many of your other coworkers are slowly herding towards you. It is slightly disconcerting having everyone approach you like you are an animal at an exhibit. Unlike a zoo animal, however, you have no place to hide.

“The Frisk case. Working with monsters. What’s it like?”

You shrug, saving your document. You have a funny feeling you aren’t going to be able to get back to work for a while. “I mean, in some ways, it’s not really different than any other case. There’s been some… cultural confusion, but other than that, it’s fine.”

“Have they used any magic on you?” Simon pops in, pushing his glasses up his nose. “I heard that monsters can do all sorts of crazy sh—”

“Language,” scolds Marianne.

“Oh please, we aren’t around any children right now. There’s no need to censor.”

Marianne huffs in displeasure. “It’s a matter of professionalism.”

“Whatever. But seriously, have you seen any magic?”

“No. Like I said, it’s all been pretty normal.”

“What kind of monsters are the guardians? Are they some of those weird jello slime things?”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” someone else adds in, “how could a slime take care of a kid?”

“Perfectly well, I imagine,” you mutter through your teeth. It’s too early for this. You decide that it would probably be best to answer the question before someone spouts something else insulting. “The guardians are both skeleton monsters.”
Marianne gasps, covering her mouth with a manicured hand. “Skeletons, as in dead bones skeletons?”

Ugh, why are you getting retail flashbacks? Probably because of the tone of voice you have to use while responding to her ignorant questions. “I can assure you, they are both very much alive. Now, if you all don’t mind, I should be getting back to work.” As should all of you, you tack on mentally.

Everyone returns to their desks, some of them grumbling about the fact that you won’t answer any of their questions. Too bad for them; it is really none of their business in the first place. How would *they* feel if they were bombarded by questions about a case? Just because Frisk is the ambassador and all that, it doesn’t mean that any of them have the right to be intruding. Also, even if you are the only person in the room that has met a monster, it doesn’t mean that you should be responsible to answer all their questions. New New Home has been open to the general human population for weeks now! If they are all so curious, there is nothing stopping them from driving ten minutes out of town to find out themselves.

This interaction sits at the back of your mind for the rest of the day. The more you process it, the more upset you become. Not only were your coworkers being rude when they interrupted you to demand answers about a case that doesn’t involve them in the slightest, but some of them were being straight up racist against monsters. Some of it, like the statement about the slime monsters and Marianne’s question about Sans and Papyrus, was pretty obvious. However, even the first question you received was kind of offensive. ‘What’s it like working with monsters?’ The fact that they felt as though they had to ask that disgusts you. If you were to replace the word monsters with some other minority group, people would be incensed! Yet, in this case, no one seemed to blink an eye.

When you finally drive home for the day, you start to wonder how Amanda would have handled this situation. As Frisk’s original social worker, she would have been responsible for all this, after all. Knowing her, she would have silenced any talk against monsters before it even had a chance to begin. As soft and gentle as your friend seemed, she was staunch in her beliefs, one of which being equality for all. You smile, imagining the tongue-lashing that Marianne, Simon and the others would have gotten. It would have been legendary.

After changing into your pyjamas, the first thing you do when you get home is turn on the news. Yes, it is often dull and depressing — the exact opposite of what you need after a long day’s work — but you figure it is probably for the best that you catch up on current events. Especially any current events involving monsters.

Luckily, you manage to tune into a cute segment instead of something depressing. One of the local animal shelters is having an adoption day soon, so they decided to go and show the public some of the adorable critters that are looking for a home. Tiny little balls of fluff run all over the news studio, inspiring awws from you and the news anchors. A small golden retriever cross trips on its own feet, causing you to snort the water you had been drinking up your nose. It hurts, but it’s worth it. So worth it. One of these days, you are going to need to take a trip to a pet shop so you can enjoy the animals. Self care, right? That is how you and Ivy used to justify half your procrastination back in university: self care and mental health breaks.

Speaking of Ivy, you should probably check in on her. The two of you still haven’t gotten to meeting up. Maybe during your time off this weekend. Even if she can’t arrange for a babysitter for Libbie, the two of you could still go out to talk.

You: Hey, anything going on Saturday night?
Ivy: No

Ivy: GNO?

You: That’s what I was thinking.

Ivy: Great!

Ivy: Malcolm has the night off, so he can deal with Libbie

You: Any ideas of what you want to do?

Ivy: Yeah

Ivy: I found this new pub online

Ivy: From what I can hear, the bartender is pretty hot

You roll your eyes after reading her last message. Some things never change.

You: Ivy, you’re married.

Ivy: Yeah, but you aren’t

Ivy: ; )

Again, some things never change.
**You:** Ivy Denise Wilson, what’s with you and getting involved with my love life?

**Ivy:** Can’t get involved in something you don’t have

**You:** Ouch

**Ivy:** Love you too

**Ivy:** But seriously, Saturday night. You and me

**Ivy:** And possibly you and a hot bartender ; )

**You:** GOODNIGHT Ivy!

**Ivy:** Goodnight

With a sigh, you put your phone to the side. Trust Ivy to proclaim herself as your wingman without asking you. Secretly, you think that she just wants you to hurry up and settle down and join the mom club with her. You stretch across the couch for the remote to turn off the tv; now, they are just going over national gas prices, which you really don’t feel like listening to. With that taken care of, you allow yourself to flop and lie down, pulling a nearby blanket over top of you. Really, you should get up and and go to your bed instead of sleeping on the couch, but that sounds more like a problem for you in the morning. Or whenever you wake up; you aren’t too picky.

Right now, all you care about is going to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Hmmm, I wonder where Ivy could be planning on going? nection_lightning

For the next little bit, updates are going to be a bit slower. Life is really busy at this time of year, so I can't (fine, I shouldn’t) write as frequently as I have been. Also, if I post anything else here this week, you have my full permission to yell at me for being an irresponsible adult.
My Tumblr! Feel free to pop on over there to say hi or ask me something. Plus, sometimes I post random tidbits about my writing process (or complete lack of one), so if that interests you for whatever reason, come on over.
The Droll Drive

Chapter Summary

You go on a quick roadtrip to start your girls' night out with Ivy.

Chapter Notes

Have a filler chapter, or part one to the girls' night out. Originally, the outing was supposed to be one chapter, but then I got rambly. So, now it's three chapters. Tada!

(Also, I'm aware I said that I shouldn't post anything this week, but I needed a break between research papers. Whoops.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

By the time Saturday night arrives, the idea of going to a bar and drinking away the stress of the week sounds fantastic. Not that it will happen, though; you agreed to be the designated driver for the way back. You dress up in something cute, yet comfortable — because even though you may whine about Ivy deciding to play matchmaker, it isn’t like you would complain too much if you met someone tonight — before waiting in your living room for her to pick you up.

Ivy: Ding dong

Well, it looks like she is here now. You run outside, nearly tripping yourself on a branch that had blown onto your pathway. As you make your way to her minivan — because ever since she has become a mom, she has felt justified to use it as much as possible — Ivy rolls down the passenger window.

“Hey Bubbles! You ready to watch me get plastered for the first time in over a year or what?”

Climbing in, you can’t help but groan, and not just because of her old nickname for you. “Please don’t. The last thing I want right now is a repeat of the Psych 312 incident.”

“Boo, that’s no fun,” she teases, flicking a navy blue braid over her shoulder before she shifts back into drive. “Since when are you the responsible one?”

“Try ‘since always’. Are you going to tell me where we’re going yet?”

“Nope! This is going to be a surprise.”

“Fine.” You shift to a more comfortable position in the passenger’s seat. “How’s Libbie?”

“Great, other than the whole ‘refusing to sleep the night’ thing. I have some pictures on my phone
if you want to look.”

You decide to take her up on the offer. “Has your passcode changed?”

“Nah, who has time for that?”

You snort as you unlock it. Of course she would cite something like time efficiency to serve as a reason not to adapt a phone passcode after over half a decade. “I better not find any ‘pictures’ of you or Malcolm by accident.” You bring up her phone’s gallery, finding a folder conveniently named ‘Liberty <3’. You swipe through picture after picture of the infant, each one just as cute as the last. With her deep skin tone and round, chocolate brown eyes, you can see a definite resemblance between Libbie and her mother.

“Hey, while you have my phone, do you think you could text Malcolm and remind him to take out some chicken to thaw for tomorrow? I told him earlier, but his brain is like a sieve these days.”

“Maybe it has to do with the fact that neither of you get any sleep,” you respond sassily as you type out the message.

“You think?” Ivy deadpans back, signalling a right turn. Ah, there is nothing like being able to snark with an old friend. You take a casual glance out the window, only then noticing that Ivy has driven you out of Ebott. In fact, unless you are mistaken…

“Would this mystery pub that you’re taking us to happen to be in New New Home?”

“Dude! How did you guess?”

“Maybe because I just drove here a few days ago. Besides, where else could we be going at this point? I doubt you’d take us for, I don’t know, an hour car ride past Mt Ebott just to hang out. Or at least, I doubt you would do that without making it an overnight thing.”

“Ugh, you and your logic ruining all my fun. At least tell me that you don’t know the specific establishment I’m planning on.”

You take a few moments to reflect, then shake your head. When you remember that Ivy can’t see your non-verbal communication while driving, you answer, “No clue. I didn’t exactly get the chance to check out any businesses yet.”

“Then what were you doing in New New Home?”

You hesitate, unsure how to answer the question. If you respond truthfully and say that you were there for work, it would be pretty obvious who your client is, which is information that you don’t really want to share with anyone. Besides the fact that discussing any case would be a breach of client confidentiality, the less people that know of Frisk’s situation, the better. You may not know much about things like politics, but even you can guess that it would be easy for the wrong person to use you as a mean to attack monsters through their ambassador. Therefore, even though you trust Ivy with almost anything, you cannot permit yourself to share this with your friend.

Thankfully, before your silence becomes suspicious, Ivy lets out an excited squeal. “Look!”

“What?”

“Horses!” she exclaims, pointing ahead to the right.

“Okay, it’s official: you need to get out more.”
“Shut up. Horses are always exciting. Plus, it’s a known law of the universe that you can’t go on a car ride and see horses without pointing them out. And you can fight me about that.”

Instead of fighting her, you just turn up the radio. The music isn’t anything to write home about, although you can at least say that there are some songs that you don’t recognise. The radio broadcaster says that they are some new hit singles from a new artist. Shyren, you think, although you might have misheard. Unusual name, in any case. For the rest of the drive, the two of you jam out. Ivy continues to play road trip games, which you didn’t sign up for. A part of you wonders if she just wants an excuse to punch you in the arm at this point. Also, why are there so many VW Bugs on the road right now? So not fair.

You are given the role of navigational assistant once you get to the monster capital, especially now that Ivy knows that you’ve been there before. You can really tell that she is devoted to keeping everything a surprise: the screenshots she took on her phone to describe the directions to where you are going have been edited so that the name of the place is blacked out. She parks the car about a block away, explaining that the reviews online mentioned that parking at the pub isn’t the greatest.

“Doesn’t bother me, as long as you don’t get black out,” you say as you climb out of the car. “If I have to drag your drunk ass all the way back here, though, you will wake up to some unpleasant voicemails in the morning. And I will not bother watching my tone, regardless of the pain it will cause because of your inevitable hangover.”

“I’ll try to keep that in mind,” she chuckles, knowing from experience that you are dead serious. “Now close your eyes and we can get going.”

You stop midstep, pivoting on your heel to look Ivy in the eyes. “I’m sorry?”

“You heard me. Close them eyes; I don’t want to give anything away. Don’t worry, I’ll guide you along.”

You roll your eyes before submitting to her request. “Fine, have it your way. But you are completely ridiculous.”

“Yeah, but you love it.”

And the thing is, she isn’t wrong.

Chapter End Notes

Can anyone guess why Ivy calls you Bubbles?

Like always, you can find my tumblr [here](http://example.com).
You find out where Ivy has taken you for your night out.

Part two out of three of the girls' night out.

“All right, watch your step here.”

“How am I supposed to do that?” You grumble, nearly tripping as the floor raises despite Ivy’s advice. The temptation to open your eyes is strong; she isn’t exactly the best at guiding you. So far, you have nearly face planted at least three times.

“Yeah, yeah, word choice. You know what I mean. Wait here a minute. I’m going to find us a place to sit.”

So now, you stand in the pub, hopefully out of direct traffic, with your eyes closed. You feel a bit like an idiot, but things could be worse. At least you can trust that Ivy won’t leave you there alone for too long. It is pretty cozy inside, with a warmth that is surprisingly pleasant. The smell of fried foods permeates through the air, making your mouth water already. In the background, you can hear some peppy music, although you don’t quite recognise the song. If you were to hazard a guess based on those clues, you would say that this is some kind of small mom and pop joint, maybe with a ’50s diner aesthetic. Then again, considering you are in New New Home, it could look like anything. Heck, for all you know, it could be some kind of fusion between a medieval tavern and a sci fi inspired disco bar. Actually, that would be pretty cool. You are down for that.

Someone taps your shoulder, and you jump slightly. “Chill out, it’s just me,” Ivy laughs. “I found us a spot right at the bar.” She grabs your hand, guiding you along. Along the way, you apologise as you hit tables, simultaneously hoping that they are unoccupied so you didn’t hit anyone while also hoping that someone is there so that you aren’t the idiot apologising to inanimate objects. Goodness knows that happens enough when you go shopping; sometimes, mannequins are just too lifelike.

“Okay, here’s the stool. Once you sit down, you can open your eyes.”

“Finally,” you exhale. You struggle your way onto the barstool, which is a task in and of itself. A bleary wall of orange is in front of you when you open your eyes, so you blink a few times to get everything back in focus. Behind the bar is a tall pillar of fire decked in a classic suit and glasses. Realisation hits you like a bag of bricks. You swivel in your chair to face your friend, who is barely holding back her laughter. “No.”

Ivy just gives you a smug smile and waggles her thinly plucked eyebrows. “Yes.”
“I hate you.” You turn to face your attention to the monster, who has been standing passively during your exchange. “Sorry about that.”

“... no problem,” the bartender rasps with a voice that reminds you of a campfire. “... can I take your order?”

“Um… do you think you could give us a minute?”

With a nod, the fiery monster leaves to attend to more customers. Ivy is still giggling at your reaction. “I told you he was ho—”

You smack her with a menu. “Not. Another. Word.”

“Didn’t you used to have a fantasy about firemen?”

“Shut up and decide what you’re eating.”

“Fine. But the offer to be your wingman is still there if you realise you have the hots for him.”

You refuse to look up from your menu to acknowledge the shit-eating grin that is most definitely plastered all over her face. “You are the worst. I’m telling Malcolm on you.”

“Who do you think encourages me? Ooh, they have magic drinks here! You should try one!”

“In case you’ve forgotten, I can’t. Driving. I could go for a good burger though. And maybe some cheese fries.” Cheese fries always sound good.

While you wait for Ivy to make up your mind so you can order, you decide to take a good look at the restaurant. Your first instinct seems to have been pretty accurate. Grillby’s, as the menu calls it, is a very homey joint with a slightly retro feel. There is even a jukebox in a corner of the restaurant, leading to the restrooms. The interior is mostly made of wood, which initially is a bit concerning, considering that the only monster you have seen working here is made of fire. Then again, he must have impeccable control, because you know that monster businesses, even though technically under the jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Monsters, must be vetted by human inspectors in order to be open to humans. In any case, Grillby’s has a unique atmosphere.

Another factor that you think adds to the appeal of Grillby’s is how well humans and monsters are getting along here. Although most of the people you see here are monsters, no one has been making a big deal about you and Ivy coming in. However, you can tell that you aren’t necessarily being ignored, either. As for the other humans, they don’t seem to be bothering monsters, which you could see being a problem in such a touristy area. You even notice a table of dog monsters playing cards with about five humans.

A few minutes later, Grillby, who it turns out is the bartender and owner, takes your order. You decide on a bacon cheeseburger, cheese fries and a chocolate milkshake. Ivy goes for a similar order, but replaces the milkshake with some sort of magic-infused mixed drink. With your order placed, you excuse yourself to go to the washroom real quick. You can still hear the music from the main part of the restaurant, and you hum along unashamedly until you hear someone else enter. You are much too sober to start a karaoke party in the ladies’ room tonight.

The first thing you see when you get close to the bar is Ivy gasping in laughter. Looks like she made a friend. Good for her. Grillby stands across from her and you realise with amazement how fascinatingly done he looks with the situation even though he doesn’t really have discernable facial features. That is a talent right there. You wonder for a few moments what could cause his mild disapproval until you remember it is Ivy you are talking about. Chances are high that she has been
torturing him with dumb puns, probably fire related. None of them rude necessarily, but still irritating. You wave to get her attention.

“Oh, hey!” Ivy calls out loudly, pointing at you. If you didn’t know her any better, you would assume that she is already tipsy. “This is the friend I was telling you about, my dude. I think you’ll like her.”

You still can’t see who she is talking to, but you wave again, just to be polite. “Hi?”

No response. You continue to make your way back to your seat, eagerly anticipating your meal, which Grillby must have brought over while you were gone. You sit down and turn to look past Ivy, ready to try introducing yourself again.

“Hi, I’m…”

Your voice peters off as you see a familiar face staring at you, cold as can be.

Hell no.

“Imagine seeing you here, bubbles.”

Chapter End Notes

Look! Ivy made a new friend! Good for her.

All of your guys guesses from last chapter about the nickname were so much fun to read! Just before I posted this chapter, I got a comment with the official answer! Bubbles started as a reference to Cobra Bubbles, the social worker from Lilo and Stitch. Ivy came up with it after an all-nighter of marathoning Disney movies, including Lilo and Stitch, and the name stuck over the years.

My Tumblr!
The Mortifying Misunderstanding

Chapter Summary

You deal with seeing Sans at Grillby's. You just want to leave and disappear.

Chapter Notes

Part three out of three of the girls' night out.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You should have known that something like this would happen. Didn’t Frisk even mention that sometimes Sans would take them to Grillby’s for food? Plus, it is apparently a well-known monster restaurant. It should not be the slightest bit surprising that you ran into him here.

Well, even if you are seeing him here because of your friend being super social, that doesn’t mean you should put aside all airs of professionalism. You would rather not have the mental association of the two of you meeting up at a bar during your next home visit. Especially considering how much difficulty you have had with him so far.

“Good evening, Mr…” What is his last name again? Shoot, why does something this important have to escape you now?

“just sans works."

You give a curt nod, thankful that he is at least saving you from that embarrassment.“Of course.”

Ivy looks back and forth between you and Sans. You can practically hear the gears in her head piecing everything together. “You guys know each other already?”

“yep.” Sans takes a swig of… is that a ketchup bottle he just downed? Nope, not going to question it. Pulling at a gooey, cheese covered fry, you start to chow down. Maybe if you are lucky, she won’t ask anything else since both you and Sans are busy eating.

Naturally, it seems that luck is not something you have going for you tonight.

Ivy’s eyes widen in realisation, “OH! That’s why you were in New New Home this week!” She playfully nudges your side a bit too hard. “Shoulda told me that the reason you aren’t feeling into hotstuff over here is because you were going for a trip to the bone zone.”

... What?

“What?”

Ivy doesn’t note the shocked confusion shared by you and Sans. Instead, she just smiles brightly at
Sans, downing more of her drink. “It’s all right, my dude, no judgement here. I’ve been trying to
find her a boyfriend for years. Who knew that I should have been looking for a bonefriend
instead?”

“IVY NO!”

Hopefully it is just your imagination, but you swear you hear Grillby snicker “... Ivy yes,” before
leaving to serve another customer.

“look, me and her, that’s not what’s going on here,” Sans tries to explain. It almost looks as if his
skull is shifting towards a pastel blue instead of being bone white. Is that like him blushing? Can
monsters even blush? You don’t know, and you don’t really care at the moment. Currently, the
desire to do your best ostrich impression and hide from your friend and her mortifying speech
seems more appealing than anything else.

“Don’t be shy, Snas,” Snas? Ivy, no. Please, for the love of everything in the universe, stop talking.
Your silent plea does not amount to anything; she keeps on going. “I think you’d be good for her.
You might even help her gain of a sense of humour.”

“Hey!”

“It’s true, don’t try denying it. Your new boyfriend was telling me some pretty sweet jokes while
you were gone.”

“look, i’m really not her—”

“Hey, I’ve got a question for you. When you two get it on—”

NOPE! That’s it. Screw professionalism. You would rather put an end to this before the whole bar
is staring at you. “We are not dating! Sans is one of my clients!”

Oops, you might have said that a bit too loudly. Now, people are definitely staring. But of course,
Ivy pays them no heed. “Don’t worry, sweetie,” she says, patting your hand, “I won’t tell anyone.”

“There’s literally nothing to tell!”

“Of course not,” she winks. “Your secret is safe with me. These lips are sealed.” Naturally, that last
bit is said loud enough for half of the people at the bar to hear. Like that is a trustworthy statement
from her right now.

Why?

You did not sign up for this today. Or any day.

On the bright side, Sans looks just as uncomfortable as you are about this whole situation. True,
that isn’t exactly a good thing, but at least you aren’t alone here. Silver linings, and all that.

“welp, i should, uh, get going, i guess.” Sans stands up, placing his bottle — yeah, that is almost
definitely ketchup — onto the counter. “grillbz, put it on my tab.”

And with that, Sans is gone.

No, seriously, he just straight up vanished. Took two steps and — POOF! — gone.

“Whooooooooaaaaaaaa, did you see that?” Ivy asks, holding onto your arm. It looks like she has
somehow already reached the stage of tipsiness where she becomes a bit clingier than normal. Fan-
freaking-tastic. Either monster alcohol is a lot stronger than regular stuff, or it really has been a long time since she has had anything to drink, causing her to forget her limits. Or both. Both wouldn’t really surprise you right now. “He just straight up blipped out of here, beam me up Scotty style!”

“I know. I was there. It happened less than a minute ago.”

“That’s so cool! I wish I could do that.”

“It would make life a lot more convenient,” you admit. Do you know how much time you could save on a regular basis if you could teleport? A lot. The answer is you could save a lot of time. You could have even avoided this entire situation before it got a chance to start. There is a reason teleportation has always been your go-to for the good old ‘if you could have any super power, what would you want’ question.

“Well, it’s a good thing you’ve got bone boy. Imagine all the other ways —”

“I’mma stop you right there.” At this point, you don’t want to know what rabbit trail her mind hopped off to. “For the last time, there is nothing between Sans and myself. Nothing. If we’re being generous here, we could maybe call it a working relationship at this point. End of story.”

Before Ivy has the chance to argue, Grillby returns to check on you. “... how are things tasting over here?”

Thankful for the distraction, you answer, “Excellent, thank you.” And you aren’t just being polite; this is probably the best tasting meal you have eaten all week, if not all month. It is a bit weird when the food breaks down before you swallow, leaving a fizzy sensation similar to as if you ate an entire pack of popping candies, although not entirely unexpected. After the whole spaghetti incident, you decided to conduct some research on monster food. According to your readings, monster food is made with magic and is directly transformed into energy, eliminating the need for a digestive process. Although there are very few statements as to the long-term effects of human consumption of monster food (for fairly obvious reasons), several renowned human scientists have determined it to be safe to eat. In addition to this, monsters can infuse magic into regular foods, which provide the nutrients that humans need while becoming edible for monsters. In short, you have come to the conclusion that Frisk should be fine as long as Papyrus and Sans include magic-infused foods with any traditional monster food in their cooking.

Great. It seems you can’t even avoid Sans in your thought processes tonight.

“... can I get you ladies anything else?”

Ivy holds up her cup, and you promptly shove it back down to the counter. “You’ve had enough. I would rather not have to act out my earlier threat.”

“But it’s so goooooooooooood,” she whines, attempting to give you puppy eyes. Jokes on her; she should know by now that you have been immune to that ploy for years now. Grillby, however, must not have the same level of invulnerability as you, as he takes her glass.

“... I’ll make it virgin,” he promises, mostly for your sake. Ivy is back to eating her meal, and therefore not paying attention anymore.

The last part of the evening is far less embarrassing, mostly because you manage to keep Ivy away from the topic of you and Sans. In many ways, the outing brings back good memories of your post-exam celebrations you two used to have back in university. It is nice to be able to just chill out and
chat with a friend. That is something you haven’t actually done in a while.

When Grillby hands you the bill, you do a double take. There is no way that both your meals together could cost that little; you have spent more money on individual fast food runs! “Um, excuse me, I think there’s a mistake here.”

The fiery monster picks up the bill — it is trippy to watch him handle paper without burning it — and shakes his head, pointing to a small line near the bottom. “... this is correct. I gave you a discount.”

Sure enough, there it is: a seventy percent discount. Huh. “Not to sound ungrateful or anything, but why?”

“... that was the best entertainment I’ve had here in years.”

You are about to ask what he means, then you realise. Oh. Then, just in case you couldn’t figure it out on your own, a red bird monster chimes in, “Yeah, watching you two and Sans was a real hoot. There’s been nothing that even comes close to that since Undyne got Papyrus drunk for the first time. Remember that Grillby? I wish I had taken a video; I don’t think I’ll ever see him floating around here singing opera music ever again.”

Beside the jukebox, a monster that kind of reminds you of a giant hamster adds, “Man, I don’t even like opera and I have to admit that it was pretty hilarious.”

“I wanna watch someone float and sing opera music,” Ivy mumbles.

“That’s nice,” you say while you grab the cash to pay, making sure to leave a generous tip. She needs to get home. Now. “Well, thanks for the discount. Come on Ivy, time to go.”

Grabbing her by the arm, the two of you return to the car. It takes a while; one of the things that Ivy didn’t consider when she insisted upon you having your eyes closed to keep Grillby’s a surprise is that now you have no idea where you are.

Tonight has really been something else, to put it mildly. Next time you have a night out, though, you are going to be the one to choose the place.

Chapter End Notes

So, it turns out that Sans wasn't the problem here so much as Ivy. Thanks for making things weird, friend. Didn't anyone ever teach her not to jump to conclusions?

Apparently not.

Your home visit on Monday is going to be awkward.
(Also, Grillby ships it.)

My Tumblr!
The Spiteful Skeleton

Chapter Summary

You see Sans and the others for the first time after the incident at Grillby's.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Ever since lunch, you have been dreading this afternoon’s trip to New New Home. Sure, none of what happened at Grillby’s on Saturday was really your fault. Even though you provided the idea of an outing, Ivy was the one to decide on Grillby’s as the location. She was the one that got a bit too drunk a bit too quickly. She was the one who assumed you and Sans had gone out together and wouldn’t let it go, broadcasting a non-existent relationship to the world.

Still, despite all this, secondhand guilt is a thing. You know you could have handled the situation better.

Parked right outside their house — which is still artistically covered with inexplicable snow — you take a minute to go over some notes you made after the last visit.

1. Check on the food situation
2. Ask about Frisk’s life outside of school and politics (friends, hobbies, routines, etc.)
3. Ask about monster traditions/culture

Mentally, you add a fourth item to the list: apologise for Saturday.

With that taken care of, you reluctantly make your way to the front door. Here goes nothing, you guess. Just as you are about to ring the doorbell, Papyrus swings the door wide open. “HELLO MISS SOCIAL WORKER. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO TAKE OFF YOUR COAT AND HANG IT UP BY THE DOOR.”

“Thank you.” You take a moment to do so, noticing that Rocky the pet rock has been covered in a fresh batch of sprinkles, these ones being of the small, round variety. Does that mean that someone cleaned up the other sprinkles, or…are pet rocks actually like real pets for monsters? Can Rocky actually eat the sprinkles?

Focus. You need to focus. You can ask about that later.

“FRISK AND SANS SHOULD BE HERE ANY SECOND NOW.”

“Where are they?”

“right behind you.”

You jump and whip around, barely managing to suppress a startled shriek. Sans is barely a foot away from you, a giggling Frisk at his side. “How?”

“Shortcuts,” Frisk answers with a bright smile. “He could take you for one, if you want.”
“Er, no, thank you.” Even though you cannot deny being curious about it, now does not seem like an appropriate time to do so. It is good to know that you weren’t losing it when you thought you saw him disappear on Saturday, though. And speaking of Saturday… “If you don’t mind, I would like to speak to Sans alone for a minute.”

“OF COURSE. FRISK AND I WILL BE IN THE KITCHEN.”

“Excellent.” You wait until they are both gone before speaking. The dots of light inside Sans’ eye sockets, which you assume are something like pupils, are intently focused on you. His staring is a bit unnerving, but you don’t necessarily blame him. Pulling the ‘I need to talk to you’ card can and will make anyone uneasy, especially if you are in a position of authority. You can admit that the last time your mom texted you saying that she needed to call you, you had paced around your bedroom in nervousness for a few minutes before racking up the courage to phone her. As the case was, all she wanted was to call and discuss plans for the holidays, but that didn’t stop you from being worried that you were in trouble ahead of time.

“What’s so important that pap and frisk can’t listen in?” If you were to put his demeanor into words, you would probably say something along the lines of passive hostility, like a step above passive-aggressiveness. His posture at first glance seems no different than how you have always seen him: slumped posture, wide grin, hands placed in the pockets of his hoodie. However, there is an edge behind that which isn’t limited to his suspicious tone of questioning. You will have to keep an eye on that edge to make sure it doesn’t become dangerously sharp.

“I want to apologise for Saturday.” Sans shifts slightly at your statement. You continue, “Ivy’s behavior was… out of hand. I’m sorry for any discomfort she might have caused.”

“Fine.” Clearly, it is not fine.

“I would also like to add that I’m —”

“I said it’s fine,” Sans snaps, causing a chill to run up your spine. You decide to drop the issue, even though you still have more to say. This is not really the hill you want to die on.

Evidently, Sans needs some time to cool down before you do any more talking with him. Without a word, you make your way to the kitchen to check in on Frisk and Papyrus. Besides, this seems like an excellent opportunity to take care of item number one on your checklist.

“AH, I SEE YOU ARE DONE CONVERSING WITH MY BROTHER.”

That is the understatement of the year. “Yes, I am.”

“IN THAT CASE, ALLOW ME TO DEMONSTRATE MY NEWLY-FOUND CULINARY PROWESS.”

It appears he is half a step ahead of you. You follow behind, only stop when you notice Frisk raising their hand from the table. You assume that they want to get your attention, or maybe Papyrus’. “Yes Frisk?”

“Why are you called Bubbles?”

The blood drains from your face. Did Sans blab about what happened? Or did Frisk find out from someone else? You aren’t sure which one is worse. “Where did you hear that?”

Frisk shrugs, making their way over to the counter to grab an orange from a bowl of fruit. “Uncle Sans was in a bad mood Sunday morning, so he called Mom. I accidentally overheard the
“YES, ‘ACCIDENTALLY’, JUST LIKE HOW YOU ‘ACCIDENTALLY’ FOUND OUT ABOUT WHAT I GOT YOU AS A GIFT FOR YOUR TWELFTH BIRTHDAY WHEN I WAS TALKING WITH UNDYNE.”

A sheepish expression makes its way onto Frisk’s face. “Whoops.” It seems as though this is not the first time they have eavesdropped. You also have a funny feeling it is far from the last time. “But can you tell me? Please?”

“Maybe some other time.” That nickname is too personal to share right now. Sure, it might just be something that started as a joke after a night of Disney movies and cold pizza, but the memories associated to the name Bubbles are very important to you. To be honest, Ivy is the only person you feel comfortable with being called Bubbles. Well, she is the only person who can get away with it anymore, that is. Sticking to a vague response lets you avoid giving the answer without being forced to give away what you don’t want to tell.

“Promise?” Frisk holds out their pinky in anticipation.

You reject it. In your line of work, promises are a no-go. Even for something as insignificant as this. To avoid completely quashing Frisk’s request, you offer an alternative which requires less commitment on your part. “How about this. Each visit, starting next time, I will give you one guess.”

“So, like Rumpelstiltskin?”

You allow yourself a small smile. “Yes, except instead of taking your first-born child, I just won’t tell you why that’s my nickname.”

“WHY WOULD YOU TAKE FRISK’S FIRST-BORN? IS THAT A HUMAN TRADITION I DON’T KNOW ABOUT?”

Nope! Nope nope nopety nope nope! Thankfully, Frisk answers for you while you have an internal freak-out over the fact that Papyrus would even wonder about that being a thing. “It’s a fairytale.”

“AH, I SEE. PERHAPS SANS COULD READ IT TO US BEFORE BED TONIGHT?”

“I’ll go ask.” With that, Frisk darts out of the room to talk to the absent skeleton.

While Frisk is occupied, Papyrus runs you through his research, showing you recipe after recipe, nutrition charts and even meal plans for the next week. He was beyond thorough, and you cannot help but admit that his efforts are rather impressive. You are also informed that he will be starting officially cooking lessons with Toriel starting later this week. While the two of you are in the kitchen, you decide to ask some of your questions. It seems easier to do with Papyrus, who is fairly talkative, than to attempt with Sans. The one disadvantage is that the taller of the two brothers has a tendency to blather onto different topics, but at least you get answers.

Most of the visit ends up happening with Papyrus. Frisk wanders in to get some milk and stays for a while. Even though Sans doesn’t enter the room, you have a funny feeling that he might be lurking within earshot.

“MISS SOCIAL WORKER,” Papyrus asks as he leads you to the door, “HOW DID WE DO TODAY?”

“I am pleased with the improvements I saw today.” Papyrus beams at you, eye lights brightening
with the comment. “My main feedback would be to continue working on your cooking, which I understand you were already planning on doing.”

“so, guess that means we won’t be seein’ you next week.”

Look who finally decided to acknowledge your existence. “Actually, we will be continuing with home visits.”

“thought you said things were just peachy.” Oh, and there is the hostility again.

You make sure to keep your tone calm and controlled. Even though he hasn’t presented himself as a threat to your or Frisk’s safety, you cannot allow this to escalate. Even the most kind and caring guardians can be unpleasant at times, which only becomes worse if you demonstrate any sign of aggression. “Yes, I did. However, Mr Sans, you must realise that Frisk’s situation is quite… unique. As I mentioned last week, I want to continue weekly visits until further notice. As monsters are not officially citizens and Frisk is considered a ward of the government, the adoption process will be a bit more complicated.”

“yeah, ‘cause your government has done such a good job taking care of them.” Is it just you, or have those lights in his eye sockets dimmed? You can barely see them anymore.

“SANS!”

He isn’t done though. A slight gold light starts streaming from one of his eyes, and you start to feel nervous. “where was your government when frisk ran away? when they started to work to give my people rights? when they were almost ki—”

Frisk places a hand on his shoulder. “Sans, stop.” The light disappears.

Well, that was… something. Papyrus looks uncomfortable and fidgets with his gloves. Frisk doesn’t seem fazed at all, which is mildly disconcerting. Is something like this normal? Then again, you don’t know what the light coming from his eye meant. Maybe it is just some kind of biological reaction to stress. Despite his anger, Sans was starting to sound almost panicked before Frisk intervened.

In any case, you will need to take note of this for later.

“I would suggest you calm yourself. I agree, it is most unfortunate that the system was unable to help Frisk when they needed it. Sadly, Frisk is only one example among many of a child who has been let down. Combine that with the fact that their former case worker passed around the same time as all of this, and Frisk was sadly one who fell through the cracks.”

“more like fell down a mountain.”

You choose to ignore that statement. “Also, I would like to remind you that my government has been fairly considerate, considering the circumstances.”

“yeah, ‘cause threatening to take frisk away from the only family they have is sooooo considerate.”

“Considering that legally, you could have been charged with kidnapping, yes,” you snap. “Also, at the end of the day, if I have to choose between a child’s happiness and their wellbeing, their wellbeing will win. Every time. Frankly, if I did have any doubts about your abilities, your current actions would not be helping you in the least.” You force yourself to take a deep breath. Your heart is racing to the point where it feels like it is beating in your throat. You cannot allow your emotions to get to you like this. Purposefully, you shift your gaze towards Papyrus. It will be easier
to regain your demeanor if you focus on him instead of the aggravator. “With that discussed, I hope
we can get back to what I was hoping to say.”

Sans stares at you sullenly while Papyrus stutters out a nervous “Y-YES.”

“Good. Now, starting next week, we should be able to start what we call informal visits. Basically,
what this means is that instead of me asking you a whole bunch of questions for the entire visit, I
will be here mostly as an observer. You will continue with your normal routines. During these
times, I will be here almost like a guest, except without any special privileges. I will be abiding to
all your normal rules and so forth. Do you have any questions?”

“nope.”

“NO, MISS SOCIAL WORKER.”

“Good. Have a nice rest of your week.”

Chapter End Notes

Happy holidays to anyone who celebrates! I hope that you have an enjoyable end of
the year. Just so you guys know, I'm going to be staying with my family for the next
two weeks, so I have no idea what my updates are going to look like. I am hoping to
post another chapter sometime before January starts, though.

My Tumblr! For anyone who hasn't jumped ship, you can find me there along with
some of my random thoughts.
“WELL,” Papyrus sighs loudly as the door slams shut behind you, “THAT COULD HAVE GONE BETTER.”

Frisk rolls their eyes. “You think?”

“I’M GOING TO REHEAT SOME LEFTOVERS FOR SUPPER. I DON’T FEEL LIKE COOKING RIGHT NOW.” He takes two of those gargantuan strides of his before turning back to face Sans. “OH, AND BROTHER? IF YOU EVEN THINK ABOUT SHORTCUTTING TO GRILLBY’S, I WILL TURN YOU BLUE AND FLOAT YOU BACK HOME LIKE THE IRRITATING LUMP YOU ARE.”

Sans has to admit, his baby bro knows him too well. Just before he can make a pun about how he will do whatever floats his boat, Papyrus turns around, giving an exasperated glare almost worthy of Toriel. Welp, that is something he hasn’t seen in years. Better not mess with him until he gets a chance to cool down a bit.

The house is weirdly quiet, especially considering that Paps is in the kitchen. Even Frisk isn’t making a sound, just sitting cross-legged on the couch and playing with their phone. Normally, the only way Sans can get any quiet is hiding in his lab, and that is only because he sound-proofed it so he could work on experiments without waking up Papyrus when he was little.

The uneasy silence continues up until Papyrus calls him and Frisk for supper. Just before Sans digs into his brother’s newest cooking endeavor (which looks like some sort of casserole, maybe? All he knows is that Pap spent most of the afternoon chopping up lots of different human ingredients and the results smell more than edible, which is always great), Papyrus clears his non-existent throat.

“AHEM. NOW BROTHER, I WOULD LIKE TO START THIS OFF BY SAYING THAT I AM
NOT ANGRY WITH YOU AS MUCH AS I AM DISAPPOINTED.”

Shoot, Papyrus isn’t missing a single beat here. When was the last time either of them had to bring up the ‘not angry, but disappointed’ talk? Usually, it was Sans giving it as the older brother, mostly when Papyrus was acting too recklessly as a teen and did something stupid. Like the time when he broke his femur jumping from the balcony during his parkour phase. Yeah, he doesn’t miss those days. Normally, Papyrus would be crying guiltily by the time Sans was only halfway through his spiel and he would have to buy some nice cream or cinnamon bunnies to calm him down again. Stars, handing out punishments was the worst. At least Papyrus would accept the consequences of his actions. He has no idea what to do if Frisk starts acting up. After all, what can he do against the kid who can go back in time? Kind of eliminates the whole ‘every action has a consequence’ thing.

“SANS!” Papyrus shouts, jarring him out of his thoughts.

“uh, yeah?”

“YOU WEREN’T LISTENING TO ME, WERE YOU?”

There is no denying it at this point. Even on the off-chance that he can convince Papyrus, there is no way he can also get Frisk to believe any lie he could think of. “sorry. i zoned out.”

“OF COURSE YOU DID,” Papyrus sighs, wiping his mouth with his napkin. “FRISK, YOU CAN BE EXCUSED AT ANY TIME. IN FACT, IT MIGHT BE BETTER FOR YOU TO BRING THE REST OF YOUR FOOD UPSTAIRS, JUST THIS ONCE. I HAVE SOME WORDS THAT NEED TO HAPPEN WITH SANS, AND I’M NOT SURE IF ALL OF THEM WILL BE CHILD FRIENDLY.”

Frisk nods, gathering their things. Both skeleton brothers wait until they hear them walk all the way upstairs, down the hall and open and close the door to their bedroom. With the faint thud of the door, Papyrus stands up abruptly.

“SANS, WHAT THE FLYING FADOODLE WERE YOU THINKING THIS AFTERNOON?!?!?!”

“bro, what the—”

“DO NOT INTERRUPT ME, OR ASGORE HELP ME, YOU DO NOT WANT TO KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN. I SWEAR, IT’S LIKE YOU TRY TO MAKE MY LIFE DIFFICULT.” Papyrus takes a deep breath, very obviously trying to gather himself. “YOUR OUTBURST TODAY WAS VERY INAPPROPRIATE. YOU WERE THIS CLOSE TO HAVING AN ENCOUNTER WITH HER, WHICH WOULD BE TERRIBLE FOR MORE REASONS THAN I FEEL LIKE MENTIONING, ESPECIALLY SINCE YOU TUNED ME OUT THE FIRST TIME I TOLD YOU. THAT WAS VERY RUDE, BY THE WAY, BUT I WILL LET THAT PASS FOR NOW.

“NOW, I KNOW THAT YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT FRISK BEING TAKEN AWAY. I AM TOO. HOWEVER, GETTING UPSET WITH MISS SOCIAL WORKER WON’T PREVENT THAT. IN FACT, I BELIEVE YOU MADE HER ANGRY WITH US, WHICH IS THE OPPOSITE OF WHAT WE WANT.

“HOWEVER, I BELIEVE IN YOU, BROTHER,” he continues with a confident smile. “I KNOW THAT NOW YOU HAVE SEEN THE ERROR OF YOUR WAYS, YOU WILL WORK ON MAKING AMENDS WITH HER. CORRECT?”
Mollified by his response, Papyrus nods. “EXCELLENT! DID YOU FIND THE HUMAN FAIRY TALE FRISK WANTED YOU TO READ TONIGHT?”

Nice, a change in topic. “yeah, found a pdf online. imma skim it in advance, though. don’t want a repeat of the cinderella incident, right bro?”

“How was I supposed to know that some of the versions ended with the stepsisters losing parts of their feet and getting their eyes pecked out?!? That is hardly proper bedtime material for anyone!”

“Agreed.” It may not have bothered the kid too much (stars know that they have seen and done worse), but as a result, Papyrus got even less sleep than usual. And that is really saying something.

By the time bedtime rolls around, there is far less tension in the house, thanks to Papyrus. His brother truly has a gift with diffusing strained situations. Hopefully, this will be a talent Paps can put to use more frequently now that they are on the Surface. As Sans settles into the chair by Papyrus’ bed, he nearly forgets about the unpleasantness you had caused today. Everything is so normal as he reads tonight’s story from his phone, Papyrus and Frisk sit in the bed, completely immersed in the short tale. Once finished reading, he gives his brother an affectionate noogie before leading a tired looking Frisk to their room.

Barely a second after the two of them step through Frisk’s door, they turn to face Sans, arms crossed and eyes narrowed. “Sans, are you trying to get me to Reset? Because with how you’ve acting, it damn well seems like it.”

Sans falters, not quite sure how to respond to this sudden shift in emotion. “Language?”

“Please,” Frisk huffs, “you and I both know I’ve heard much worse. But seriously, could you quit it? At this point, you’re making me want to Save right before she comes here in case I need to Load.”

“Then why don’t you, buddy? nothing’s stopped you from doing that before for far less.”

“Maybe, Sans, it’s because I can’t just mess with time all willy nilly on the Surface like I could Underground. Remember?”

Sans thinks for a moment. Has the kid told him this before? “Nope.”

They squint at him assessingly, before giving a small shrug. “Huh, must be mixing up my timelines again. Let’s sit down, ‘cause I feel like we’re going to be doing a lot of talking before I go to sleep tonight.” Unceremoniously, Frisk plops onto their bed, leaving room for Sans to sit down.

“This better better not be an excuse to stay up past your bedtime,” he grouses halfheartedly, knowing all the while that Frisk tends to be very serious with anything related to their powers these days.

“To put it briefly,” Frisks starts, taking on the serious tone and expression reserved for when they are working with humans as the ambassador, “the whole saving, loading and resetting thing doesn’t work as well on the Surface as it did Underground. You told me it probably has to do with there being more humans to impact determination levels now that there’s ambient magic on the Surface. Or something like that. I guess it must have been another timeline when we talked about this and I don’t remember all the science words you used. All I know is that it’s harder for me to
Save up here, almost like something, or probably someone, is stopping me from doing it.”

All that they are saying makes sense to Sans, even if it is slightly terrifying to think about. Frisk, with their brilliant crimson Soul, is the most Determined human he has ever met. Sure, he may not have gotten to meet a whole bunch of humans, but the thought that someone can outdo Frisk’s Determination concerns him. At least with Frisk, he can keep himself in the loop with anything related to Resets. However, should someone else take control and figure out how to manipulate time with that power… well, who is to say what this could mean for monsterkind? “Kid, are you completely sure about all this?”

“Yeah. Don’t get me wrong. I’m still determined, but sometimes that’s not enough. You know? Sure, it’s not too hard to be determined, but it’s a lot harder to be Determined.”

Sans just nods, resting his skull on his hands as he sits on the bed. “I think I get it. Even if I don’t, I’m not sure I’m up for a repeat of the explanation. Only so many times I can hear the word ‘determined’ before it quits meaning anything.”

“Good. So, to get back to my point, it’s hard for me to Load these days, which means if you mess this up, we’ll have to start again. From the very beginning, most likely, because full on Resets are easier to control than Loads. But, even if I do Reset, which I would rather not, by the way, I don’t know how things will change. So yeah, stop being stupid when the social worker visits. It was hard enough to convince Miss Amanda to let me stay with Mom, and Mom was the perfect example of a guardian all the time.”

Being called out by a literal child is never great. With this, all of his previous frustrations from the day start to build and build and build… Until Sans loses his temper (again) and snaps. “Then why didn’t you just stay with her instead of dragging me and paps into this mess?”

Frisk’s face darkens, and he instantly regrets opening his big mouth. “Sans,” they say barely above a whisper, “please, don’t make me tell you. I can’t.”

“No, Sans, it’s not ‘fine’.” Frisk’s voice is firm, building steadily in volume as they continue. “I don’t want to do it again. I can’t do it again. I’m just so tired of it. I don’t want to start over and over again. I’m tired of saying the right lines to everyone, hoping they won’t realise something is up. I’m tired of having my friends, my family, try to kill me for their freedom as I do the same action in every single Encounter. I’m tired of seeing everyone sad because they’re stuck Underground while knowing that they could be free if I didn’t Reset. I’m tired of dying, Sans! Of waking up in the dark, with the choices to continue or to start over again staring me in the face until I finally choose. I’m tired of wasting my time in those endless meetings that we always have when we first get up here, when I have to pay attention to the same words each and every second, because if someone varies even the slightest bit from the normal script, I might say something wrong and be forced to send us back to the beginning.” They gasp for air, tears streaming down their face. “I’m just so tired of having to be the one responsible for everyone else’s actions. It’s one thing to have to deal with my own choices, but it sucks when I’m the one who has to fix other people’s mistakes.”

Sans just sits on the bed, processing all that Frisk told him during their explosion of words.
Admittedly, it is a bit of a shock to hear all this from them. How is this the same kid that systematically would run through the Underground, almost like they were trying to win all the accomplishment trophies in a video game? It had gotten to a point for Sans that he had to develop a damn numbered shorthand to keep track of how each run ended, for goodness sake! At what point did it stop being fun to them and become more of a chore?

A knock at the door catches both his and Frisk’s attention. They share a slightly panicked look. How much did Papyrus overhear?

“SANS, FRISK, MAY I COME IN?”

“uh, sure thing bro.” Frisk quickly scoots under their covers and wipes away their tears with their sleeve as Sans gets up to open the door.

“ARE YOU TWO OKAY?” Papyrus asks as he brings in mugs of warm milk with honey. “I HEARD SHOUTING, WHICH, AS OF LAST TIME I CHECKED, IS NOT A PART OF HOW HUMANS ARE SUPPOSED TO SLEEP.”

“Sorry,” Frisk says, accepting the offered hot beverage. “I had a nightmare.” Making sure to keep out of his brother’s line of vision, Sans gives them a discreet thumbs up. That is a lie that should be able to convince Papyrus, regardless of what he may or may not have heard of their conversation.

“A NIGHTMARE? WELL, LUCKILY FOR YOU, THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS AN EXPERT ON ALL THINGS NIGHTMARE-RELATED, AND HE HAS ALREADY GIVEN YOU SOMETHING PROVEN TO HELP!”

Frisk holds up their now mostly empty mug questioningly. “Milk?”

“OF COURSE! MILK BUILDS STRONG BONES, AND STRONG BONES ARE ESSENTIAL IN THE BATTLE TO TRANSFORM NIGHTMARES INTO FRIENDLY, NOT SCARY DREAMS.” With that, Papyrus hands the other mug to Sans. “SO DRINK UP, AND GOOD NIGHT.”

“Goodnight,” Frisk waves before taking a loud slurp of milk.

“yeah, ‘night bro.” Taking casual sips of his barely warmer than lukewarm drink, Sans waits until he thinks Papyrus is fully out of listening range. It doesn’t take long; Papyrus has always been a fast walker. “so, uh… anything else you want to say before bed?”

“Yeah.” They pause to put their mug on their nightstand. He should really try to remember to grab it before he leaves so he can put it in the sink. Sure, it may not bug him in the slightest, but dirty dishes left all over the place irks Paps even more than the whole sock thing. Sans will hand it to him though: dishes that get left too long are pretty nasty. There is nothing worse than having to clean food-crusted, moldy dishes. Especially when said dishes don’t belong to him, because that eliminates the possibility of just taking a blaster and disintegrating the problem away.

“Look. I don’t know what all you have written down about Miss Manda, just that it’s obvious that you think she would be better than my new worker. And I can’t blame you for that. I really, really miss her. Before I met you guys, she was probably the closest thing I’ve ever had to family. But, even though I miss her and I know she would have tried to make me happy, you don’t see me being rude to the new lady. I give her a chance, because she’s kinda responsible for my future. As it is, we’re lucky she’s giving us so many chances. All that I’m asking is that you give her a chance in return. You know, ‘innocent until proven guilty’ and all that kind of judgy stuff?”
Sans sighs. Trust the kid to pull his job into this. “sure, kiddo.”

“Promise?” Frisk asks, holding out their pinkie as they tilt their head slightly to the right and stares at him expectantly with hope filled eyes. Damn it, they are doing the Face™, just like Paps used to use whenever he wanted something as a babybones. He could never say no to that. Do they know? It wouldn’t surprise him.

He clasps their pinkie with his own. “i promise.”

“And that you’ll try being nicer to her?” Frisk adds while their pinkies are still entwined.

“sure.”

“I want you to say it.”

“i promise to give your new social worker a chance and to be nicer to her.”

Frisk smiles and lets go of his finger. “That’s all I wanted to hear. Goodnight, Sans.”

“goodnight frisk.”

Stars. One of these days, he is really going to regret making promises.

Chapter End Notes

Alternate title: Frisk Rants at Sans in an Expository Manner and I Hate Writing Dialogue

Also, I just looked at my outline today, and I have over 50 chapters semi-planned already, and I know I'm missing a lot of stuff in between. How!?? That's a lot of words that need to happen somehow. Also, I had a Gyftmas chapter planned, but based on my current pacing, that won't happen until the middle of February at the absolute earliest.

My Tumblr! Come visit if you feel like seeing Undertale reblogs and some of my random thoughts.
The Cooking Class

Chapter Summary

There is a special visitor to the skeleton household during your next visit and Papyrus gets some quality cooking lessons.

Chapter Notes

Oh look, is this a chapter where Sans doesn't cause problems for anyone? Wow, imagine that.

Also, most of my editing was done while I had some heavy cold meds in my system, so please let me know if there's anything weird going on.

Oh yeah, and Happy New Year!

As you are stuck waiting at a red light, you take a moment to reflect about how weird it feels to be going to New New Home on a Wednesday morning instead of a Monday afternoon. Due to a custody hearing, you were unable to make it during your normal visiting time. Even though it isn’t ideal, this is the only time you were able to successfully coordinate with Papyrus when you called. Frisk, obviously, will be at school, but you figure it is also good to see what the skeletons are like when they aren’t around a kid even though you have gotten the chance to see Sans away from Frisk before, not that it ended well.

Once at the house, you ring the bell and let yourself inside, as requested when you were working out some of the details for today. Mornings are apparently pretty busy, so there is a good chance that the brothers could both be upstairs when you arrive. Papyrus didn’t want you to worry about being left out in the cold if that was the case today. That was pretty considerate of him. If it weren’t for your professional duties, you could see yourself becoming good friends with the mascot of monsterkind.

“MISS SOCIAL WORKER, I’M IN THE KITCHEN,” Papyrus calls from across the house, his naturally loud voice coming into good use. He meets you halfway, showing up in the living room. “I REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT MY BROTHER WILL NOT BE HERE TODAY. SOMETHING CAME UP IN THE LAB, SO HE HAD TO LEAVE TO HELP DOCTOR ALPHYS.”

That is slightly disappointing. Out of the two of them, Sans is the brother that you need to supervise the most. On the plus side, at least you now know about one of his jobs. Providing, of course, that your assumption that he actually works there — which, since he was called in last minute to help, seems likely — is correct. Again, it isn’t like he answers your questions. “I understand.”

“DO NOT WORRY, HOWEVER, AS THERE WILL STILL BE PLENTY FOR YOU TO
“That sounds good.” Actually, it could be quite useful. As of the last time you checked your notes, which just so happens to have been before you left your house this morning, Papyrus’ teacher is also the monster that Frisk referred to as their mom. It would be fairly insightful to talk to her. Plus, this way you can verify Sans’ claim that she is familiar with human dietary needs.

However, when you walk into the kitchen, you can confidently say that the monster before your eyes is NOT Toriel.

Damn it.

“MISS SOCIAL WORKER, THIS IS GRILLBY. MISS TORIEL’S SCHEDULE IS TOO BUSY FOR US TO HAVE REGULAR LESSONS, SO SANS DECIDED TO ASK GRILLBY INSTEAD. IT TURNS OUT THAT EVEN IF HIS RESTAURANT IS A TOTAL GREASEHOLE, HE IS ACTUALLY A VERY SKILLED CHEF.”

“I see.” You turn your attention to Grillby. “Good morning, Grillby.” Please, don’t bring up anything from that Saturday.

“... good morning. It’s nice to meet you again. How is your friend doing?”

“Fine,” you say through clenched teeth, slightly salty that the flame monster didn’t heed your non verbal request, “She’s doing just fine.” Please, stop talking about it.

“... good. Most humans aren’t as affected by my drinks as she was.”

“I’ll be sure to let her know.” Desperate to change the topic away from your personal life, you make your way over to the stove. “What are you two making?”

“... a veggie stir fry with coconut rice.”

“DESPITE HAVING THE WORD ‘FRY’ IN THE NAME, IT IS NEITHER GREASY NOR UNHEALTHY,” Papyrus chimes in, almost like he is narrating an informative children’s program.

“It smells delicious,” you admit, mouth starting to water. If it weren’t for the fact that you have already surpassed your yearly quota of unprofessionalism, you would ask to be a taste tester. Then again, you haven’t managed to figure out if refusing food is offensive in monster culture. So, if Papyrus offers, you would have no choice but to accept. You don’t want to be culturally insensitive after all... Yeah, that sounds like a legitimate excuse. “I’ll be here at the table, mostly. Feel free to let me know if I’m in the way.” Papyrus nods before swiveling on his heel to bring his attention to his lesson.

Moments later, Grillby crackles, “... Papyrus, could you grab some cornstarch? We’ll need to add it for the sauce.”

“OF COURSE!” He strides towards a cabinet and opens the door. A flash of white dashes out, knocking Papyrus off balance. “DRAT! NOT AGAIN! HELP ME CATCH THAT MEDDLING CANINE!”

“What?” Why was there a dog in his pantry? The only pet you remember seeing before this is Rocky.

“... since when do you and Sans have a dog?”
Papyrus is already out of the kitchen when he shouts, “WE DON’T, WHICH IS PRECISELY THE PROBLEM. THAT PESKY TOBY ALWAYS SNEAKS HIS WAY INSIDE OUR HOUSE AND CAUSES ALL SORTS OF HAVOC. I JUST FINISHED SORTING MY BONE ATTACKS, FOR ASGORE’S SAKE!”

Bone attacks? You are going to need to ask about that later. In the meantime, you join the frantic search.

“I THINK HE’S UNDER THE COUCH. GRILLBY, USE YOUR FIRE AS A BEACON TO DRAW HIM OUT SO I CAN CAPTURE HIM.”

“... he’s a dog, not a moth,” Grillby argues as he kneels down in front of the couch. A small ball of fire appears a few inches above the ground. “... here… did you say his name was Toby?”

“YES.”

“... here Toby, go fetch!” The fire ball goes soaring across the room and the dog chases after it, claws scattering to a halt as he hurdles straight into a wall of bones. The wall encloses around Toby, trapping him in place.

Or, it does until he takes the largest bone and scampers off to chew it.

“NOT MY PRECIOUS BONE ATTACK, YOU RASCAL!”

In a stroke of luck, you manage to attract the dog’s attention with a sharp whistle. After a few strategic pets and belly rubs, the bone falls from his mouth. You slide it over to Papyrus, keeping a steady control over the canine.

“THANK YOU, MISS SOCIAL WORKER.”

“No problem. What should I do with Toby now?”

“JUST LET HIM OUTSIDE, PLEASE,” he requests, offering a hand to help you up as you hold onto the squirming dog. He leads you towards the door, and you settle Toby outside. He gives your hand a quick lick before running down the street, leaving slight pawprints in the snow.

“... are you ready to get back to cooking?” Grillby calls from across the house.

“The Great Papyrus is always ready! Unless we are talking about Sans’ awful puns. In that case, no one is ever ready.” The two of you return to the kitchen, where Grillby is carefully stirring vegetables around the pan so that they don’t burn. Papyrus takes over that station for now, waiting for further instruction.

Once you take back your seat at the table, you decide to ask a question that has been bothering you for the past few minutes. “How often does this dog thing happen?”

“Too often, Miss Social Worker. It’s been like this since we lived underground,” Papyrus laments. “I still don’t know how he makes it inside.”

“... Papyrus, grab a spoon and tell me how it tastes right now.”

“WHY WOULD I NEED TO DO THAT?”

He… he is kidding, right? Please, let him be kidding. Sure, it would explain a lot, but still. Grillby, it seems, shares your thought process. “... so you know if you need to add anything?”
“WOWIE! I WOULD HAVE NEVER THOUGHT OF INCLUDING ALL MY SENSES LIKE THAT. USUALLY, I RELY ON MY IMPECCABLE VISION.”

Again, that explains a lot. Namely, the sequins. As disgusting as it is to think about, you do have to admit that they were an aesthetically pleasing addition. You watch as Papyrus gets out a soup spoon and scoops up some vegetables. Just before he places it in his mouth, he pauses. “I SUPPOSE IT WOULD BE IDEAL FOR ME TO MAKE MY TONGUE FOR THIS.”

Before you can stop yourself, you blurt out “What?” In response, Papyrus opens his mouth wide for you and Grillby to see. At first, there is only a dark cavern behind his teeth. In a matter of seconds, a bright, shimmering tangerine glow forms inside his mouth, which soon forms into what truly does resemble a tongue. A small inner voice tells you to poke it, which you promptly ignore. That would be rude on so many levels.

“TADA!” he exclaims, still perfectly enunciating despite the fact that his tongue is sticking out. Then again, that shouldn’t come as a surprise, considering that he has been talking to you this entire time without it. “NOW I SHOULD BE ABLE TO TASTE THE STIR FRY MUCH BETTER.”

“... since when do you have a tongue?” Grillby asks while Papyrus chews thoughtfully. Good to know that you aren’t the only one out of the loop about skeletons having tongues. Papyrus holds up a finger in the universal sign of ‘wait until I’m done eating, please’.

“THIS IS QUITE GOOD, GRILLBY. I LIKE THIS RECIPE ALREADY. OH! THE TONGUE? SINCE A FEW SECONDS AGO? DIDN’T YOU WATCH ME FORM IT?”

“... I meant, have you always been able to do this?”

“OF COURSE,” Papyrus answers, sounding slightly puzzled. “EVEN A BABYBONES CAN SUMMON A TONGUE. WHY WOULD I NOT BE ABLE TO?”

“... it’s just that I’ve never seen Sans do that.”

“REALLY? WELL, MY BROTHER HAS ALWAYS BEEN A BIT LAZY WHEN IT COMES TO HIS MAGIC.”

“... that’s a shame. Your tongue is very fascinating.”

“NYEH HEH HEH!” Papyrus laughs, suddenly reminding you of Skeletor. “THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT ARE FASCINATING ABOUT THE GREAT PAPYRUS!”

“... I’m sure there are. I can’t wait to find out some more~” Grillby says, flames shifting slightly behind his glasses. Um, is it just you, or is Grillby…? Nah, you’re probably just imagining things. “... you can measure out the rice now.”

The rest of the meal prep goes over pretty smoothly. It is almost like watching your own private food channel show, if those included a bizarre comedy element. Or maybe a horror element based on how often you have to suppress a cringe. Papyrus listens to Grillby’s instructions, although he sometimes makes some strange suggestions along the way that get turned down immediately. For example, taking the dinosaur eggs from his oatmeal to add to the coconut rice to improve the texture. Every few steps, Grillby gives the instruction to try a bite of food. It seems a bit excessive to you, but you are sure the bartender knows what he is doing. Maybe it is to help Papyrus get into the habit of testing his food. You do notice that Grillby stares at Papyrus’ mouth a lot when he is eating, for some reason. Or, at least you think he is. You may struggle to discern his facial features
amidst his flames, but his glasses are directly pointed in that direction.

Actually, the more that you think about it, the more like you feel like you are intruding on something private. Sure, that kind of is what generally happens during informal home visits, but it is almost like the two of them have forgotten about your presence. Grillby’s compliments, which had previously been mostly in reference to Papyrus’ progress, are starting to become a bit more personal. In fact, it gets to the point where the skeleton’s cheekbones are lit up with magic the same colour as his tongue. This seems to imply that your previous observation that skeletons can blush (that you have been trying so hard to forget about) is correct. The two of them have also been getting pretty close in physical proximity in the last little bit. Even if Grillby is just keeping a careful eye on his student’s technique, you doubt he needs to be that close in order to do so. That, or he really needs to get a new prescription for his glasses.

Basically, you feel like you are third-wheeling on their cooking lesson.

With a quick look at the clock, you realise your time is up. You need to get back to Ebott for your next visit. You say a quick goodbye, letting the two of them continue in peace.

Needless to say, this was an interesting visit. Then again, when are they not? At least you can say that you should no longer have concerns about Frisk’s food situation. Now, all you need to do is see if you can figure out what is going on with Sans.

Chapter End Notes

I wonder what’s up with Grillby and Papyrus? Also, now I want stir fry. In preparation for this chapter, I looked up so many recipes to double check that I don't just make it weirdly when I cook. As it turns out, most of what I found online calls for the sauce to be made ahead of time. I personally think it’s easier to make directly in the pan when cooking everything else (plus it dirties less dishes), but whatever.

Also, you guys don't wanna know how long it took me to think of a food that is relatively simple to make that wasn't pasta. The answer is a long time. For some reason, my brain wouldn't accept the fact that part of the reason for Papyrus' cooking lessons was for him to be able to cook something other than noodles.

My Tumblr! Feel free to come over to talk or to find out the occasional tidbit about upcoming chapters.
From the second you open your eyes to see sunlight fighting to stream into your room from behind your curtains, you are thankful today is a Saturday where you have absolutely no responsibilities. You can just lay in bed, make sketchy microwaved meals and watch tv, and nothing can stop you.

Well, until your phone starts ringing. That could easily bring your plans to a halt.

“Hello?”

“Hey Bubbles!” Ivy exclaims in a rush. “Are you busy today?”

“No,” you admit, knowing that you soon will be by the sounds of it.

“Oh, thank goodness! Remember how Malcolm and I have had plans for a date day for almost a month now? Well, Kelsey — you know, our regular sitter — just called and told me she has the flu. So, I was hoping you could come and take care of Libbie for the day.”

Blankly staring at the wall, you wait a few seconds for the word vomit Ivy unleashed upon you to make sense to your still-tired brain. Once you decipher her request, you yawn, “Sure. What time do you need me here for?” She gives an awkward laugh over the line, making you groan. “I’ll be there in about half an hour? I’m not really up yet, so I’ll need to get ready.”

“That’s all right! Thank you so much! I’ll make it up to you sometime! See you!” Just as you assume she is going to hang up, you hear her yell, “Malcolm, we’re good! Bubbles is coming over.” You decide to end the call yourself and rush to get dressed.

Twenty minutes later (you made better time than expected), you arrive at the Wilson house. Malcolm is barely able to let you in before Ivy grabs you by the hand and starts giving you instructions in a whirlwind around the house. Along the way, Malcolm wordlessly hands you the baby. Finally, he ends up dragging your friend out the door, still spouting various information at you.

“Will you just go and enjoy your time with your hubby already? Lib’s gonna be fine. You’re acting like I’ve never watched a kid before, for goodness sake.”

“I know, but—”

“We’ll see you in a few hours,” Malcolm interrupts. “C’mon dear, we’re going to be late.” With that, he shuts the door behind them, leaving you and Liberty alone.

“Hey Lib Lib,” you coo to the six month old, bouncing her gently as you walk to the living room. “What should we do today?” She giggles before going into a burst of babbling as a response.
While Libbie is laying on her play mat, you decide to look up some activities in the area. Ivy left you the car seat and stroller, allowing you to go out if you wanted. You see an advertisement for some sort of winter market at a nearby community centre, which sounds like fun. Maybe you could even work on getting some holiday shopping done while you are at it.

“Well, let’s get your diaper bag packed and you dressed in your outside clothes,” you tell Libbie as you pick her up from the floor. “We’re going on an adventure! Actually,” you amend, scrunching up your nose, “you’re getting a diaper change and then we’re going on an adventure.”

By the time you arrive to the market, you can tell that you missed out on some of the better deals. From a quick glance, a lot of the tables are devoted to selling baked goods and some homemade crafts. Libbie at least seems amused, reaching from her stroller to grab at the bright and shiny merchandise. Feeling indulgent, you buy her a blue crochet owl toque, slipping it over her fine, dark curls.

“I can’t wait until you’re older so I can babysit you and then send you back to your mom hyped up on sugar.” Goodness knows Ivy deserves it sometimes.

Roughly halfway around the market, you start to realise how hungry you are. It shouldn’t really come as a surprise, considering how you didn’t have a chance to eat breakfast this morning. It only becomes worse as you walk by a booth covered in expertly decorated sugar cookies. You purchase a batch, but you don’t really feel like making that your only meal of the day. Out of the corner of your eye, you notice a hot dog stand with a pretty substantial line in front of it. Quickly, you scan the rest of the building to see if there are any other options. Nothing pops out at you, so you carefully turn Libbie’s stroller around to join the line.

You move forward fairly automatically, keeping most of your concentration on your young charge. That is why it isn’t until you are the next person in line that you notice the familiar face of the hot dog vendor.

Or should you say the familiar skull?

“hey, welcome to sans’ sans-sational ‘dogs,” he says, not looking up from his portable grill. “how many ‘dogs wouldja like?”

“‘Dogs?”

He directs his gaze at you. After a flicker of recognition, he points to the sign above his head. It looks like it is written in comic sa— damn it, how have you not noticed this about their names before now? “yeah. ‘dogs. apostrophe-dogs. short for hot dogs. are you gonna buy any or just stand there all day?”

Right. “Uh, I’ll just get one, please.”

“comin’ right up.”

The two of you stand there awkwardly as you wait for the current batch to finish cooking. With a mostly silent sigh, you decide to try and make the wait feel slightly less awkward with some polite small talk. “So, how’s the market been going for you?”

“decent,” he says curtly, flipping over some of the food. “pays better than it did underground. all i have to do is say is it’s monster food and you humans will spend an outrageous amount. speaking of…” He points back to the sign, specifically at the prices. Yeah, he wasn’t kidding. You have never paid so much for a hot dog, but here you are, still grabbing for your wallet.
“You used to sell hot dogs Underground?”

“sometimes.” Oh look, avoidant as ever. Not that it matters at the moment; you aren’t on the job and he has no responsibility to cooperate with you as anything more than a vendor.

Libbie, who has been amusing herself quietly in her stroller, chooses this moment to toss her rabbit plush. Naturally, it lands on the other side of Sans’ stand. “Sorry, do you think you could...?”

Without a word, he glances at the ground. He keeps staring, and a part of you wonders if he will just leave it there as some sort petty act of revenge. At this point, you can’t put it past him. A slight bluish light rises up from his side, which you soon see contains the bunny. He floats it on over to Libbie, who is flailing her tiny arms to reach at her airborne toy. Something in Sans’ expression softens (and man, is it weird to think about a skull becoming softer), and he dances it around for a bit before letting the toy fall as the blue magic fades away.

“that your kid?”

“No, I’m watching her for a friend.”

He gives the baby another glance before preparing your food. “would it be the friend from grillby’s?”

“Yeah...”

“cute kid.” Wrapping up your hot dog, he hands it to you. “have a nice day.”

“You too.”

With that interaction out of the way, you go find one of the benches the market organisers set up for eating. Shoppers start to filter out, clearing the room. For a while, you find yourself watching the hot dog stand, although that is largely because it is in your direct line of vision. Just as you are about to get up and make your way out, you notice someone at Sans’ booth that gives you pause. There is something in the man’s stance which screams danger. Almost like you can feel rage streaming from his body. Your unease at the situation only increases as you can hear the man raise his voice at Sans. Now, back when you had a job in retail, you had dealt with your fair share of irritable customers. However, this looks like more than someone being upset with the price of his purchase. Your curiosity and mild concern get the better of you, so you put the remains of your hot dog in the stroller and inch your way forward to get a better view of the scene.

You are unable to catch everything the man says, but what little you do hear riles a feeling from deep in your chest. The man, who is clearly anti-monster, keeps on going on about how Sans and his kind are what is wrong with society and that leaving Mt Ebott was a mistake. This is not okay. Sans is standing there stiffly, just taking it all in. Not standing up for himself when he is being borderline threatened for existing. You look around, hoping someone will go and step in. After all, you have a baby to take care of. But nobody does. And if no one else is going to do what is right, that leaves you. You cannot — will not — stand to the side right now.

Making sure that the wheels of Libbie’s stroller are locked and that she is in a safe location, you march over, cell phone at the ready. Your timing is perfect, as you hear the man make a clear threat of violence. You clear your voice with a cough. “Is this man bothering you?”

The offender, whom you have mentally assigned the (admittedly childish) name of Racist McJerkface, turns towards you, face screwed into a scowl. “Yeah, the demon’s bugging me. Calling the over-glorified, filthy corpse a ‘man’, though, is —”
“I wasn’t talking to you,” you cut Racist McJerkface off curtly, turning to Sans. “Do I need to call the cops?”

“Why, so they can finally send this scum back where it belongs?” McJerkface laughs. “Shoo, girly. This is none of your business.”

Well, now you are angry. If openly intimidating and threatening a monster, who is just trying to earn his living, isn’t bad enough, he has now made you personally pissed off with his condescension. “Actually it is. When I heard you threaten him, it became my business.”

“Oh, I see. You must be one of those monsterfu—”

“I dare you,” you hiss. “Finish that sentence.” A small crowd has gathered nearby, which works for you. More witnesses, should things escalate. It wouldn’t surprise you if some already have their phones out to record the conflict. “Now get out of here and leave the vendor alone. Before I call the cops.”

Racist McJerkface glares at you but he hesitates, taking a look at the people watching. He must realise what you already have, and he backs off, swearing under his breath as he storms away.

Finally.

You return to grab Libbie, adrenaline high starting to go down. Swerving around the dispersing crowd, you make your way back over to Sans. “Are you okay?”

“Fine. You didn’t have to do that.”

“Nonsense. It wouldn’t be right to just watch as he went after you. Besides, things looked like they were about to get ugly and I’m probably the only person here with multiple emergency service numbers on speed dial.”

“Only ugly thing there was his face.”

That... that joke gets you. A sharp burst of laughter escapes you, no matter how wrong it seems, given the circumstances. “I’m assuming you came here alone?” Sans gives a grunt in response. “I’m going to take that as a yes. Do you want any help packing up?”

“Why, so you can protect me from the haters?”

Wow, are your intentions that obvious? “I would call it standing up for you, but sure. The last thing you need is to be beaten up behind the back of the building because Racist McJerkface decides he’s not done with you.”

“I can handle myself.”

You look him up and down. Really short, slouchy skeleton wearing bunny slippers and a hoodie who looks like he could fall asleep at any second. Something about that image doesn’t let you believe his words. “Sans, let me assure you, as someone who has been involved with her fair share of physical conflicts, ‘handling yourself’ with people like that isn’t the best plan to fall back on. Trust me.”

“Yeah, ‘cause social work is such a violent job.”

“A lot more violent than you’d think,” you spit back at his derisive tone. “Chances are, I’ve been involved with more fights than you. Either way, the point is that I’m not going to sit by and watch
one of Frisk’s guardians put himself in danger, no matter how much we may not get along.”

“since when do you care?”

Just before you go into a whole tirade, you force yourself to take a deep breath. You are being unreasonable, letting the leftovers of your anger from Racist McJerkface take over. “Look. You never knew her, but Frisk’s former case worker was a good friend of mine. For years, it broke her heart knowing that Frisk didn’t have a forever home where they were happy. Heck, they rarely had a temporary home where that was the case. Now, I'm pretty sure the both of us can see that Frisk is happy with you and Papyrus. If things go well, this’ll be something they get to keep.”

“then why don’t you just leave them alone?” Unlike in the past when he has asked you similar questions, there is something in his tone that really speaks to you. There is no hostility, for starters. The question is genuine, if not slightly resigned, like he already knows the answer. In part, he does. Yet, he is still compelled, for whatever reason, to ask. Not for him; if he was thinking of himself, he would have said ‘leave us alone’ or ‘leave me alone’ instead of ‘leave them alone’. No, this is more about Frisk, and possibly Papyrus. All of this drives you to share more with him.

“You should know by this point that I can’t just do that,” you sigh, unstrapping Libbie from the stroller so you can hold her for a few minutes. “In my line of work, it isn’t that easy. Happiness, even though it’s something I like to provide, isn’t everything. I’ve had to tear kids away from their parents, kicking and screaming, but with no other choice because their parents were in no way deserving of the title. I will in no way pretend to enjoy doing it. It’s really one of the worst parts of my job. But the thing is, a sad kid is better than a dead one, and sometimes, that’s what it comes down to.

“Even though I don’t have reason to believe you would cause deliberate harm to Frisk, I can’t be too careful. Especially not when I am being held responsible for the wellbeing of a child ambassador. Call me selfish, but I don’t want to deal with an international scandal because something bad happens. Frisk and King Asgore also don’t need that on their plate right now. Plus, I need to be ready for anything that could come up during the adoption process. Frisk doesn’t deserve to have their happiness stolen from them by careless negligence. That’s why I can’t leave you guys alone.”

Sans doesn’t respond, but you hope that he takes your words to heart. You bounce Libbie on your hip and watch as he finishes putting everything away. Once he is done, you ask, “Do you want me to walk you to your car?”

“didn’t take one.”

“Then how…?”

“shortcut.”

You are about to ask how a shortcut can get him all the way to New New Home, but remember what Frisk called Sans’ teleportation just before you open your mouth. “All right. Well, have a nice day. I’ll see you Monday.”

“yeah. see you.”

With that, he takes a step and poofs away, stand and everything. Libbie gives a small gurgle in wonderment, deep brown eyes widening to perfect spheres. You cannot help but laugh at her antics, all the while knowing that a part of you wants to react in the same way. As much as he may irritate you with his attitude, it is fun getting to watch Sans use magic first hand.
You leave the market barely a minute before the organisers would have kicked you out. After struggling to get a squirmy Libbie into her carseat, you head back to the Wilsons’, stopping for a coffee drive through along the way. Libbie, to your complete and utter joy, sleeps through the car ride, not even stirring when you pick her up to bring her to her crib. A babysitting miracle, really.

A few hours later, Ivy bursts through the front door, Malcolm close behind. She scoops up her baby, who had been messing around with large rubber building blocks, spinning her around in joy. “Libbie! Were you a good girl for your Auntie Bubbles?”

You send her an exasperated look as Malcolm groans, “Really dear?”

“Auntie Bubbles is an adorable title and you all know it. But seriously, how was she for you?”

“A wonderful little angel,” you respond, stretching as you stand up from where you had been sprawled on the floor. “I also have some pictures to send you to add to her album.”

“Really? You’re the best. Any way I can convince you —“

“Ivy, she has a job for goodness sake. We’ll ask Kelsey later.”

“Spoilsport,” she complains teasingly, sticking her tongue out at her husband. “Thanks again for coming in last minute. I owe you one.”

You shrug on your coat. “All it means is that the bill is on you next time we go out.”

“Deal. Will you be heading home then? You’re welcome to stay for a bit.”

“I know. I would like to drive back before it gets to dark, though. But the three of us do need to plan a night of our own sometime.”

“We’ll text and arrange something,” Malcolm says. “Have a safe drive home.”

“Thanks. See you guys soon.”

“Bye!”

As you make your way home, what happened at the market sticks in your brain. The sheer amount of coincidences that led to you meeting up with Sans is absolutely astounding. Life really is funny that way. You are just glad that you were there to step in, even though it infuriates you that it was even necessary to begin with. What kind of person actively goes forward and acts like that? It seems so stupid, especially since it takes no effort to just let people live in peace. But what really bugs you is the fact that no one else stepped in. It cannot be because everyone in the crowd hates monsters; most of them were eating food made by a monster, for goodness sake. Where are the people like the ones Ivy texted you about, ready to defend the fact that monsters are also people who don’t deserve discrimination?

You conveniently ignore the fact that you were ready to just sit to the side like everyone else in the room, making your judgement of their actions to be very hypocritical.

At least you can say some good things came of your encounter with your client. Seeing him interact with Libbie was really an eye opener. A good part of you wants to add it to your case notes; nothing you have seen thus far has demonstrated his character with children like watching him play with Libbie’s bunny. Sure, the whole thing barely lasted a minute, but many clues you find tend to be like that anyways. Long story short, though: if Sans acts with that much caring to the child of a stranger for whom he has no responsibility, his treatment of Frisk should theoretically
be even better.

Finally, you arrive back home. To think that you initially had planned not to leave for the day. Oh well. You unlock your door, ready to change into some pyjamas and turn on a movie and put aside all thoughts related to your work. However, there is still one last question weighs upon your mind:

How on earth did Papyrus manage to become such a terrible cook when the hot dogs Sans made were so good?

Chapter End Notes

Sans got back into selling hot dogs (and the occasional hot cat) after hearing Grillby talk about how much of a market there is for monster food items. Less effort with a higher profit? Sign him up for that. Just wait until he finds out about vegetarianism/veganism and realises he can market his food (which is made out of water sausages) as such and make even more money.

Cool fact: Sans wasn't even supposed to be in this chapter. Originally, I was just planning for filler fluff, but then plot appeared out of nowhere. Funny how that happens.

My Tumblr! Feel free to visit at any time! I also have a Pillowfort that you can find here, although I'm not as active there.

Also, I would just like to say that if you ever need someone to talk to, vent to, whatever, my inbox and DMs are always open. I may not be able to respond right away, and I can't guarantee I can be any help, but I'm always willing to listen.
Understanding

Chapter Summary

Sans' experience at the market.

Chapter Notes

Here's Sans' POV of the last chapter, which comes thanks to Punny_Fan bringing the idea to mind. This one feels a bit more repetitive than my other Sans chapters, but that's because I actually decided to have his in-the-moment reactions, which meant repeating dialogue. Oh well.

Also, chapters 12 and 13 will be referenced a decent amount, so if there's any confusion about some of the conversations/other things referenced here, it would probably be helpful to reread those.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“SANS, IT’S TIME TO WAKE UP!”

Sans groan and rolls over, hiding his head under his pillow, the first part of his morning routine. Even on the rare occasion that he wakes up before his energetic brother, this is one of those habits neither of them break. It has just stuck throughout the years, like reading Papyrus something before bed or leaving that one sock out in the living room. Tradition, basically. Each and every morning, Papyrus yells through his door to wake him up, and Sans refuses to move for the next few minutes. Depending on time constraints, Papyrus will either shout that his breakfast is getting cold and wait for Sans to roll his way out of bed or he will full on pick up his older brother and drag him to the table himself. Sometimes, to gauge Pap’s mood in the morning, Sans will purposefully burn through a set list of the worst puns he knows, just to see how long until his brother will snap. Sure, it may be dumb, but if it works it works. During breakfast, Papyrus will often chatter about what he did and who he saw on his morning jog (yesterday, it was a Woshua who was at work cleaning snow and debris from the sidewalks) and remind him and Frisk about the day’s schedule.

With a thump, he hears his door hit the wall in Pap’s enthusiasm to get him up and going for the day. Peeling a single socket open, he stares blearily at his clock, waiting for the blurry red lights to be processed as numbers. Ah, that explains it: Papyrus, being the cool guy that he is, let him sleep in a bit. Considering Sans has to have his booth set up at the human market first thing this morning, that is pretty great. When Papyrus reaches under his arms to pick him up, Sans refuses no resistance, letting himself be carried down the stairs like a boney koala. Frisk is already in the kitchen, sleepily munching on some oatmeal in their pyjamas. As Sans is placed into his chair, he notices that they look just as tired as he feels, mussed bangs shielding their eyes from the light.

“morning frisk. nice to cereal you this morning.”

Sans can feel his brother roll his eye lights from the other side of the room. “REALLY, BROTHER?” Yup, Pap is doing just fine.
“you oat to know by now that i can’t resist.”

“SIGH. THAT’S IT,” Papyrus complains dryly. “I LOST MY APPETITE. IT’S GONE. ARE YOU PROUD OF YOURSELF?”

“the proudest,” he snickers, downing half of the coffee that had been set with his food. “what’s the plans for when i’m in ebott?”

“I’ve got a meeting,” Frisk grumbles, mouth full.

“MANNERS, FRISK. BUT YES, THE BOTH OF US WILL BE AT THE EMBASSY DISCUSSING THE ANTI-SEGREGATION BILL.”

“good luck,” Sans responds, trying to give Frisk a look to convey the silent question ‘have you succeeded with this before?’. Their head bobs the slightest bit, imperceptible if someone wasn’t looking for it, and Sans relaxes. The kid’s got this.

The minute he finishes his bowl, Sans says his goodbyes and pops over to the shed to grab his stand before shortcutting right to the market. Like always, he heads to the back corner and sets up the grill. Leaning against the small section of counter space, he begins to rest until the customers arrive.

One of the nicest part of working the ‘dog stand has and will always be the fact that he can people watch. Well, that and the fact that he has a constant supply of ketchup, although he is careful not to drink directly from the bottle these days. Humans have a habit of not believing him when he says he keeps the ones he drinks separate from the ones he uses for customers. That doesn't stop him from filling a metal water bottle with the red condiment when nobody is looking, though. May not be as easy to drink that way, but he can’t complain too much.

About an hour before he can go home, his line explodes. After that point, it is impossible for him to keep track of time. Sans is too busy taking orders, making ‘dogs, shortcutting home real quick for extra supplies and continuing the cycle all over again. After giving one dude a dozen hot dogs and a hot cat (Sans respects the dude, even if it didn’t beat Frisk’s record), he takes a quick peek at the line. Damn, is it even longer than before? Yeah, there is no way that he is going to be able to take a break. He might even have to do overtime to get through everyone.

A few more customers later, Sans has to place a new pack of ‘dogs on the grill. He hears the next person approach, so he says his normal spiel. “hey, welcome to sans’ sans-sational ‘dogs. how many ‘dogs wouldja like?”

“‘Dogs?” Asks a familiar voice. Really? Can’t the universe give him a full week in peace? His next customer is you, because of course it is.

Suppressing a tired sigh, he looks you straight in the eyes. “yeah. ‘dogs. apostrophe-dogs. short for hot dogs.” You still don’t give any indication of a response, so he adds, “are you gonna buy any or just stand there all day?”

That seems to get your attention. “Uh, I’ll just get one, please.”

“comin’ right up.”

Of course, it isn’t as easy as just giving you a hot dog before sending you on your way. That would be too easy. None of his food is actually cooked yet, and he sure isn’t going to break his promise of being nicer to you by giving an uncooked water sausage. Those things are nasty unless properly prepared. In theory, he could ask you to wait to the side and take the next person’s orders.
That, however, soon becomes unnecessary as you speak up. “So, how’s the market been going for you?”

“decent,” Sans truthfully responds, thanking the universe that the hot dogs are about halfway done. He then considers some of the questions you had asked him in the past that he avoided and decides to supply you with more details. Chances are, you will remember this information even if you aren’t currently working. “pays better than it did underground. all i have to do is say it’s monster food and you humans will spend an outrageous amount. speaking of…”

You get the hint, screwing your nose slightly when you read the price. Yeah, definitely not the first person to have that reaction today. But, like pretty much everyone else, you still fork over the cash. One of these days, he should really raise his prices a tidge, just to see at what point humans will stop buying. Someday, but not today.

“You used to sell hot dogs Underground?”

“sometimes.” Sans cuts himself off, before getting into it. This is the social worker, not Joe Blow eating a burg with him at Grillby’s. You probably wouldn’t be happy finding out that he ran a semi illegal hot dog stand at his sentry station. Actually, that would likely lead to questions about his sentry job, which he would rather avoid. There is so much that could go wrong if you started looking too far into that.

So that he can feel less rude about ignoring you, Sans decides this is a great time to check on his topping levels. He hears a soft thump nearby, but pays no attention to it. Honestly, with all the people walking around and buying things, it could be anything.

“So sorry,” you ask, catching his attention, “do you think you could…?”

Following your gaze, he notices a small plush rabbit a few inches from his feet. You are standing there with a stroller, so logic would dictate it belongs to your kid. Not feeling like making the effort to bend down and grab it, he uses his magic to return it. Your eyes sparkle in interest, but it is really the kid’s reaction that he enjoys. The little squirt, who can’t be more than a year old if Sans is properly remembering how human development works, is enthralled, trying to grab at the floating toy. They are even struggling against their seatbelt in their attempts. Man, does that ever remind him of Paps at that age. All small and full of playful energy in a way that shows how they will become a real handful once they start walking. An indulgent smile grows on his face. It isn’t like he will be holding up the line by doing this; the hot dogs still need to cook, so he might as well enjoy the moment. With a simple manipulation of the bunny’s gravity, he makes the toy look like it is dancing midair. Stars, isn’t this reminiscent of the times Papyrus had him act out the Fluffy Bunny series with some toys he had found in the Dump when his little bro was still working on his reading.

A telltale sizzling lets him know that this next batch is almost done, so he gently sets the bunny on the baby’s lap. A question pops into mind. “that your kid?”

“No, I’m watching her for a friend.”

With another quick look, he notices how the deep skin tone and some of the facial features look vaguely familiar. “would it be the friend from grillby’s?” He is pretty sure she said something about having a baby before you came and everything went downhill.

“Yeah…”

That makes sense. The baby smiles, blowing a small bubble with her saliva. That would be one
thing that Papyrus never did as a babybones. Too bad; it would serve as some great blackmail material whenever Paps complains about him doing something gross. Or to add to the photo album of embarrassing pictures to show potential datemates. “cute kid. have a nice day.”

You take your hot dog, giving him a small smile, which doesn’t look fake for once. “You too.”

The second you leave, the next person steps up. “hey, welcome to sans’ sans-sational ‘dogs. how many ‘dogs wouldja like?”

As it turns out, the rest of his line is taken care of with that last batch of hot dogs. Sans decides just close his sockets for a bit, resting his head on his fist. And maybe nap. Who knows?

Someone slams their hands on his counter, startling Sans to attention. “Hey, monster!”

Really? The market is supposed to close any minute now. Sans ignites his eye lights, not liking what he sees in front of him.

This human? Well, it doesn’t take a Check to know he means trouble. His intent is radiating off of him, to a point where even humans, as out of tune as they are with all things Soul related, should be able to notice. The guy is saying something to him, which Sans mostly puts aside. Right now, watching is more important so he knows the exact moment to dodge. Because, face it: right now, this guy could flick Sans and cause some severe damage thanks to that awful, violent intent.

Sans is about ten seconds from just teleporting the hell out of this place when he notices you marching over to him, Soul radiating with that vibrant yellow. “Is this man bothering you?”

Before he can answer, the human speaks up. “Yeah, the demon’s bugging me. Calling the over-glorified, filthy corpse a ‘man’, though, is —”

You cut him off with that harsh voice that Sans is so accustomed to hearing directed at him. “I wasn’t talking to you. Do I need to call the cops?”

Again, Sans isn’t able to get a word in before the other human interrupts again. He watches as you go up against Mr Angry and Violent, meeting his rage with seething righteousness, going as far as making veiled threats. Before he knows it, the man is gone, uttering a strangely creative bunch of curses. Sans will have to remember some of those for future use. You leave again and Sans decides that this is a great time to pack up and get the heck out of here.

Before he can, however, you reappear with your friend’s baby. “Are you okay?”

“fine. you didn’t have to do that.”

“Nonsense. It wouldn’t be right to just watch as he went after you.” Of course. The only thing that motivated you to help was your Justice. That doesn’t surprise him in the slightest. “Besides, things looked like they were about to get ugly and I’m probably the only person here with multiple emergency service numbers on speed dial.”

You have a point, despite having no idea how ugly it truly could have been. However, even if you are right, that doesn’t mean that Sans feels like acknowledging it. Instead, he relies on his personal favourite manner of deflection: humour. “only ugly thing there was his face.”

To his pleasure, you give a surprised chuckle. Clearly, you were not expecting that. “I’m assuming you came here alone?” Really? Do you see any other monsters here? Of course he came alone. “I’m going to take that as a yes. Do you want any help packing up?”
He knows he should be polite and just give a yes or no. Unfortunately, Sans has been working for too many hours already and the stress of what just happened makes it harder to resist the snarkier response. “why, so you can protect me from the haters?”

You don’t even glare at him for that. Either you are better at hiding your reactions than Sans thought, or it didn’t come out as rude as it could have been. He is going to stick with the latter, if only because he puts a good bit of pride in his ability to read faces. “I would call it standing up for you, but sure. The last thing you need is to be beaten up behind the back of the building because Racist McJerkface decides he’s not done with you.”

He just barely resists the urge to roll his eyes. Your words may be genuine, but can you give him at least a little credit? Like he would be dumb enough to just go wandering around random buildings outside of New New Home. Especially after being threatened. He does have to hand it to you for one thing: Racist McJerkface is the best name he has heard for an anti-monster asshole. “i can handle myself.”

Without a trace of subtlety, you scan him with the same intensity as he does when he makes his Judgements. Even without the ability to see his Soul, it is obvious that you have come to a conclusion reminiscent of what his Check would say: Sans, the easiest enemy.

“Sans, let me assure you, as someone who has been involved with her fair share of physical conflicts, ‘handling yourself’ with people like the isn’t the best plan to fall back on. Trust me.”

Trust you? Not happening, or at least not any time soon. “yeah, ‘cause social work is such a violent job.”

“A lot more violent than you think. Chances are, I’ve been involved with more fights than you.”

Sans wants to laugh bitterly at that statement. Stars! You really have no idea. Now, he doesn’t doubt that you been in a few scuffles over the years. But you having more fight experience? He has definitely dealt with worse as Judge. And repetitively. Granted, he may not fully remember all that happened the times when Frisk forced his hand, but his notes, nightmares and conversations with the kid paint him an all too vivid picture.

“Either way,” you continue,” the point is that I’m not going to sit by and watch one of Frisk’s guardians put himself in danger, no matter how much we may not get along.”

Sans hates himself for asking before he even gets all the words out of his mouth, but he doesn’t stop. “since when do you care?”

You deliver a slow, long exhale, and Sans prepares himself for whatever comes his way. What he was not expecting, though, was for your expression to shift to something softer, and a bit sad. Your voice is quiet as you explain yourself. Everything you say reads true. Frisk may not talk much about what happened before they left for Mt Ebott, but the child that is now a part of his family is far happier than the one he met Underground. This Frisk smiles and laughs. Sure, they may have made friends with monsters during their more peaceful runs, but it is nothing compared to what he has seen on the Surface. The idea of forcing Frisk back to their previous life hurts, and not only because Sans knows that it would likely lead to another Reset. At this point, he isn’t sure if him or the kid can take that anymore. Not after what Frisk confided in him.

This is why he asks.

“then why don’t you just leave them alone?”
“You should know by this point that I can’t just do that.” He does, and that is the worst part, isn’t it? Neither you or him want this, but you are both stuck here.

Content-wise, a lot of what you tell him next repeats previous conversations. A child’s safety trumps their happiness, like it or not. This time, however, Sans gets a better impression of who you are as a person. When you had gone off on this topic previously, you had been angry and accusatory, even if Sans probably deserved it. Don’t get it wrong, your emotions still colour what you say. It is just how they impact the message that has changed. Today, you are more open, giving small personal anecdotes instead of just citing your position on the matter. You also go more into detail about the specifics for Frisk’s case and Sans has to admit that you are completely correct. Additionally, as much as it may annoy him, he cannot help but acknowledge that, in your shoes, he would make the same decision.

What really gets to him, though, is this, barely spoken above a murmur while simultaneously bearing more weight than anything else you have said: “Frisk doesn’t deserve to have their happiness stolen from them by careless negligence. That’s why I can’t leave you guys alone.” Because is that not exactly what Frisk was in tears about when that one night? The kid has already had so much of their happiness taken away because of others throughout the Resets.

With a locking of the shelves in his stand, he brushes his hands on the front of his hoodie before stuffing them in his pockets. You soon figure out that he is ready to leave, asking, “Do you want me to walk you to your car?”

“didn’t take one.” And a good thing too. He doesn’t want to try thinking about how he would fit his stand into a vehicle. Maybe with an interdimensional box, but that still takes more work than his way.

“Then how…”?

“shortcut.”

You blink a few times, and Sans can tell that you are trying to remember what that means. “All right. Well, have a nice day. I’ll see you on Monday.”

“yeah. see you.”

Hot dog stand back in the shed, Sans takes another shortcut directly to the living room couch. He mindlessly channel surfs, napping through commercial breaks. Papyrus and Frisk get back during one of those breaks, causing Sans to wake up with a snort.

“HELLO, SANS, WE’RE BACK! HOW WAS YOUR DAY?”

“eh, decent,” Sans shrugs. Better to not mention what happened with Racist McJerkface; he doesn’t want to worry the kid or his bro unnecessarily. “you’ll never guess who i got to ketchup with at the market, though.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm so glad this chapter is now a thing, if only so I could share some of Sans' thoughts in response to some of Bubble's claims. Namely, the whole "I've been involved with more fights than you" thing. That entire line was created with Sans' thoughts in mind.
My Tumblr! Feel free to visit at any time! I also have a Pillowfort that you can find here, although I'm not as active there.
You groan irritably and squeeze your eyes shut, knowing that the glaring lights of the office are only contributing to your growing headache. Naturally, the day that you choose to devote solely to catching up on paperwork is the day that your computer decides to be a complete and utter pain. Between requiring updates and other generic issues, you have probably spent just as much time scowling at the damn thing as you have been getting actual work done.

Nearby, someone furiously slams their keyboard tray under their desk, muttering a slew of curses before finishing with a hissed “Maudit ordi!” At least you can say you are not the only one having tech problems today.

“Hey,” Kyle calls out as he bursts into the office, “the IT guy should be here in about twenty minutes.” A series of lackluster cheers breaks through the room. “Also, I’ve got donuts.” Another more enthusiastic cheer. Practically everyone gets up, flocking to the young intern like seagulls at a beachside picnic. He places the box of pastries on a table before ducking out of the way. Luckily, you manage to snag the last of your favourite flavour before Kyle taps you on the shoulder.

“François wants you in his office,” he says, smoothing his hand over his hair as he takes off his toque. This has the opposite effect than intended, and the dark brown waves floof up even more with static electricity. “He didn’t say why, but it sounded urgent.”

“Sure thing.” At least this will give you a break from struggling to type up reports. Maybe IT will have even dealt with the problem by the time your return, depending on how long your boss wants to talk. “Thanks for the food.”

“No problem. My girlfriend bought them for her practicum class, but something came up. All I know is that she shoveled the box in my hands before I left this morning.”

“Well, thank her for me then.” You grab a napkin before unapologetically shoving the entire donut in your mouth. The sweet food practically dissolves in your mouth, and it is almost as though you can feel your headache diminish. Were you that hungry? Actually, now that you think about it, the donut had a similar fizziness to the burger and fries you had at Grillby’s, or the hot dog you had at the market. Does that mean it was also magic? Probably. If so, it would explain why it no longer feels like someone is slowly stabbing at your eyes and brain with a dull, rusty butter knife. Maybe you should look into buying some sort of monster food product to keep on hand after next week’s visit to New New Home. Eating a donut or some fries or whatever when you have a headache sounds much more fun than having to wait on pills to do the same thing. Especially considering how much quicker the effects kicked in.

Carefully brushing at your face and shirt to get rid of any stray crumbs, you knock at François’ door.
“Come in.”

There is a sharp squeak as you open the door, and you can’t help but give a slight wince at the sound, even though your headache is now pretty much gone. “Good morning, François.”

“Good morning,” he echoes, taking a sip of coffee before gesturing to the chair across from his desk. All right, this is going to take some time. “How was your visit to New New Home yesterday?”

“The roads to and from were awful, but other than that, it was pretty good.” And that is nothing but the truth. It seems that Sans has mellowed out a little bit after your little talk on Saturday. Yes, he was still slightly avoidant and sure, he wasn’t as pleasant to deal with as his brother. But then again, who is? Even when the tall skeleton shocks you with some of the weird things that come out of his mouth, his overall manners and cooperation make Papyrus a delight to work with. Frisk also brings a certain lightness to your Monday afternoons, yesterday included. The second you stepped inside, they ran up to you with their guess of the day in regards to the meaning of your nickname. It was wrong, but you had to applaud their creativity. A part of you wishes they were correct, though; winning a national bubblegum blowing contest would have been an awesome way to earn the name of Bubbles.

“That is good.” He pauses, putting on a pair of reading glasses before taking out a stack of papers. You don’t have to read them to know that they are Frisk’s; the bright, cherry red sticker on the top right corner shows that they belong to your highest priority case. “Let me cut to the chase. I got another call from Judge Andrews again.”

Again? You quirk a questioning eyebrow at him, and he nods tiredly. “Why haven’t I been told about this?”

“Because I’m a nice person who knows that the last thing you need right now is to have her on your ass about this whole situation.”

Yikes. You can count on one hand the amount of times you have heard François use coarse language, or at least in English. “That bad?”

“You have no idea.” He stands up and turns on his personal coffee maker. “It’s as though she does not understand that I have other things to worry about.”

“I’m assuming that the judge’s calls have to do with why you want to speak to me?”

“Yes. Andrews has been having me send copies of your reports and wants to know why you haven’t taken custody away from the current guardians.”

You sigh. A part of you was worried that this would happen before you even got anywhere near an adoption hearing. “Have you also read my reports?”

“I have, but I would still like you to explain your opinion on the matter.”

“My opinion is that this entire thing is a complicated potential disaster.”

“Why?”

That is the one million dollar question, isn’t it? You slouch back in the chair, trying to think of the best way to phrase this. “If anything goes wrong, I have no real solution. Obviously, I wouldn’t be able to leave Frisk with Sans and Papyrus.”
“Obviously.”

“However, there’s really no other place where I would be able to send them. I don’t think we could allow them to live with another monster family, just because the community is so small; Frisk would remain too close to Sans and Papyrus. Plus, I had enough problems with finding paperwork for the current guardians, and both of them had worked for the king. Add that to the whole citizenship mess and I’m not sure if it would work out any better.”

“What about Asgore?”

“Conflict of interests,” you say almost automatically. This would not be the first time you had thought about that. If Frisk were to live with King Asgore, there would be no separation between their duties as ambassador and family. Also, you don’t want to think of the diplomatic incidents that could arise should you determine him to be unfit as a guardian for whatever reason. Because of these same reasons, you can’t even allow yourself to consider Toriel as an option, even though Frisk thinks of her as a mother figure. Even if she is separated from Asgore, as rumour has it, the fact that she is still using her title as queen could cause similar concerns.

“So, monsters are out.”

“Hypothetically,” you remind him. “Which would hypothetically mean that Frisk would return to the foster system, which would be problematic for a whole bunch of other reasons.”

“How would they serve as ambassador?”

“Precisely. If we were lucky, the foster parents would give them rides to and from New New Hope, but you and I both know that is very unlikely. And that’s assuming we’d even be able to get them into a family instead of being forced to place them in a group home.”

“What other problems would there be?”

“Well,” you start, “there’s the fact that Frisk has already proven to be a flight risk. And if they can get all the way to Mt Ebott on their own, I don’t see what would stop them from returning to New New Home, especially since there are people they care about there.”

François nods. “I see. So, should I tell Judge Andrews that you are waiting to remove Frisk until you can figure out what to do with them?”

“Of course not!” You are appalled that your boss would believe that you would let a child stay in an unsuitable situation only because you are not one hundred percent sure you would have the ideal placement for them. “I thought I made it clear that all this was hypothetical, that these would be the problems if something was actually to go wrong. Right now, I’m fairly confident that we will be able to proceed with adoption as planned.”

“Fairly confident?”

“I’d rather not count my eggs before they hatch,” you clarify with a subtle shrug.

“I see.” He downs the rest of his coffee so he can refill the cup. Not for the first time in your life, you wonder how much blood actually runs through his veins and how much is just pure caffeine. His ability to consume coffee rivals a college student who has been pulling consecutive all-nighters during exam season. “Enlighten me then as to why you have flagged one of the guardians as a concern in your reports.”

“Honestly? With how everything is with this case, I’ve been forcing myself to record the slightest
little thing, just in case. Don’t get me wrong; Sans has caused me my fair share of trouble. However, as it stands, I have not seen anything in how he interacts with everyone other than myself that causes concern. I think he just has a grudge against me personally. Also, you’ll find that those notes come from my first visits, not recent ones.”

“And the food issues?” François asks with a quick glance to the files.

“Resolved. Things had drastically improved by the next time I had returned, as mentioned in my report.” You rack your brain for any other things he could bring up, but are at a loss. Hopefully, these answers will suffice. “Anything else that you’d like to know?”

“No, that will do. This was an excellent conversation,” François says lightly, straightening the files. “I won’t keep you from your work any longer.”

With a curt nod, you get up to leave, only to pause. You turn back to face your boss, narrowing your gaze at him. “You were already aware of all this, weren’t you?”

“Most of it,” he admits with an amused smile. “I just wanted to make sure that you knew where you stand, just in case Judge Andrews’ decides to cut out the middleman and contacts you directly. You may not be a lawyer, but with her, you’ll need to argue like one.”

Trust François to question you like that as a test. Of course, you cannot deny that it is nice to know that you have him looking out for you. “Do you think that it’ll come to that?”

“I have no idea. But,” he firmly adds, “if it does, you are more than capable of handling her. I chose you for a reason, and not just because you were close to Miss Jamison and familiar with how she used to think.”

There is a moment of silence between the two of you. With your voice barely above a whisper, you ask, “How do you think Amanda would’ve handled this?”

François’ expression softens as he reflects upon your question. “I have no idea. She probably would have overworked herself, trying to find the perfect solution, even though there will never be one.”

“Probably,” you repeat with a subdued smile. “She always would spread herself too thin, trying to save the world all by herself.”

Maybe, if you were lucky, she would have vented to you about her problems, using you as a sounding board as she went through ideas. You would be the shoulder for her to cry on as things go wrong, but you always did prefer that to when she would just try to power her way through her own struggles as she tried to fix other people’s problems. In the mornings, you would have come to the office, only to find her passed out at her desk after she accidentally worked beyond overtime doing research. Goodness knows it wouldn’t have been the first time that it happened, but if she was still working the case, it would be a much more frequent occurrence. People might have accused her of going a bit too soft on the guardians. Admittedly, it would have been true. However, she would have refuted those claims, explaining that she has been working through cultural differences. On her roughest days, like when the chemo made her unimaginably sick, she would still make it to every home visit, forcing a cheerful smile on her face. Unlike when you do that, though, the smile would become real throughout the day as she found things to appreciate. Then, she would tell you about those things and your day would lighten along with hers.

Man, you miss her so much.

After you decide that the melancholy has passed its due course, you get up. “Thanks again,
François. I appreciate it."

“It’s no problem. That is what I am here for.”

A teasing smile makes its way onto your face. “I thought it was so that you could be Judge Andrews’ middleman.”

“Get out of here already and let me work,” he shoots back, although you can see his lips quiver in amusement.

“Yes sir.”

Just as you step out the door, he calls your name. You pivot around on your heel. “You’re making the right call here. Keep up the good work.”

“I will.”

And that is a promise you are determined to keep.

Chapter End Notes

I'm going to be honest here, I'm still not sure how I feel about this chapter. For a while, I've wanted to have a similar conversation with François, but I wasn't sure where or how I wanted to do it. It just happened that I felt like I needed something to go to after the past few chapters that wasn't another home visit, so...

On the plus side, I got to delve into a few more characters that I have been wanting to deal with for some time, so there's that.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
Warmth floods through your body as Papyrus unlocks the front door and lets you into the house. Over the past few weeks, the region has only gotten colder and colder, and New New Home is no exception. With the city being closer to the mountain than Ebott, the wintry weather is all the more noticeable. Now, thick layers of fluffy snow cover the monster capital, making the festive decor covering their house look far less out of place. As always, Frisk sprints towards the two of you, sliding to a stop in their slippered feet.

“Did you used to work in a soap factory?” Frisk gasps, cheeks flushed and slightly out of breath.

“No, but good try.”

“Dang it!” They rush off again, nearly tripping on their slippers in their haste. You just smile, shaking your head slightly. During your last visit, they had shown you the special notebook that they have reserved for the sole purpose of tracking their ideas for the origin of your nickname. You have to admit, this kid is insanely determined to figure this out.

While Papyrus catches you up to date with the happenings in the household, you finish removing your coat and slip into a clean pair of shoes so you don’t drag slushy snow all over the place. Just as you do, a loud thud comes from the living room area, followed by a sharp cry of pain. In near perfect synchronicity, you and Papyrus exchange a startled look before going to see what happened. Hand covering their mouth, you watch as Frisk slowly sits up in front of the stairs.

Before you can ask what happened, Sans teleports right beside you. You shriek in surprise. In your defense, though, it is only natural to freak out when someone pops up barely two inches away from you from out of nowhere.

“what happened?” Sans asks, kneeling down beside Frisk. For some reason, your brain decides to take note of the fact that he has a pair of what you can only call Dad Glasses™ taped onto his skull. It is a strange detail, but who knows; it could come in handy to remember for later. Right now, you would rather concentrate on the situation in front of you.

Spitting into their hand, Frisk grimaces before mumbling, “I tripped down the stairs.”

Sans rubs his hand over his head. “kiddo, this is why i keep telling you and pap to stop running inside. but do you two listen? noooooooo.” He sounds exhausted as all get-out, which only
increases the dad vibes he has going on with the glasses.

“I know,” they respond somewhat guiltily.

“and this,” he flails his arms around in a meaningless gesture, “is why you know that your actions haaaaaaaaaaaaaaa…” Sans’ voice trails off as he looks at their hand. “frisk... is—is that a tooth?”

Sure enough, in the centre of Frisk’s palm sits what looks like a molar. How hard did the kid hit the ground for that to fall out?

“Yup.”

“freaking crap kiddo, are you all right?” He nervously starts examining them, checking for further injury. “should i call a healer to reattach it?”

“I’m fi—”

“paps,” he interrupts, “where’s the monster candy at?”

“I’M NOT SURE, BUT I THINK IT WAS ON MY LIST, LIKE YOU WOULD KNOW IF YOU HAD GONE SHOPPING WHEN I ASKED.” Papyrus wrings his gloved hands as he crouches down to Frisk and Sans’ level. “HOW QUICKLY WOULD IT TAKE YOU TO MAKE A HOT DOG INSTEAD?”

“too long. do ya think a hot cat would work?”

What the actually heck is going on? They continue at it, not noticing that Frisk is giggling wildly as the brothers build off of the other’s panic.

A bit later than you would like to admit, it clicks in. “Frisk,” you inquire, raising your voice so it reaches above Sans and Papyrus’, “is that one of your baby teeth?”

“Uh huh! I was wondering when it would fall out.”

An idea pops into mind, and you cannot resist, if only to help their guardians chill out. Otherwise, you have a funny feeling one of them will try to call an ambulance within the next minute. Grinning casually, you raise your eyebrows. “I hope that it didn’t hurt tooth much when when you tripped. Most people try to get rid of their baby teeth by pulling them out, not by taking a nosedive.”

Frisk easily catches onto your strategy. “No, but it fall worked out in the end.” They even add finger guns to punctuate their statement, albeit only doing the snap with one hand since they still have the tooth clenched in the other.

Your joint effort pays off.

“UGH. SANS, HOW IS IT THAT YOU HAVE MANAGED TO CONTAMINATE EVERYONE I KNOW WITH YOUR SENSE OF HUMOUR?”

“maybe because my sense of humour is sans-tastic. besides, you’re smiling.”

“ONLY BECAUSE I AM PLEASED THAT FRISK ISN’T ACTUALLY HURT. DEFINITELY NOT BECAUSE THE COMEDIC TIMING WAS IMPECCABLE. ANYWAYS,” he exclaims, not at all subtle in his shift of topic, “ARE YOU SURE YOU’RE OKAY FRISK? I CAN STILL HEAL YOU IF YOU WANT.”
“No thanks. I’m really fine, and you can Check if you don’t believe me.” Frisk gets up to place their tooth on the coffee table. Personally, you want to wrap it in a tissue or something, just so you don’t have to stare at it throughout the entirety of the visit. As the only item on the dark wooden surface, it stands out. A lot. Also, you are pretty sure you can see a fleck of blood from where its root was. Blegh.

“how long was your tooth like that?”

They shrug, jumping backwards to land in the middle of the couch. “Dunno. I was planning on asking you guys to pull it tonight, but I guess that’s not happening now.”

Oh, you can imagine that going over wonderfully based on Sans and Papyrus just reacted. As it is, Sans is looking slightly uncomfortable right now at the idea, eye lights focused on the molar sitting on the table as he moves to sit down beside Frisk. Not quite nauseous, per se, but definitely not okay with it.

“gee, guess not.”

“WOULD YOU HAVE PREFERED US TO PULL IT?”

Another shrug. “I mean, it doesn’t really matter, but I was thinking it would be kinda cool if you could’ve tried using your blue magic to rip it out!”

Ummmmmm… You are not sure if you should comment on that. Then again, is it any stranger than trying the good old doorknob and dental floss trick? Probably not. Besides, as exhilarating as the whole tooth situation is, it would be nice to move on to something else.

You clear your throat with a small cough. “All right then. As long as there isn’t anything pressing, I would like to have a bit of a sit down with all of you. I have some housekeeping things I think we should go over, and it would be nice to have answers before the holidays start.”

“ALL RIGHT. DO YOU WANT ME TO SHOW YOU HOW WE TAKE CARE OF OUR LIGHTS? IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO FIND A POLISH THAT KEEPS THE BULBS GLOWING BRIGHTLY BUT THAT ALSO DOESN’T IRRITATE SKIN OR BONE, WHICH I, OF COURSE, HAVE SUCCEEDED IN. OOH! OR WE COULD TALK ABOUT GYFTMAS TREE MAINTENANCE. I PERSONALLY FIND THAT —”

“Um, that sounds nice and all, but that’s not what I meant by housekeeping. Or, at least, not today.” After all, if there is one thing you have deduced in your visits, it is that Papyrus is a bit of a neat freak, to put it mildly. Once you had completed your initial investigation of the house for all the normal things, you have seen no reason to check again. After all, everything is almost always impeccably clean, making it easy to see if there was anything wrong. You may be a bit curious as to why the one sock with the sticky note doesn’t appear to have moved from its spot in the living room since then, but whatever.

“OH, YOU MEANT IT IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND AGENDA SENSE. WELL, WE CAN DO THAT TOO. MY OFFER TO DISCUSS THE OTHER TYPE OF HOUSEKEEPING STILL STANDS, THOUGH. AFTER YEARS OF LIVING IN SNOWDIN, I’VE LEARNED SOME EXCELLENT TRICKS AND TIPS IN REGARDS TO ALL THINGS WINTER RELATED.”

“I’ll, uh, keep that in mind.” Shifting your weight on your feet, you grab a folded up piece of paper from your pocket. Considering how Judge Andrews apparently has the impression that you should be removing Frisk from the skeleton brothers’ custody, you cannot afford to let anything slip past you. That is why you had quickly scribbled out a checklist before you left home this morning, just
to be safe. Besides, you imagine that Sans and Papyrus would probably appreciate having a physical copy of your list so they don’t have to worry about anything.

“don’t tell me you went and wrote a whole speech for us,” Sans says jokingly. When was the last time that he directed his sense of humour (which you were aware of before things went south during that first visit) at you? Or, at least, without it being rude or aggressive? Well, there was the one comment after the incident with Racist McJerkface at the market, but he was still super hostile. That one was more snark than anything, to be honest. This, however, is straight up jovial. Things really are improving here.

Might as well take advantage of his mirth to keep things... less hostile between the two of you. With an equally light tone, you toss back, “I won’t. However, I am open to requests for a Shakespearean recitation, if given advance notice.”

“Really?”

Sans reaches from where he is seated on the couch to ruffle Frisk’s hair. “nah kiddo, i’m pretty sure she was joking.”

“WHICH, IF I MAY ADD, IS SLIGHTLY UNFORTUNATE. AFTER ALL, ONE THING THAT MY TRAINING WITH UNDYNE HAS TAUGHT ME IS THAT MONOLOGUES TRULY IMPROVE DRAMATIC TENSION. PROVIDED YOU REMEMBER THEM, OF COURSE.”

“i thought your training taught you how to catch houses on fire by boiling water.”

“How do you set a house on fire by boiling water?!?!?”

No one answers your question. Or even acknowledges it. Instead, Papyrus gives his brother a betrayed look. “SANS, HOW MANY TIMES MUST YOU BRING THAT UP?”

“all the times, bro. it’s my duty as your older brother to embarrass you, and face it: that’s just the tip of the embarrassment iceberg.”

“UUUGGGHHH, FINE. JUST REMEMBER THAT I HAVE THE DIRT ON YOUR EMBARRASSING HABITS, WHICH JUST SO HAPPEN TO INCLUDE HOW DIRTY YOU ALLOW ALL YOUR BELONGINGS TO BECOME. SERIOUSLY, IT’S NOT LIKE YOU DON’T KNOW WHAT SOAP IS. YOU PROVED YOU DO WHEN YOU DECIDED IT WAS NECESSARY TO WASH MY MOUTH WITH IT. OR THE TIME YOU ‘BORROWED’ ALPHYS’ NAIL POLISH TO COVER ALL MY SOAP AND MAKE IT UNUSABLE AS A VERY IRRITATING JAPE.”

“ah, good times. good times.”

How did you even get to this conversation? Oh right, the list. “Okay, I have some new questions, but I’m going to ignore those for now.” Seriously, boiling water should not be able to lead to a house fire. How does that happen? Is the answer magic? You are going to be so disappointed if it is magic. “To get back on topic, I want to discuss Frisk’s healthcare. It will be very important to make sure that they are kept up to date with everything, like dentist appointments, optometrist appointments, immunisations, physical exams, and so forth.” You hand over the list to Sans, as he is the closest to you, and he starts reading.

“all right. is that all?”

“That should be. If needed, I can help you find some healthcare professionals in Ebott to take care of everything.” After all, you would prefer to have this all taken care of as soon as possible. If that
means you have to spend some of your time getting in contact with people so that they don’t have to spend who knows how long researching people, so be it.

“THAT IS APPRECIATED, MISS SOCIAL WORKER. BUT, I BELIEVE WE WILL JUST STICK TO OUR PERSONAL DOCTORS HERE IN NEW NEW HOME. THAT WAY, WE WON’T NEED TO MAKE AN EXTRA TRIP.”

“I’m sorry, but all of Frisk’s appointments will have to be conducted with human doctors.”

“excuse me?” Sans’ voice sends an inadvertent chill down your spine. And to think that everything had been going so well. “what’s that supposed to mean?”

Oh, you think you understand his issue this time. Now that you think about your wording, you can see the impression you must have given off. Quickly, you start to clarify. “It means that I’m wanting you to take extra precautions. Again, it really comes down to monster citizenship status. At the moment, it’s unclear if degrees from the Underground — especially medical degrees — will be able to transfer over and be considered as valid. We have to make sure that everything is considered legitimate, which right now means it has to be done by humans. Also, I’m afraid that someone might make the claim that the differences between monster and human physiology might put Frisk at risk if they were undergoing healthcare from monsters. Again, this is not my opinion, but I want us to be prepared for anything and everything.”

Frisk sticks their hand in the air like they are still in school to catch your attention. You nod towards them to speak up. “Have you had people try to find reasons to remove me from here?” Their voice is very controlled, but there is a hint of fear shining through their eyes.

Part of you wants to shield this child from the truth. Yet, you know that they are more than mature enough to handle reality. Plus, it isn’t as though they would be unfamiliar with adversity resulting from anti-monster sentiments. They are the ambassador, for goodness sake.

“Explicitly try? No, or at least not that I know of. However, my boss has recently informed me that Judge Andrews has had some… concerns, let’s say, about you living here.” You aren’t going to mention how some of the concerns come from your earlier reports of Sans’ behavior, however.

“isn’t that the judge…?” Sans doesn’t need to finish his question.

“Yeah,” Frisk mumbles. “That’s the one.”

Silence.

Man, you really brought down the mood here. Frisk sits quietly, hands fidgeting in their lap as they lean forward, hair obscuring most of their face. Sans’ smile has flattened to the closest you have seen to him frowning, and he starts rereading the list. Even Papyrus is looking down, with that awful kicked puppy expression. It hurts just as bad this time as that first visit, when you had to reprimand him for that atrocity he had then called spaghetti.

Despite that, Papyrus is the first out of everyone to recover. “WELL, I GUESS THAT JUST MEANS THAT WE WILL NEED TO TRY EVEN HARDER TO SHOW JUDGE ANDREWS HOW GREAT OF GUARDIANS WE TRULY ARE!”

That is just so pure, the genuine conviction and confidence that runs through his voice. You cannot help but smile. “That sounds like an excellent plan.”

“BUT OF COURSE IT IS! IT IS SOUND AND LOGICAL, AS WELL AS THE FACT THAT I
“AM GREAT AT DEMONSTRATING GREATNESS.”

“Yeah,” Frisk chimes in, getting into the spirit of things, “you are the Great Papyrus after all!”

You notice how one of the guardians hasn’t had a chance to join the pep talk yet. “What about Sans?”

“i’m pretty great at napping,” he offers, sinking back into the couch as he shoves the note and his hands into his hoodie pockets, looking ready to prove his statement as true.

“SAAAAAAAAAAANS!”

“what, am i wrong?”

“YOU AREN’T, BUT YOU KNOW PERFECTLY WELL THAT WAS NOT WHERE MISS SOCIAL WORKER WAS GOING WITH HER QUESTION.”

“i’ve also got some sans-tastically punny jokes.”

Papyrus facepalms, the sound of bone hitting bone making it seem a lot more painful to your ears. “OH MY— I SWEAR— COULD YOU NOT? YOU LITERALLY USED THAT ONE A FEW MINUTES AGO.”

As the two of them banter, you take a moment to reflect upon the positive attributes you know about Sans. Not that you would admit it out loud, but it is initially a bit of a struggle, no thanks to someone being a cagey little skeleton over the past few months. Compared to Frisk and Papyrus, there is so little that you know about Sans. He is fond of puns and driving his brother crazy, but that is irrelevant for your current purposes, not to mention the fact that Papyrus just shot down the joke thing. Then, it occurs to you. “Sans, you are very perceptive.”

That catches everyone’s attention, especially Sans, as he had been ready to deliver another quip to his brother. Jaw agape, he stares at you. Is your comment really that much of a surprise? Surely, it cannot be that strange that you noticed. After all, the first thing he did after opening his door to you — well, second thing if you include how he initially slammed it in your face — was question your identity as it didn’t match up with what little information he had known. True, his power of observation has sometimes been skewed by his… emotional outbursts, let’s say, but overall, he is quite astute.

“Well,” you start after glancing at your watch, “this was a nice visit. By tomorrow evening, I’m hoping to send you a list of some doctors in Ebott. Again, feel free to do your own research as well; I’ve always found it preferable that people feel comfortable with their healthcare providers. If possible, it would be great if this could all be taken care of before next year.”

“UNDERSTOOD, MISS SOCIAL WORKER.”

“Excellent. I hope you all have a nice week.” With that, you make your way back to the entrance, aware that they are trailing behind you to see you off, as per usual.

“Hey, just thought of something,” Frisk ponders while you change back into your boots. “Why was me losing my tooth so surprising? You guys lost yours; Sans showed me the pictures from Papyrus’ album.”

“NYEH!” Papyrus cries out, sounding positively betrayed by the news. “SANS, YOU KNOW I HATED MY DENTAL TRANSITIONAL PERIOD! IT WAS SO EMBarrassing. HOW DARE YOU DOCUMENT MY CHILDHOOD SUFFERING?”
“‘cuz you were an adorable, overdramatic babybones. and like i said, it’s my job to be embarrassing. can’t go breaking older sibling rules and all. besides, it’s not even that bad.” He turns to you and Frisk and winks before stage whispering, “of course, nothing can compare to his goth phase. that, my friends, was gold.” If your mental images from that statement are accurate, you would be inclined to agree.

“I THOUGHT WE AGREED TO NEVER DISCUSS THAT PERIOD OF MY LIFE,” whines Papyrus, completely mortified as his skull flushes vibrant orange. Poor guy.

Coat and gloves on, you decide to direct attention off of Papyrus as you say a final goodbye. Frisk gives you a small, enthusiastic wave, which you take as your official cue to leave. You about to shut the door behind you when an unexpected voice speaks up.

“hey, drive safe.”

You pause for a moment, before returning a grin. “Thanks. I will.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, that was an adventure. It is important to note how gross the skeleton brothers (especially Sans) find it that when a human loses a tooth, it just stays there. Sure, they may know that humans don't turn to dust and all that, but still. Ew.

Also, here's an important equation I came up with while writing this chapter: Social worker visit + Injured kiddo = Heightened freakout

Sans and Papyrus just took over this entire chapter with classic sibling banter. I literally had no plan going into this other than "Frisk loses a baby tooth and skeletons lose their metaphorical crap”. Where did this all come from???

Sidenote: I feel like all my years of piano came to use in this chapter, because my caps lock button hasn't been working for some reason, and any Papyrus dialogue was done while my pinkie was holding down on shift.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
The Adoption Adventures

Chapter Summary

A successful adoption makes your life happier.

Chapter Notes

Hello again! I would just like to thank everyone for all the sweet comments on the last chapter. They really made my week.

This chapter came together pretty quickly, but I didn't really feel like waiting another week to post it. So I decided to break my unofficial schedule to bring it to you guys sooner! I can see the next chapter being a bit finicky, though, so don't expect it for a while yet. Plus, uploading this now makes it easier for me to work on next chapter based on how I organise all of my different documents for this baby, so... Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Elation rising from within, you gladly join in for the photos to commemorate the finalisation of Bryan and Abi’s adoption into the Ferguson family. As expected, the hearing had gone perfectly; Sophie and Travis are wonderful people and even better parents. From your first meeting, you had a good feeling about this placement, and this is just confirmation that your initial instincts were correct. You stand behind Bryan’s wheelchair, shuffling beside the judge to get properly in frame for the picture before freezing into place. The flash of the camera goes off, and you stay for a few seconds while the photographer makes sure that no one blinked or anything like that. You are given the official thumbs up, so you move out of the way while the judge finishes signing the adoption papers.

Days like these are easily the best part of your job.

What makes this whole thing even better is the fact that Abi and Bryan could have so easily become living examples of the problems within the foster system. Orphaned at the ages of nine and twelve after their parents were killed by a drunk driver, the siblings were placed in various foster homes when it became clear that the few family members they had were unwilling to step up as guardians. Bryan, the eldest, was definitely of concern for you. If it wasn’t hard enough being an adolescent in the system, he also has a mobility disorder, which limited placement options. Finding foster families that were not only capable of taking care of his special needs but who were also willing to take in his younger sister? Nearly impossible. At least, that is how it had felt at the time. Each and every time you revisited their case, there was the fear that these two would age out of the system, leaving them alone as adults without the support they would need.

Fast forward nearly five years later, and Sophie and Travis Ferguson opened their home and their hearts to the teens. Right away, they had expressed their interest in adopting the pair. Now, as you watch Abi and Bryan, you can see that they have found their happy ending.

As they finish, you decide to go up to them to give one last congratulations before you return to the
office. Abi, however, beats you to it, practically ambushing you as her family catches up. Before you know what is happening, the tall fourteen year old has her arms wrapped around you in a hug. Slightly startled by her actions, you just let the moment happen.

Once she lets go, you decide to speak with the family. “What are your guys’ plans now?”

“Lunch and then we’re going out for ice cream.” A large smile grows on Bryan’s face at the thought, the metal of his braces gleaming from the lights of the court house.

“We pulled them out of school for the whole afternoon,” Sophie adds, placing the adoption papers into a folder in her large purse. “Just in case things took longer than expected. Besides,” she grins knowingly at her children, “I doubt either of you two would be concentrating on your lessons in any case.” They laugh, but neither teen denies the claim.

“Can you join us?” Abi asks. “Pleeeeeeaaaaaaaaaase?”

“I don’t know…” Paperwork has been piling up on you again, and you were hoping to make a good dent in it today. Besides, you wouldn’t want to intrude in on their time together.

“You’re more than welcome to join along. And now that everything is taken care of, we technically aren’t your clients, if you’re worried about conflicts in professional interest.”

You pause for a moment, considering Travis’ words. In spite of your hesitation, you hadn’t yet even considered that as a problem. Trust the man who works for a law firm to make sure all the bases are covered. As for your primary concern, though, it is still fairly early in the day; family court was running faster than usual, not that you are ever going to complain about that. You should be able to make time to eat with them, even if it pushes you farther behind schedule. Plus, your mom has been worried again that you aren’t getting enough social interaction, despite your various protests. Technically, this would count as social interaction. It isn’t like she needs to know that the people you would be going out to lunch with were former clients. All that matters here is that you would be ’leaving your house to do something fun with actual people for once’.

Screw it; you’re going. Worst comes to to worst, you can bring paperwork home for the evening. Nothing like Netflix and case files, right?

… You are starting to see why your mom worries about your social life.

Once you and the Fergusons figure out where you are going to eat, you get in your car, following behind them. Apparently, some family friends own a small Italian restaurant that is relatively close to family court which has “the world’s best cannoli” according to Sophie and Abi. You take their word for it and let them lead the way instead of trying to find the address so you could input it into your GPS.

About an hour later, you have come to a conclusion: not only are Sophie and Abi right about the cannoli thing, but this restaurant has some of the best fettuccine you have eaten in a long time. So good! Then again, you haven’t been able to think about pasta without getting flashbacks to the sequined, burnt and mushy mess that was presented to you as spaghetti. Needless to say, that tends to ruin any appetite you might have.

Excellent food aside, you are glad the family talked you into joining them for lunch. After having known both teens for years, it is nice to genuinely get to know them as people. Likewise, it is nice to find out more about Travis and Sophie without feeling the need to analyse their every word in relation to how it affects their ability to parent. For example, you learn that Abi has recently gotten one of the lead roles in her school’s musical theatre production this year and she is absolutely
pumped for it. She excitedly goes on and on about it, only stopping when her food arrives so she can stuff her face. Meanwhile, Bryan shares about his plans for the next year as he graduates high school, Travis occasionally adding in a clarifying statement.

You leave after lunch, even though the family makes it clear that their offer also extends to their ice cream trip. As nice as that sounds, you force yourself to decline. Like it or not, you cannot allow yourself to put off work for much longer. Abi gives you another hug before you go and it hits you that you will probably not see any of them again. However, when you consider the reason why, it doesn’t bother you as much.

As you wait for your car to warm up in the restaurant’s parking lot, you turn on the radio to jam for a bit. For whatever reason, the first station you tune into is playing hits from your middle school days, and you aren’t sure if you are loving the nostalgia or wanting to cringe at some of the memories the music brings back. Possibly both. Actually, definitely both. Early puberty was not the greatest point in your life, as is the case for many people.

Papyrus and his alleged goth phase, for instance, comes to mind.

Engine heated up properly, you start making your way back to the office. Traffic is irritatingly slow, especially considering what time it is. Yes, roads are icy and slippery, but no more than they were a few hours ago. There are days where you can go faster during morning rush hour, for goodness sake! Perhaps there was an accident up ahead? That would explain why it feels like you could reach your destination faster by walking than driving. While you idle, you try flipping through the local radio stations. If there was an accident or something, surely one of them would mention it. None of them say anything, so you return to what you are going to call the middle school music station.

You wait at a red light, gently bopping to the tunes. Large, fluffy snowflakes, perfect for making snowballs and snow forts, fall intermittently, only to be wiped away by your windshield wipers. Maybe you should talk to Ivy and Malcolm about having a skating night this weekend, providing they can find a sitter. Of course, that would also mean you would have to put up with Ivy clinging to you and Malcolm the entire time for support, because that woman is terrible at ice skating. And if your memory serves you correctly, last time the three of you did that, it ended with the two of them being absolutely unbearable with their PDA with the excuse of ‘wanting to keep warm’. Don’t get it wrong, you are glad that your friend has a fantastic relationship with her husband, but you would rather not spend an hour of your limited free time acting as a third-wheel as the two of them giggle and swap spit. Or, as she put it last time to make an awful joke in reference to the group of teens competing at the rink, ‘playing tonsil hockey’. Sorry Ivy, but ew. She definitely got a snowball thrown at the back of her head for that one.

Roughly five blocks from the office, the radio station shifts from music to one of those generic talk segments. You let it stay there for about a few minutes, in the hope that the conversation might be mildly intriguing. No luck on that front. The guest they brought in has one of those monotone voices that forces you to tune them out. In fact, this specific person has the type of voice that you used to listen to when you were younger to help lull you to sleep.

…

Yeah, now that you think about it, you should probably change the station. The last thing you need is to start getting drowsy while driving, even if you are only a few seconds from turning into the parking lot. Even if it won’t have the chance to affect your driving ability, you would rather stay alert for the rest of the afternoon.

Just as you go to turn off the radio, a new voice butts in. “Sorry to interrupt, Darcy, but we have
some breaking news from New New Home.” Shoot, you should probably listen to this. It could prove to be useful.

“Sure thing, Kacey,” the other anchor replies unnecessarily, as Kacey simply continues along with what she was saying. You pull into your parking space, waiting to hear what the news is.

“Citizens are advised to stay away from the monster capital for the next little bit. Reports are coming in that there has been an attack on the Delta Academy, which is the main school in New New Home.”

WHAT? That’s Frisk’s school! Why is Frisk’s school under attack? Was it something politically motivated? It has to be; even if people don’t know that the ambassador of monsterkind is a student of the Delta Academy, the school could have been attacked just because the students are monsters. Is Frisk safe? What about the other students and staff? Panic sets in as you turn up the radio, an awful sense of dread building in your stomach. You need to know more.

“Our sources say that the building has been set on fire, and there is concern of it spreading. Little is known about the cause or who is responsible, but we are awaiting information from King Asgore.”

You try to think of where the school is in relation to the rest of the town. It doesn’t take long for you to realise you have no idea. The only locations you are certain of would be the skeleton household and Grillby’s.

“As of the moment, it is unknown if there are any casualties. More to come.”

Chapter End Notes

What a sweet little chapter, am I right? Absolutely nothing to be worried about here. *Shoves those last few paragraphs under a rug* Yup, nothing to see here!

Also, on a slightly unrelated note, is anyone else familiar with the expression "tonsil hockey", or is that just a local abomination that I grew up with. Because I have clear memories of that being a Thing people said when talking about making out (and specifically french kissing), but that could also be because I grew up in what is essentially the redneck territory of Canada.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time for whatever reason.
The Attack’s Aftermath

Chapter Summary

You try to find out if everything is okay after the attack on New New Home. It isn't going that great for you.

Chapter Notes

This chapter feels a bit all over the place to me, but that also feels right, given the context? IDK.

Also, just as a heads-up, I felt like this chapter was a bit more emotionally intense than my other chapters so far, and I'm not the best at identifying that type of thing in my own writing. A lot of this chapter is Bubbles reacting to a bad situation, so there is an undertone of panic that is definitely present. If this could be a problem for you, my advice would be to search for the words "This is getting ridiculous!" and skipping to there. After that point, things start to tone down a lot more, plus you'll be able to catch up to a lot of the plot stuff.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At your desk, you erratically scan through as much information as you can find. In one tab, you are listening to a local news station with a set of borrowed headphones. In about five others, you have different searches running in the attempt to find out something, anything, about what is happening in New New Home.

Unfortunately, the information you so desperately need to know has yet to pop up.

As for what you have been able to find, suspects have been taken into custody in a joint effort between Asgore’s people and the Ebott police force. A group of about five humans — you have seen some contradicting numbers in the different reports — with ties to an anti-monster terrorist group were found in suspicious proximity to the now mostly incinerated school building. A quick search of their cars led to the discovery of several empty gasoline containers. As you refresh one of your tabs, you find a statement taken by Asgore. In it, he says that the fires have been put out and that the people responsible will be brought to justice. Additionally, he offers his thanks to the humans of the Ebott police and fire departments for their service in this situation.

Nothing, however, tells you whether or not Frisk is safe.

When it is clear that your research is getting you nowhere, you bring up your list of work contacts. You need to know that Frisk is okay, and you would like to do it without trying to make your way into New New Home. You start with Papyrus’ cell phone, fingers tapping noiselessly on your desk as you listen to the rings. Nothing. Next up is Sans, but you get the same results, or rather, lack thereof. You leave a voicemail, identical to the one given to Papyrus, requesting that they contact you as soon as possible. As a last ditch effort, you try the home number, hoping, begging that someone will answer.
One ring…
Two rings…
Three…
Four…
Five…

You have no such luck.

Another check online yields no new results. Feeling somewhat defeated, you force yourself to open up some of the documents you had been planning on working on before you heard about the attacks. There is nothing you can do right now about Frisk. You might as well get something productive done, because worrying won’t fix anything. In a few minutes, you can try calling again.

And again.

And again.

And again.

And again.

Over the next hour, there have been absolutely no changes, whether for better or for worse. Marianne, who decided to snoop and read the search results on your monitor as she walked by, recited the old adage that “no news is good news”. That is probably the most unhelpful thing you have heard all day. By this point, you would rather have some news, even if it isn’t the most reassuring. Knowledge would help you know how you need to react. Right now, you feel completely powerless as you lack the ability to do anything useful. You know yourself; there is no way you will be fully able to move on to other work until you have found out something.

A hand on your shoulder startles you. The borrowed headphones are ripped off in your haste to spin around in your chair, and you have to drag your feet on the floor to stop yourself from rotating more than necessary.

Completely impassive, François just stands by your desk as you take a second to catch your breath. “I take it you know about the situation in New New Home.”

“What do you think?” is what you want to snark back at him, but you restrain yourself just in time. Even though you are pretty sure he would forgive you for your rudeness if you did, he really doesn’t deserve to bear the brunt of your frustrations. Instead, you force yourself to bite your tongue before responding with a simple, “Yes, I do.”

François looks past you towards your computer screen, clearly taking in the evidence of your panic-fueled research. “I received a call from the Embassy —”

This is exactly what you need to hear right now! “What did you find out? Is Frisk okay? There’s nothing online about them. What about the guardians? Oh, I didn’t even consider if Sans and Papyrus were all right! I’ve been so busy —”

“Slow down, and let me finish,” François gently admonishes. Somewhat sheepishly, you obey. “As I was saying, I just got a call from the Embassy. You have been summoned to meet with King Asgore at the soonest possible moment.” He hands you a slip of paper, which has the symbol of the monster kingdom as a watermark. A quick scan shows you that it is a written copy of the summons, with Asgore’s signature and everything. “You will need to show this along with your
I.D. to get in, he said.”

You nod, already starting to gather everything together to go. “Did he say anything about…?”

“Sorry, I’ve told you all I know.”

“Okay.” You close all the tabs you had opened before logging off your computer; you feel it is safe to assume that you won’t be needing them anymore. “I better get going then, huh?” Sure, Asgore didn’t create a specific time in which he wanted you to be there, but you would rather not keep the monarch waiting. After all, you can imagine that he has a lot going on right now.

You are halfway across the office when you hear François call after you. You pause, letting him catch up to you. “Calm down,” he instructs. “You aren’t helping anyone when you are so worried.”

“Right.”

“Are you going to be fine to drive yourself to New New Home?” Unspoken is the question of if he needs to find someone to take you. It probably wouldn’t be the worst decision to make, but it is not convenient for today. First, finding someone to drive you will take time. You would rather find out what Asgore has to tell you as soon as possible. Plus, King Asgore has only provided clearance for you. The last thing you would want would be for someone to be stuck in your car for who knows how long because they aren’t allowed in New New Home after the monster capital experienced a terrorist attack.

“I’ll be fine.”

“If you say so,” your boss replies, getting the door for you.

All the way to New New Home, you try to prepare yourself for whatever King Asgore has to say. Obviously, it will be related to today’s attacks. However, the more that you think about it, the more possibilities there are. First of all, there is all the news you could potentially receive regarding Frisk’s personal safety. That can be divided into three categories, in your opinion: Frisk is fine, Frisk has been injured or Frisk was… Well, you get the point.

Beyond that, something could have happened to one or both of Frisk’s guardians, which would also be reason enough for Asgore to want to talk to you. Even if they were only injured — and how awful is this situation, that being injured is mild enough of an outcome to receive the qualifier of ‘only’? — you would have to work hard to find a temporary placement for Frisk until they could recover. Any home would most likely need heightened security. Should the temporary guardians be humans, which would probably be the case given the short notice, you would need to vet them carefully to ensure they have no ties to other anti-monster groups.

Either way, you would need to strategize as to how to proceed through the next few weeks. Whether something happened to Frisk or Sans and Papyrus, plans will have to be adjusted. It wouldn’t surprise you in the least if this entire situation could put a delay on the adoption process.

Also, if —

No.

This train of thought has to end.

You need to stop it with the hypotheticals already. Yes, you are just trying to prepare yourself, but there is such thing as going overboard. François’ words from earlier repeat in your head.
Calm down. You aren’t helping anyone when you are so worried.

Fire engines pass along the other side of the highway, returning to Ebott from New New Home in a convoy of bright red, contrasting greatly with the soft greys and whites of the world around you. Despite being a visual reminder of the terrors that have occurred this afternoon, the sight is somewhat reassuring. There are no sirens or flashing lights to indicate an active emergency. The fire engines are leaving the monster capital, which implies that the firefighters have done their job.

Things are going to be okay.

Things will be okay.

Up ahead, you can start to make out the silhouette of New New Home and Mt Ebott. There is a slight haziness to the city, although whether it is from smoke or clouds, you cannot tell. In other circumstances, you would say it looks peaceful and soft, like a gentle watercolour painting on a postcard. However, the nagging voice in your head points out that under the beauty lies the scorched remains of the Delta Academy, ruined by hatred.

You decide to tell that voice to shut up. It isn’t being helpful in the least.

You aren’t helping anyone when you are worried.

This is getting ridiculous! Yes, you are concerned. Yes, what happened in New New Home this afternoon was terrifying. However — and this is important to remember — you cannot allow these things to get the better of you. You cannot allow your emotions to take over. Maybe it is an unfortunate consequence of meeting with this family on a weekly basis, but somehow, you have let your emotional defenses down. You have become too attached to this young ambassador, and it is only now obvious how it is clouding your normally clear mind. All afternoon, since you first heard the news on the radio, you have been frantic, nearly to the point of becoming hysterical. Granted, the whole terrorism situation is admittedly more severe than your average case, but as a rule of thumb, you are never urgently called to a specific location because things are going well in a child’s life. If you are able to remain cool and collected when dealing with unthinkable allegations of child abuse, you can do the same here.

You have to.

Your ability to make proper judgement calls relies on it.

By the time you reach the city limits, you feel a bit more in control of yourself. Nothing like a slightly aggressive pep talk/personal scolding to get your mind in the right place. Well, a better place, at least. You are calm enough to get things done, and that is what matters most here.

Some police officers pull you over to the side of the road. After you show your licence and summons, they search your car. Upon finding nothing suspicious, you are escorted a bit further into town to park your car. From there, two human cops lead you around, presumably to the Embassy. The streets are silent, without a single monster in sight. It feels uncomfortable, like walking alone through a ghost town. A shiver runs down your spine, although you aren’t quite sure whether it is from the atmosphere or the cold weather.

You are brought to the front of a large building. The official monster flag flies at half-mast, barely fluttering in the weak breeze. A tall monster, wearing a full suit of armour, walks outside.

“Is this the social worker?”

“Yes, captain,” one of the cops answers for you while you pull out your papers again.
The monster takes a few steps forward, scanning over your person. “Good. Come with me.” With that, the captain turns to go back inside the Embassy, long scarlet hair snapping around like a whip from outside their helmet.

Metal armour clanking against polished floor is the only sound as you silently follow the captain to meet with King Asgore. The corridors are completely devoid of life, unless you were to include the occasional arrangement of bright yellow flowers which sit as decoration. Golden flowers, if you remember correctly, because of course that is what the national monster flower is called. One of these days, you are going to need to have some words with whoever is in charge of naming things here.

Finally, the captain stops in front of a large door at the end of a hallway, intricately decorated with an ornate carving of the same symbol which decorates the monster flag and your summons. This must be where you are to meet with King Asgore.

The captain knocks, gauntlet meeting the solid wood door with two resounding thuds.

“Come in.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh look, another cliff hanger where we still don't know if everyone is okay. Fantastic!

In my defense, I got kinda rambly during the first half of this chapter, so I had to move a lot of what I originally had planned to what is now next chapter. I promise, we will have answers next time.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time for whatever reason.
You and King Asgore have an important discussion about the recent events in New New Home.

King Asgore’s voice, easily recognisable after listening to so many interviews, booms through the closed door. You cast a glance to the captain, wondering if there is some sort of procedure that you should be following or if you should just… enter? Look, you are out of your element and stressed out; some direction would be highly appreciated. The captain simply opens the door, tilting their helmeted head towards the room as if to ask why the hell you aren’t inside already. You hurry inside, wishing your heartbeat would stop beating so heavily. If it was any stronger, you swear your heart will escape your chest.

“Howdy,” the king greets as the door shuts behind you, “It is nice to meet you, although I do wish it could be under more pleasant circumstances.”

“Likewise,” you force out, still very much processing the situation. This… this is not what you were expecting were you told that you would be meeting with the king of all monsters. Asgore, who seemed so large and imposing compared to Frisk and even Papyrus in the early videos following their release from the Underground, is currently in an outfit that you can only describe as suburban dad on vacation. Seriously, all he needs is a fanny pack and baseball cap to go along with his pastel hawaiian shirt and khaki slacks to complete the picture. He stands up from an incredibly large chair, which for him is just the perfect size, gesturing for you to sit across from him at the small conference table.

“Tea?” King Asgore asks, pouring himself a cup. Well, you would call it a mug, but the thought of the large goatlike monster trying to hold one of those tiny little Victorian teacups is almost hysterical. Maybe when you get back home tonight, you will be able to have a little laugh at the idea. For him, it would probably be like downing a shot.

Oh right, he asked you a question.

“Um, if you don’t mind, your majesty.” Or is it your highness? For some reason, it sticks in your mind that ‘your majesty’ is for kings and queens whereas ‘your highness’ is the next highest rank, but you could totally be messing that one up. This afternoon, you wouldn't put anything past yourself.

“Please, just call me Asgore.” Perfect. It saves you the trouble of making some kind of faux pas and embarrassing yourself. If you haven't already, that is. “I myself find a nice, hot cup of tea to be soothing. Especially on a cold day like today," Goodness knows soothing is exactly what you need right now. By that logic, you could use all the tea right now, and that is ignoring the chill that you still feel after walking around New New Home. A few seconds later, Asgore grabs a set of tongs from a small crystal bowl full of sugar cubes. "Would you like any sugar?”
“One please,” you request. As you don’t actually know what type of tea it is, that should probably be a safe amount.

“Of course.” He hands you a teacup, and you take a small sip. Hot, but soothing, just as Asgore said. You gently blow on the golden liquid to cool it down as he continues. “I’m sorry for making you come all this way. I’ve been told that the highway between here and Ebott hasn’t been that nice as of late. However, it would be better for us to meet in person than over the phone.” By better, you have a sneaking suspicion he means safer. It doesn’t take much effort to read between the lines here.

“I understand.” You pause, sipping your tea as a grab for time. Desperately, you want to just get straight to the point and ask if Frisk and the skeleton brothers are okay. You restrain yourself, however, when you take another glance at Asgore, who looks absolutely exhausted. The poor man has probably been harassed all afternoon by reporters and who knows who else. You have time, so you can wait for him to talk to you at his own pace. Clearly, if he is offering tea, there isn’t anything urgent for you to do. Or at least, you would hope that to be the case.

After taking a sip of his own, Asgore clears his throat. “So. I imagine you would like to know about the incident today.”

Straight to the point. You can respect that. “Yes, please.”

“How much do you know already?”

“Just what’s on the news.”

“I see.” He runs a hand along his beard. “All things considered, everyone is fine. As it happens, one of the children at the school pulled the fire alarm just before the actual… incident occurred, which helped a lot in the evacuation process.”

That sounds promising. Still, you have to make sure. “So, there were no...”

Asgore understands what you are trying to imply. “No, no fatalities, angel be thanked. There were some minor injuries, but our healers have been hard at work as we speak.”

You nod solemnly, focusing your eyes on the soft plumes of steam rising from the teapot and teacups. “If you don’t mind me asking, what were the worst of the injuries?” Knowing might help you figure out what the king qualifies as being a minor injury, just in case. Again, you aren’t the most sure of the average monster’s expertise on human medical needs, so better safe than sorry.

“Young Papyrus probably went through the worst when he was helping get kids out. Undyne said that he snapped one of the bones in his arm.”

You shudder at the mere thought. At least when humans break bones, you normally don’t have to see it. On him, that type of injury is very, very visible. Not only that, but being a skeleton means that Papyrus is pretty much only bones. In your mind at least, an injury like that must be a lot closer to when a limb is partially amputated. “Oh my word! What was he even doing at the school?” The attacks happened too early in the afternoon for him to be picking Frisk up from school, after all.

“He was assisting Undyne with her gym class,” Asgore explains. “But like I said, his injuries were by far the worst. Most got away with bruises and scrapes, along with the odd case of magical exhaust. Frisk has a skinned knee, although it is debatable whether that came from this or something earlier. Other than that, though, most of the trauma is emotional.” Sighing tiredly, he
refills his teacup before indicating with a tilt of his head to your own. You politely shake your head; you are barely halfway done your first serving. “The poor kids are very shaken over this whole thing. New New Home has always been a safe place since returning to the Surface, but now…” Asgore’s voice trails off slowly, like he is unwilling to continue with the thought.

With the worst of your fears and concerns relieved, this would most likely be a good time to move onto other things. Might as well get this dealt with here and now, so you don’t have to wait until Monday to ask.

“Do you know what will be happening with classes now? Until repairs are done, I mean.” As extraordinary as these circumstances are, you have to make sure that Frisk stays in school, even if that means temporarily sending them to Ebott. Sure, managing transportation would be a major drawback, but one of their guardians is fully capable of teleportation. If push comes to shove, that is always an option.

“So far, the plan is to move classes here. We will also be calling some people this weekend to see if they’d be willing to have students gather at their homes. I know that a married couple from the Guard has offered their house already. Tomorrow, the children will get the day off, just to give everyone a chance to recover.”

“I see.” Well, that at least simplifies your life a little bit. Plus, it would be nice for Frisk to be able to keep the emotional stability of staying with their classmates. Goodness knows they will need as much stability as they can get over the next little bit.

Silence is shared between the two of you, and you fall back to drinking your tea so you feel less awkward about it. A part of you just wants to say your goodbyes and go home for the night. Asgore has given you the information that you needed, for the most part. Everyone is alive. Frisk is fine. Papyrus was injured, but the king sounded pretty calm about the whole thing, so you are trusting that he will be able to recover soon. You still don’t know why Sans didn’t answer any of your calls, but he does have multiple jobs, some of which that he even leaves New New Home for. For all you know, he could have been busy in Ebott at the time. In either case, he hasn’t been mentioned amongst all that Asgore has told you, so you are going to assume he was uninvolved.

Despite all this, you can’t help but feel that you need to stay for at least a bit longer. Asgore has been making no attempts to get you to leave, and you would personally imagine that he’d want you out of his fur as soon as possible. Perhaps he has more he wants to discuss with you regarding the case. François hasn’t said anything about being in communication with Asgore besides today, but your boss didn’t even think about letting you know about Judge Andrews until recently. And frankly, based on what you have seen today and what you have heard about Andrews, the monster king would be far less likely to bother either you or François. Then again, he could just be acting courteously and letting you finish your tea.

However, if you were to choose between those two options, you would lean towards the first.

You finish your tea and set it on its saucer. Asgore echoes your action, but still doesn’t say anything. Finally, you take some initiative. “Is there anything else you would like to go over with me?”

“Yes. Of course.” He clears the tea supplies out of the way, before gently laying his folded hands on the table. A diplomatic action if you have ever seen one. "As Frisk's case worker, I would like to make a request of you."

“I’m listening,” you answer coolly.
"Today has really been an eye opener for my people, and not in a good way. Although I would like to think the best of humans as a whole, today has demonstrated the dangers some of your people pose to my own."

You nod. In some ways, your inner pessimist is impressed that there hasn’t been any attacks like this until now. Sure, there was the whole deal with the anti-monster segregation and the odd act of violence against monsters, but over all, the hatred they have received has been fairly distant. Not that you are justifying all these ways that monsters have been wronged, of course, but on a comparative scale, banning monsters from cafes isn’t as severe as a full on terrorist attack on New New Home.

“I would like to hope that nothing else like this will happen again. Sadly, there is only so much I can do to protect my people.”

“Understandable,” you add, feeling like you should contribute something to the conversation.

“I will be reviewing matters with my security team to improve Frisk’s personal security. What I am asking is that you will help me with their familial security.”

Is that not your job already? “Care to elaborate your request?”

“Certainly. Should, angel forbid, anything happen to Papyrus and Sans before or after the adoption, could you please consider my wi— I mean, Toriel as a temporary guardian? Frisk is rather close to her, and she is a natural mother. She… she would keep them safe.”

You slowly exhale a breath through your nose. “I cannot make any promises, but I will take your request into consideration.” He doesn’t need to know about how you have already considered other potential guardians, nor that she was on your list.

Asgore visibly deflates, obviously aware of your carefully worded refusal. Nonetheless, he straightens up, returning to business. “I understand. Is there anything else you would like to know, or should I have Undyne escort you back to your vehicle?”

You know what? It doesn’t hurt to ask. “Out of curiosity, do you know where Sans was at just after the attack? I had tried to contact him and Papyrus several times, but I didn’t get any responses.”

Obviously, you now know what Papyrus wasn’t getting back to you, with him receiving medical care and all.

“Why, yes. I had him come here right away so he could do his job.”

“Which one?” You ask, bewilderment giving your voice a slightly higher pitch than normal. Sans may have many jobs, but none of the ones you know about seem, well, useful in an emergency situation. Unless he was needed for whatever he does at the lab that Papyrus mentioned one time, but you fail to see how that would help. Plus, that wouldn’t explain him being called to the Embassy, unless the lab was hidden here for some strange reason.

“His job as my Judge, of course,” he responds, sounding just as puzzled as you. “I needed him to be prepared to make a Judgement.”

Okay, you are going to ignore how ominous that sounds, considering there has been nowhere close to enough time to have a proper investigation on the suspected arsonists. Hopefully, the word has a slightly different connotation in their judicial system.

Apparently, Asgore notices something off in your reaction to his statement. “Golly, I forgot to add that detail to the files I sent your employer, didn’t I?”
You quirk your shoulders in the slightest of shrugs. “All the reports had said was that they were employed through the Royal Guard.”

“My apologies; that was an oversight on my part. I will work on sending a revised copy for you then.”

“Thank you, that would be very much appreciated.” A little late for when you needed it most? Perhaps. However, better late than never and all that. Besides, it will still prove useful when the brothers get closer to adopting Frisk.

“Well,” he says with a gentle smile as he stands up from his chair, “I’d like to thank you again for making it over here on such short notice. I hope it wasn’t too much of an inconvenience.”

You stand up yourself, in an attempt to feel a bit less short. Needless to say, it doesn’t really work, considering how he still towers over you. “It was no problem. It’s nice to get some answers.”

“Of course. Please, feel free to contact my office at any time if you have any more questions. I’d like to help in anyway possible to make sure that Frisk gets the home they deserve.”

“I’ll be sure to keep that in mind,” you smile. "Goodbye."

“Goodbye.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey guys, no cliffhanger this time! Isn't that exciting? And even better, things are going to be a-okay.

Is it bad that the saddest I felt while writing these past few chapters was when I realised that golden flower tea would probably make my throat close up because I'm allergic to pretty much anything floral? Probably. In my defense, though, one of my personal life philosophies is that any time is a good time for tea time, so the idea of turning down tea, no matter the reason, makes me sad. Like, the other day, I spent at least a good half hour pouting because a friend accidentally made herself way too much tea and was trying to give it away, but I couldn't have any because it's what she jokingly calls "death tea" based on how my dumb immune system would react to it.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time for whatever reason.
Stutter

Chapter Summary

How Sans' day went with the attack on New New Home.

Chapter Notes

Guys, I'm PUMPED for this chapter! I had some free time, and I ended up breezing through it.

Also, shout out to all of you guys, because I swear y'all are better at recognising important plot points for the future in here than I am, and I'm the person who has at least 4 separate documents devoted to keeping track of this thing. Good job everybody!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With a tired groan, Sans cracks open the thick files and blueprints that Alphys sent his way. Stars knows there is a lot of it. Ever since the kiddo broke the Barrier, finding a way to remotely maintain the Core and prevent it from overheating has been a major issue. Forcing monsters to stay in Snowdin and throw ice in the river just isn’t a sustainable solution anymore. Sure, there are still some monsters who have chosen to remain Underground. Even though nobody could leave, it was still home, after all. Now, living in the Underground is a choice. However, even if there are monsters who could stand around and chuck giant ice blocks all day, it doesn’t mean that they should. That is a very strenuous job. Jimmy Hotpants, as he goes by these days, straight up quit the minute he heard about their new freedom. Not that anyone blames him for it, though. When you are so busy with work that you can’t leave to put on a damn pair of pants, there is officially a problem.

Flipping to page fourteen of folder B, Sans resumes from where he had last left off. Even though Alphys types up most of her reports, she has always done her math by hand, which gives him the task of deciphering her chicken scratch to double check equations. Grabbing two strips of tape from his automatic dispenser — he really needs to thank Tori for that gift, it has saved him so much time already — he attaches his glasses in place and starts reading.

So far, the math checks out. He adds a quick check mark in row fourteen of his personal spreadsheet. With so much information to go through, things like that are a necessity to keep track of results. The way things are going, Al should be ready to make her miniature models of the proposed coolant system in no time at all. Next time they talk, he should probably remind her to contact some ice elementals to help with the project. He would do it himself, but it’s not his job. Sans is just helping double check all the schematics, nothing more. Alphys is the big boss here.

The second he looks to page fifteen, Sans decides this would be a pretty decent time to take a quick break. He can already feel how his skull would be pounding after working through that one, so might as well put it off for a little later. It isn’t like Alphys is expecting anything from him right
away. He’s got time.

And what better use of that time than to take a quick nap?

So far, the math checks out. He adds a quick check mark in row fourteen of his personal spreadsheet. With so much information to go through, things like that are a necessity to keep track of results.

Although, Sans would have sworn that he has already read through this section already. The equations seem vaguely familiar, like he has already gone through them. However, considering there was nothing written down yet, it must just be his imagination.

Unless…

Out of curiosity, Sans gets up to check the machine. Nothing wrong with a quick break, anyhow.

...

Sometimes, he hates it when his suspicions are correct.

Frisk is at school. Why did they just mess with time? He better not find out that they had a test or some sort of assignment due today. It is one thing to rewind time to fix mistakes when they are dealing with human and politics, but as Frisk’s guardian, he shouldn’t let them get away with what is essentially cheating.

Just in case, he sends them a quick text. It doesn’t matter if Frisk isn’t able to get back to him now; he would just like to find out the truth as soon as possible.

So far, the math checks out. He adds a quick check mark in row fourteen of his personal spreadsheet.

So far, the math checks out. He adds a quick check mark in row fourteen—

The math checks out.
The math—

So far, the math checks out. However, that is nowhere near being a priority at the moment, considering the dizzying amount of déjà vu Sans is experiencing right now. Without a moment of questioning, he gets up and heads to the machine.

Sure enough, the results are there. Resets. Well, actually, that isn’t quite true, is it? Using the video game based vocabulary Frisk had decided on, these small jumps in the timeline are Loads.

And there are a lot of them.

Quickly, before Frisk turns back time again, he grabs his journal to make some tallies for later. He already made a few, apparently, which makes his job easier. From what he can tell, there should be roughly three minutes before the next Load occurs.

What is happening that Frisk is going all time travel crazy right now? The kid has hardly touched their powers since reaching the Surface this timeline. But now, they are Loading like they used to when they went against Undyne. Or like those times in the Judgement Hall…

The world stutters.

And again.

And again.

And again.

So far, the math checks out.
So far, the math checks out, but Sans honestly could care less right now. He needs to add yet another tick to his journal, which seems to have gotten its fair share of use this afternoon. On the plus side, at least he was already in the lab when Frisk started. Otherwise, who knows how much he would need to catch up with? The time between Loads is so short, which is oddly suspicious.

Actually, this whole situation is suspicious in general. What is pushing Frisk to do this? They told him they were tired of being in control of this time of stuff. And at the time, there was no way that they were lying to him. Sans refuses to believe that as an option. Something would need to force them to want to Load, right?

Plus, didn’t Frisk say that Loads were harder to do than Resets? Sure, they Loaded a whole lot Underground, but usually, it was when they died in battle. Now that he thinks about it, he never did find out how Frisk actually *does* the Loads and Resets. Yes, he knows it has to do with their level of Determination, but as for the actual process, he knows nothing. Frisk has only talked about it in the context of being something they could do after they died.

Does that mean that Frisk is only able to Load after they die? Because he knows that they have very rarely Loaded outside of Encounters and similar situations in which death was a real possibility. And if that is the case, how is it that they are able to Load at other times? Times when they haven’t been killed, he means. The only explanation he can think of is that Frisk might have to take their life in their own hands.

Literally.

And if that is the case, then fuck. How is this kid not more messed up than they already are?

He *really* needs to have a talk with Frisk about their abilities, and the sooner the better.

Of course, that is providing that it even *is* Frisk who is responsible for today’s time anomalies. After all, they *did* say that they weren’t always able to Save on the Surface. At least if Frisk is responsible, he will be able to get some answers.

But if the Loads are being done by some other human…

Sans *really* doesn’t want to think about that.

From across the room, he hears his phone ding. His screen is full with messages, but at this point, he clicks on the one that he thinks will probably be the most useful.

**fartmaster frisk:** LFM alert

**fartmaster frisk:** Don’t have time but need to talk later

**fartmaster frisk:** It’s bad
“crap.”

Frisk never texts Sans, or at least not in the moment, about this kind of thing. He takes a second to send a thumbs up emoji to let the kid know he saw their messages before clicking to the next.

He barely gets through the first one before his Soul pulses heavily in horror.

No wonder why Frisk has been Loading so much.

Exhausted in every sense of the word, Sans slumps down onto one of the chairs in the tiny conference room Asgore let him rest in and grabs a unisicle and a bottle of ketchup from his inventory. He desperately wants to shortcut over to Paps and the kid, but Fluffybuns all but ordered him to stay for a few minutes to recover.

Out of all his jobs, his work as Judge has always been the most tiring.

Of course, it doesn’t help that he has never had to perform so many Judgements in one day (excluding weird timeline technicalities, which don't count for obvious reasons), and especially not for people who are actually guilty of a crime. Generally, his Judgements are few and far between, making his role more of a formality than anything.

Today, however, was not that kind of day.

A small part of him was hoping he wouldn’t have to do this anymore. In an attempt to keep relations between monsters and humans as friendly as possible, Frisk and Asgore (along with some assistance from Toriel) decided to abide by human judicial systems as much as possible. Sans didn’t mind; the extra money he gets from being Royal Judge is nice, but it was something he was ready to give up upon reaching the Surface. Needless to say, some of his recollections from other timelines have ruined the job for him.

As it turns out, though, joint custody on the case meant that he had work to do. Ol’ Fluffybuns wanted information to help with the monster side of the investigation, and what better way to get it than to have Sans examine the Souls of the five suspected arsonists?

He takes a loud slurp of ketchup, hoping to overpower the images rattling in his skull.

The guy who Sans would peg as the group’s leader had an Orange Soul, which isn’t too much of a shock. It takes guts to overlook your conscious and try to kill a whole bunch of innocent kids. Doesn’t make it right, but it technically counts as a form of Bravery, as twisted as that might be.

The next two humans both had Perseverance as their primary traits. Again, he could understand how that helped them in their attack.

Human number four was a Red Soul, although the actual hue was dull and faded. Admittedly, Sans froze when he first saw it. It was only when he remembered that Frisk had texted to confirm timeline shenanigans that he was able to proceed with Judgement. The thought of a Red Souled human being involved with an anti-monster terrorist attack is extremely concerning, to put it mildly.

But it was the last one that got to him. The last human, who reeked heavily of gasoline, had a Soul
the same shade as the bright green grass of the Surface. Kindness.

What a joke.

“okay, that’s enough,” Sans mumbles to himself. Thinking about this is only going to mess with him more. Besides, he should have stayed here long enough now to calm down Asgore’s overprotective paternal instincts. It’s been what, half an hour since he finished the Judgements? Maybe longer; the room he is in doesn’t have a clock and he had forgotten to check his phone once he was done.

Right before he can shortcut away, Asgore peeks in through the door, hitting his horns in the process. “Sans?”

“heya asgore. ‘sup?”

“I brought you some tea,” he explains, because that just seems to be how the king copes with a lot of things in life.

“thanks. that was pret-tea considerate of you.”

Asgore chuckles and hands over a full thermos. “You’re welcome, my friend. Will you be needing a ride to the healing centre? I should have enough time before my next meeting to take you.”

“nah, i’ve got a shortcut.” The sooner he can see his brother, the better.

“Of course. Well, until next time. Let me know if you need anything while Papyrus is recovering.”

“sure thing. see ya.”

One quick shortcut later, Sans finds himself at the very busy entrance of the healing centre. Shortly after he had arrived at the Embassy, Frisk had texted to let him know that Tori took them there so Papyrus could get treatment. One of the receptionists leads him to a small private room. The first thing he sees is Frisk sitting on a chair, quietly fiddling with the sleeve of their favourite sweater. Papyrus is swinging his legs against the side of the exam table, boots thumping loudly as he kicks. His right arm is in a plain sling, preventing him from flailing around his broken ulna, even if it is encased in a cast shimmering with healing magic.

“hey guys.”

Papyrus stops his kicking and turns to see Sans better, skull twisted in a smile which is a bit too wide. “SAAAAAAAAANNNNNNSSSSS! YOU’RE HEEEEEEEEEEEEEERE!”

Oh, hell no.

Not again.

“They gave him pain meds, didn’t they?” Papyrus never did do well with that type of thing.

“Yeah,” Frisk sighs tiredly, idly picking at a loose thread on their cuff. “You missed when he started crying because cotton balls are soft.”

“IT’S TRUE! THEY AAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRRE!”

Okay, it’s time to get a certain skeleton home. Hopefully, he will heal faster than last time he had a break this bad; the least amount of time Paps has to spend hyped up on painkillers, the better.

“Alrighty, bedtime for papyrus. let’s go.”
“OKELY DOKELEY,” he chirps as Sans helps him down from the examination table. Sans makes sure to keep a firm hold on his brother, knowing all too well that if he lets go, there is a high chance of his younger brother skull planting at this point. Frisk hops down from their chair, and the three of them make their way out to head back home, Papyrus babbling incoherently all the way.

“CAN WE GO SEE MY BESTEST COOKING PARTNER PAL OF MINE, GRILLY BOY?” he asks as Sans helps him into bed. “I MISS HIM AND I WANT FOOD.”

“maybe later,” Sans answers, barely hiding his laughter. It’s nice that his bro is getting along so well with his best friend, but now is really not the best time for that.

“BUT SAAAAAAANNNSSSS,” he whines with a wavering voice, tears starting to build up in his eye sockets, “I MISS MY WARM FIRE BUDDY. WHY CAN’T WE GO SEE MY HOT FRIEND?”

Man, meds are weird sometimes. “hush. we can go see him after you get some rest, okay?”

“KAY,” he mumbles, settling in as Sans tucks the covers around him. “G’NIGHT BROTHER.”

“night bro. call if you need anything.”

He waits a second for a response, but it seems like Paps is already out, poor guy. Leaving the door cracked open, he makes his way downstairs. Frisk is waiting in the kitchen, nibbling away at some crackers they must have found in one of the cupboards. Their skin looks slightly paler than normal, which is probably not the best sign.

Sans takes out the thermos Asgore gave him and pours the golden flower tea out into two cups. It is still as hot as it would be when fresh, which makes him wonder if Asgore imbued the container with some of his fire magic. He wouldn’t put it past him, to be honest.

“how’re ya faring, kiddo? you haven’t had a legendary fartmaster day in a long time.”

Frisk shrugs, going for a drink of tea before shuddering and spitting the liquid back into their cup. Burnt their tongue again, if he were to guess. Sure enough, the kid starts puffing furiously into their cup. “I’m just glad I Saved when I did," they say between breaths, "or else we’d be back a week or two, I think.”

“yeah. it seems like you barely had enough time to do anything before the fire started. lucky break.”

“Yeah.”

“how many loads was it anyways? i didn’t get a chance to actually check my notes.”

Another shrug, this one more hesitant than the last. “Dunno. I didn’t have time to keep track. Over fifty? I know I tried the fire alarm trick at least five times. I was starting to think that it wouldn’t work.”

“i was wondering about that. when tori called asgore at the embassy, she said it was monster kid who pulled the alarm.”

“Oh huh. I bet them 10 G that they wouldn’t be able to jump high enough to pull the fire alarm with their mouth,” Frisk explains, and Sans can’t help but shake his head in amusement. “Oh yeah, can I get an advance on my allowance this week?”

“just this once, and only because you managed to get everyone to safety without making it
“Thanks Sans!”

“no problem kiddo. do you think you can wait a bit for supper? i told papyrus we could have grillby’s, but i think he’s gonna be conked out for a while.”

They point to the box of crackers sitting on the table and their tea. “I’m good.”

“good. i’m gonna clean up some stuff in my lab. lemme know if paps wakes up, okay?”

“Got it!”

“great,” he answers, already halfway through a shortcut.

Now that he thinks about it, he should probably make sure that Grillby’s is even open right now. He takes out his phone, only to discover a voicemail he didn’t notice from earlier. Flipping on the speaker phone option, he lets your message play as he starts organising his papers. Once it is done, he double checks the time stamp. You must have called while he was at the Embassy. Vaguely, he wonders if the meeting Asgore was talking about before he left was supposed to be with you. There had already been a whole bunch of reporters all over the place, so it probably wasn’t that. Plus, he had assigned Undyne and some of the other members of the Guard to dealing with the Ebott police department, which really limits who he would need to meet with.

Just to be on the safe side, he sends Asgore a quick text to see if you had been caught up to date. Even though your manner was still very professional in the message, your voice and rhythm of speech betrayed an understandable amount of concern.

While he waits for Asgore to try and text back — or even better, call him so he doesn’t have to decipher the inevitable typos that come from the king attempting to use the too tiny keyboard on his phone — Sans starts to think about what could happen on Monday because of the attack. Obviously, there was nothing him or Papyrus could do to help that they weren’t already doing. Papyrus broke his freaking arm because he was helping, for goodness sake. However, this might not stop you from thinking that taking Frisk away from New New Home might make them less of a target.

In his head, he knows that such a response would be fairly logical because face it; as long as Frisk is supporting monsters, someone will want to go after them. However, his Soul wants to protest. Frisk going away is just the catalyst for another Reset. In the end, it would help no one, not that you would be able to know this.

Hopefully, Sans will be able to convince you of Frisk’s safety. That is all he can do at this point.

Across the lab, his phone goes off. Not feeling up to actually walking to the table, he picks it up with his magic and floats it over.

**fartmaster frisk:** Papyrus is awake

**fartmaster frisk:** And hangry
That’s his cue. Sans had better get upstairs and see if Grillby’s is still the plan for supper or if he will need to make something himself. Personally, Sans is hoping for the former.

As for what will happen with you? Only time can tell.

Chapter End Notes

Well, that was a trip. I don’t really have any more specific thoughts right now, which is probably because I did this entire chapter in pretty much one go, so my ability to word is pretty much done until I get some more sleep.

And hey, I've got some fluff planned for next chapter, you can look forward to that. It's gonna be fun and really cute.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time. Plus, if you go back far enough on my tumblr, you'll be able to find an idea that will be going into next chapter, so there's that.
Burning Affection

Chapter Summary

Sans asks Grillby for a favour and Grillby agrees to it.

Chapter Notes

So, there has been a slight change of plans. The fluff I had been planning on has been pushed back another chapter, which is a bit of a shame, because I had some cute things in mind.

I saw some comments that made me want to write a SUPER self indulgent chapter, so I did. Like, this is only here to fulfill a personal need for some cute Papby content while Papyrus is slightly messed up on painkillers.

So yeah, here's a random Grillby POV chapter that literally no one asked for.

Sorry, not sorry.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Needing something to do, Grillby wipes down his counter for what is probably the sixth time in the past twenty minutes. After the fire at the school, tensions have been fairly high. His niece got out completely unscathed, although as a fire elemental, most people were less concerned about Fuku than they were the other students. After all, there are other monsters, like water-based elementals, who would have been in far more danger due to the heat.

However, that didn’t stop him from worrying when he initially found out.

First of all, there were the sprinklers installed all over the school, as per human regulations. He sends a nasty glare to the ones in his own building. It was a losing battle trying to convince the human contractors and inspectors why devices which activate to spray water from the ceiling could be a problem in a restaurant owned by a being made of fire. Fuku was lucky and got away with only a few water burns, thanks to her best friend who always carries an umbrella around just in case of emergency. One of these days, he is really going to need to treat Skatie to a free milkshake or something. Even though he knows that she has encouraged Fuku to skip her classes from time to time, the young monster is always careful to make sure that his niece doesn’t harm herself in her desire to ignore the limitations caused by her physicality.

Not that he is one to talk, though. Even he can acknowledge that setting up a pub in Snowdin of all places wasn’t the wisest of decisions for a fire elemental, no matter how much he enjoyed the town’s quiet ambience.

Another concern that he had was how the arson aspect could have harmed Fuku. Most monsters assume, reasonably enough, that he and other fire-based monsters can touch ordinary fire without a single problem. That is technically true, but the fire at the Delta Academy was not normal fire. No,
the flames that burnt the school were created with an intent to do harm, and intent can affect a monster, regardless of how it is manifested.

Fuku had complained when he left work to check on her. Said that her parents are overprotective enough, and that she didn’t need him stepping in. Absolutely true, not that it mattered at the time. Fuku, in all her rebellious ways, has and will always be the family member he gets along with best, and he wanted to make sure she was safe.

But, it is all over now. The culprits have been found. The humans from Ebott who came to help were nothing but nice and helpful, something for which Grillby is quite thankful. Once it was clear that everyone was out of immediate danger, a lot of them would come in small groups, wanting to buy something warm to eat before leaving the city. One of the firefighters even gave him a generous tip, promising to come back with his family at a later date.

At the recommendations of most of his regulars, he ended up closing for the night soon after the humans left. Pretty much everyone wants to be with their family right now anyways, so it isn’t like he would be losing too much business.

Besides, if half the people in his life were to be believed, Grillby is long overdue for some time off work.

A strange melodic assortment of fart sounds comes from the kitchen. Grillby sets down his cleaning rag with a gentle sigh. One of these days, he will figure out how Sans keeps getting his grubby little phalanges on his phone to change the ringtone to something obnoxious.

“... speak of the devil,” the bartender utters dryly under his breath, accepting the call after a quick check of the call display.

“hey grillbz, you still open?”

“... hello to you too, Sans. No, I’m not.” At least he decided to call and check this time instead of just shortcutting in and scaring Grillby in the process. He never did get the scorch marks from the last time he had closed earlier than normal cleaned off the ceiling properly. Thank goodness that specific incident occurred while they were still Underground, where there were no sprinklers.

“shoot. look, i know it’s been a really long day and all, but do you think you could do me a favour?”

“... depends.” The last time Sans had asked for a favour, Grillby ended up regretting it for over a year.

“i swear, i’m not involving you in another prank on undyne and the dogs.”

“... you better not be. I’m still finding remnants from whatever science nonsense you pulled, and this is a completely different building.”

“yeah, yeah, i know. the favour is actually about papyrus.”

“... oh.” Well, now Sans has got his attention. Slowly, Grillby makes his way from his kitchen to the front of the bar so he can sit down. “... what is it?”

“do you think you could come over and make some food and visit tonight? dunno why, but paps is really insistent that he sees you right now. he must really be enjoying your guys’ cooking lessons or something.”
Or something indeed. Never has Grillby been more thankful than now that Sans decided to call instead of asking in person. Explaining why his flames have suddenly heated to a pale blue would have been quite the challenge. Especially considering how Papyrus made him promise not to tell Sans anything about what happens during their time together. He said that he wanted to wait until the time is right, whenever that is.

Provided, of course, that the shorter of the two skeletons doesn’t beat him to the punch. Like it or not, Sans will eventually find out. It is just a question of if Papyrus will tell him or if his brother will put the pieces together himself.

As for now, it is a good thing that Papyrus is the better at puzzles between the two.

“uh, grillbz, you still there? there’s some weird static going on.”

Right, he still hasn’t answered. Moving his phone further from his head in an attempt to reduce the intensity of his fire crackling across the line, Grillby responds, “... yes.”

“is that a yes to you being on the line or a yes to you coming over?”

“... yes. I mean, yes to both,” he hastily corrects.

“great,” Sans’ voice says simultaneously from right behind him and from the phone, causing him to fall off the chair from shock. “do you want to grab anything, or are we good to go?”

“... Sans! Don’t do that!” Honestly, this skeleton and his damned shortcuts is going to be the death of him one of these days.

“sorry, i didn’t mean to spark you when i showed up. it’s just that the sooner we can get back home, the boo-ter.”

Grillby groans, accepting Sans’ offered hand to help him get up. At least he should be able to play off any remnants of his earlier blushing still visible in his fire as from being startled.

“... I’m starting to reconsider the favour. Those puns were awful, even for you.”

“too late.” Sans grins mischievously as he drags the elemental through a shortcut before he is even standing properly on his feet. They end up in the skeleton brothers’ living room in no time.

Head reeling from the unexpected teleport, Grillby shoves the short skeleton, sending a harsh glare his way. Sans simply smirks in amusement.

“GRIBBLES, YOU’RE HERE!”

Gribbles? He throws a questioning look at Sans, but he doesn’t get the chance to find out the explanation before Papyrus wobblily launches himself from the couch and stumbles towards him. Dashing forwards, Grillby catches the tall skeleton in an awkward hug, being careful to avoid the injured arm.

“SANS, FRISK, LOOK!” Papyrus joyfully exclaims, limply nuzzling into Grillby’s shoulder. “MY FAVOURITEST HOT FRIEND AMIGO IS HERE!”

Oh stars, he can already feel his temperature rising and flustered sparks flying. Why is Papyrus being so forward all of a sudden? Yes, he may be a very affectionate monster in general, but this seems to be toeing the line of what can be considered as platonic. He said he didn’t want to do anything to raise Sans’ suspicions! This seems rather counterintuitive.
Sans chuckles, patting Grillby’s other shoulder as he heads to the couch. “heh. sorry grillbz, forgot to warn you. the healers gave him some meds and they’re kinda messing with his skull.”

Considering that Papyrus is currently clinging onto him like a dead weight? “… I’ve noticed.”

“YOUR FACE IS WARM AND FLICKERY,” Papyrus observes with the utmost seriousness. “I LIKE IT.”

Abort! Abort! Abort! Is it possible for him to heat up any more at this point? Grillby doesn’t even want to think about what colours are running through him, broadcasting his feelings in front of the entire room. His glasses are fogging up from the change in temperature, for goodness sake! He thought that was impossible!

But also, AAAAAAAAAHHHHH! Papyrus likes his face! Is that just the meds speaking, is he just flirting again or does he really feel that way? Sure, they have been flirting with each other since pretty much the beginning of Papyrus’ cooking lessons, but it had started as a bit of a joke at first, comparing some of Sans’ usual puns with the worst pick-up lines Grillby has heard throughout the years. But then, things started to escalate from there to see who could fluster the other the most through flirting, and… well, it seems that Papyrus is currently winning, because Grillby is definitely starting to feel the heat. No pun intended.

“Oh no, he recognises that expression on Sans’ face. That is the look he gets when he is warming up to make a joke or something along that line. Sans has something going on in that skull of his, and Grillby can already tell he doesn’t like it.

Sure enough, he is correct. With an absolute shit-eating grin, he looks Grillby straight in the eye as he says, “bet his face is even warmer right now, isn’t it?”

That is it; next time Sans comes orders his usual, Grillby is going to add something awful to the ketchup. He isn’t quite sure what that thing could be yet; he is talking about a skeleton whose beverage of choice is ketchup. And no, just because a Bloody Mary is made with tomato juice does not make it okay. Although, based on the information Papyrus gave him about skeleton tongues, it wouldn’t surprise him if Sans simply chooses to forego the full taste experience just so he can weird out those around him.

“YEAH, IT’S LIKE GRILLBY’S FACE IS A BLANKET FRESH FROM THE DRYER.” As if to prove his point, Papyrus reaches up to stroke his face.

Grillby can’t handle it anymore. He needs a distraction, and quick. “… Papyrus, Sans was saying that you were hungry. What do you want for supper?”

“Well, that is an interesting combination. Not really supper food, though.

“aw,” Sans murmurs comfortingly, “is your tummy feeling upset again?” Again? Is this another reaction to the medication? Or has Papyrus been sick in general as of late?

“I DON’T EVEN HAVE A TUMMY,” he protests somewhat weakly.

And he’s gone.
“... how does a vanilla shake sound?” If Papyrus is feeling nauseous, that would probably be the best flavour to avoid irritating his stomach. Or not-stomach, as it is.

“GOOD. I MISSED YOU.”

“... I, uh, missed you too.” Technically, they saw each other in passing this afternoon when Grillby went to check on Fuku, but now does not seem like the best time to mention that. “... how about you lay down on the couch for a bit, and I’ll get you some supper.”

He ends up having to help Papyrus there, but the highly medicated skeleton does not protest, thank goodness. It would have been very difficult to work in the kitchen while holding him up. Frisk, who he had almost forgotten was even here with how silent they were, unfolds a blanket from the top of the couch and hands it to Grillby. Just before he settles it onto Papyrus, he takes a second longer to hold it, heating it more thoroughly. His decision seems to pay off, as he is rewarded with a content little sigh.

“THANKS,” mumbles Papyrus softly, grabbing at his hand. Probably for the warmth, right? His hand, bare of its usual bright glove, seems so cold and delicate. Whatever the logic for the decision, Grillby indulges his friend.

Yes, it is for Papyrus’ sake that he does it. He isn’t in denial about how holding hands sends a fluttery spark through his Soul. No, not at all. And if it does, well, that is just an unexpected benefit.

“... you’re welcome. I’ll be back in a few minutes.” Somewhat reluctantly, he retracts his hand from Papyrus’.

In the kitchen, Grillby works on gathering all his ingredients. Finding everything for the milkshake isn’t too hard. The oatmeal, surprisingly enough, is more of a problem. He had thought that, thanks to all his visits to cook (and flirt) with Papyrus, he was familiar with the layout of the kitchen. However, what he had neglected to consider is that he has never seen where Papyrus stores his more breakfasty food items. So far, the closest thing he has found to oatmeal is wild rice.

“Here.”

Grillby turns to his right, where Frisk stands holding a box of individually packaged instant oatmeal. “... thanks.”

Before he can grab the oatmeal, though, Frisk inquires, “You and Papyrus like each other, don’t you?”

Slightly bewildered by the aggressive change in subject, Grillby just stares blankly at the young child. They are completely unfazed and they turn on the tea kettle.

“Well, do you?”

“... yes? We’re getting to be good friends.” How else is he supposed to answer this?

“I bet you are.” Are they waggling their brows at him?

“.................. um?”

“Don’t worry, I won’t tell. Unless you want me to,” they add with a conspiratorial wink. What on earth? Grillby had heard from various patrons about how the human that is now their ambassador had been quite the little flirt as they travelled the Underground, but this is something else.
Are they trying to be his wingman? Because there is no other way he can think of interpreting this.

“FRISK?” Papyrus croaks from the living room. “WHERE ARE YOU?”

“In the kitchen!”

“OKAY.”

“Here,” Frisk says, grabbing a bowl and spoon, “I’ll make the oatmeal so you can concentrate on the milkshake.”

“... thanks.” If it means he doesn’t have to work directly with water, Grillby isn’t going to complain. Besides, it might distract Frisk from bringing up his relationship with Papyrus again.

Once the food is made — without any additional matchmaking attempts from Frisk, thank the stars — Grillby grabs a cookie sheet to work as a makeshift serving tray. As much as Papyrus would probably prefer eating at the table, the idea of getting the injured skeleton there sounds like a task for a later time. Besides, he looks so sweet and comfortable, all bundled up on the couch. Grillby doesn’t think he has ever seen him so peaceful. It is strange, but probably a good thing; the more Papyrus can rest, the faster his arm will heal.

“... hey Papyrus. Here’s supper.” For him, at least. Later, he can cook something up quick for Frisk and Sans.

“YAY!” Squirming under the blanket, Papyrus slowly makes his way to a seated position. “CAN YOU SIT WITH ME? PLEASE?”

Oh stars, look at that face. How could Grillby possibly say no to that face? He has only heard about that face from Sans, who says he can never deny his brother’s wishes when he uses it. Grillby finally understands what he means, now that he is subject to it. Frisk mouths the words ‘do it’ in a silent chant.

Grillby sits down beside Papyrus, easily giving in. Frisk gives him a smile and thumbs up before plopping down cross legged on the floor, eyes focused on the pair of monsters like they are the kid’s favourite tv show.

“This is really good, Grillby.”

“... thanks. Frisk made the oatmeal.”

Papyrus doesn’t even acknowledge the comment before continuing, “DO YOU KNOW WHAT ELSE IS GOOD?”

“... spaghetti?”

“Yeah! Spaghetti is pretty great, which is why the great Papyrus makes it, because then the combined greatness can help make the world a greater place! However, this isn’t what I was thinking about.”

“Then what were you thinking about?” Frisk prompts with a giggle.

“I’m glad you asked, tiny human Frisk! Grillby!”

“... what?”

Papyrus rolls his eyes, like Grillby has asked the most ridiculous question ever. “The answer
IS GRILLBY. GRILLBY, YOU ARE PRETTY GOOD. IN FACT, YOU ARE GREAT, JUST LIKE MYSELF!”

His flames fwoosh at the sudden praise, which only serves to illuminate the amusement in Frisk’s eyes. So much for the idea of his death coming from Sans scaring him by appearing out of the blue via shortcuts. Now, it seems more likely that Grillby may die from an overabundance of feelings.

“i’m sure he really appreciates that,” Sans says casually as he leaves the kitchen with a bottle of ketchup. When did he show up and how long has he been listening? “are you feeling any better?”

“YEAH, THANKS TO GRILLBY AND FRISK.”

“that’s nice. now try and drink up all your milkshake so you can replenish your magic.”

“’KAY,” he responds immediately before chugging the rest of the shake in one go. Meanwhile, Frisk gets up to turn on the tv.

The rest of the evening is less awkward for Grillby, mostly thanks to whatever movie Frisk chose. The cheerful animated film averts attention away from him and Papyrus, which he highly appreciates. Especially now that Papyrus is done eating and seems to be enjoying the warmth of his flames once again. With each minute that passes, Papyrus leans closer and closer, until his skull is resting on his shoulder. At one point, Frisk turns around and mimics the yawn-and-put-the-arm-over-the-shoulder move. Obviously, he doesn’t stoop so low as to perform that cheesy manoeuvre, which he has seen countless times at work. If Grillby ends up with his arm around Papyrus’ waist, it is only to keep him warm in a way that won’t aggravate his injured arm. Nothing else. Not at all.

Fine. Grillby may or may not be in denial about how deep his feelings for Papyrus are running, which isn’t helped by how unfiltered and physically affectionate the skeleton is being right now. Before he knows it, the movie is done and Papyrus is curled up in his lap, NYEH-ing softly in his sleep. Grillby doesn’t even bother masking the stupid grin he is almost certainly wearing, because who wouldn’t find that adorable? Someone would have to be completely Soulless to not find it sweet.

Or maybe Grillby is just biased.

…

No, even if he is biased, it is the truth.

“all right kiddo, time for bed,” Sans announces as the credits end.

“But Sans —”

“no buts, mainly because i don’t have one. you had a reaaaaaaalllllllly long day frisk. even if you don’t have school tomorrow, you’re going to bed now.”


He was really hoping Frisk wouldn’t bring up that weird conversation from the kitchen. “... I won’t?”

They stare at him in the same, slightly eerie way that Sans sometimes does. “Good. Goodnight Sans. See you in the morning.”
“i will, kiddo.” Sans waits until Frisk is in their bedroom before asking, “what did they tell you?”

“… nothing important, really,” he shrugs, hoping his friend won’t want him to elaborate, because there is no way that he will truthfully say that Frisk essentially offered to help him admit having feelings for Papyrus.

“all right then. paps is really out, isn’t he?”

“… yes.”

“you up to helping me bring him to bed? i would rather not wake him up again if i could avoid it.”

“… sure. Should I just… pick him up?”

“yeah,” Sans chuckles softly, “and i’ll help support him with my magic. ready?”

Grillby nods, pushing up his glasses slightly. With the utmost care, he adjusts his hold on the tall skeleton before standing up. Papyrus stirs slightly at the change in position, but settles down easily enough, snuggling closer to Grillby’s chest. With Sans leading the way, the elemental starts up to Papyrus’ room.

“hey,” Sans whispers as he gets the door, “thanks again for coming over and helping out. i know he can be a bit much to put up with when he’s like this, but paps means well.”

“… no problem.” Just barely, Grillby stops himself from tacking on that it was his pleasure to help Papyrus. True as that might be, he fears that he would be coming on a little strongly. Somehow, Sans doesn’t seem to have noticed anything being up, which is probably because of how Papyrus reacts to meds, and he doesn’t want to change that. Again, it is up to when Papyrus himself feels like sharing. Instead, he gives Sans a dry glare, thankful that he is able to read the expressions of his fire fairly well. “… if anything, it was Papyrus’ older brother egging him on that was the problem.”

“sorry,” he apologises without the slightest trace of remorse, "it’s nice to be able to observe and not have to be the one directly dealing with it, you know?”

Grillby places Papyrus onto his bright red racecar bed. “… you aren’t sorry, you terrible liar.”

“you got me.” Pausing for a moment, Sans rearranges the blankets around the sling and cast. “still. i really owe you one.”

“… you could pay your tab for once.”

Sans cracks up, much to Grillby’s satisfaction. There is the skeleton he knows. “yeah, i could.”

“… you aren’t, are you?”

“nah.”

“… asshole,” Grillby jokes, giving him a gentle nudge to the ribs.

“yup. do you want a ride back to your place?”

He nods, straightening up in preparation for another shortcut. “… thanks.”

“no problem,” Sans replies outside of Grillby’s home. “what are friends for?”
Was this entire chapter of Grillby being a flustered flame necessary in the slightest? Nope. Did that stop me from writing it. Nope.


I swear, next chapter is going to go back to what I had planned. I've got some A+ cute stuff planned.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
The Merry Monsters

Chapter Summary

You get to observe Gyftmas preparations as life starts to return to normal following the attack.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Mom, I’m telling you, I’m fine.” This is probably the third time you have repeated this to her, and that is only today. Obviously, news of the attack quickly spread outside of the Ebott region. Your father had called a few hours after you returned home from meeting with Asgore, interrupting a much needed nap. Due to Ebott’s proximity to New New Home, your parents had been — and still are, apparently — concerned about your personal safety.

You don’t even want to know how they would react if they knew that you actively work in New New Home.

“I know. But can you blame me for worrying? It’s so close to you!”

“It was a fire,” you groan in exasperation, tapping your fingers on the dashboard of your car. You pulled over just outside of New New Home to take her call, assuming at first that it was something urgent. However, you are starting to wish that you didn’t; if she doesn’t let you hang up soon, you are going to be late. “I doubt a fire is going to hurt me all the way in Ebott.”

“But what if it was something worse than a fire?”

“But it wasn’t.” For the sake of Frisk and all the others in New New Home, you hope that it will never come down to something like that. “Anyways, I’ll call you and Dad later, okay? I need to drive to work now.”

“Okay, sweetie,” your mom says, sounding slightly resigned. “I love you.”

“Love you too, Mom.”

You barely wait for her to hang up before setting off again. First thing this morning, Asgore sent over the revised files, not that you have gotten a chance to read them yet. Along with them, he gave you a heads-up that security protocols have been heightened for the time being. He didn’t specify, but you assume that he warned you for a reason.

Sure enough, you discover something new when you reach the edge of the city. Where there had previously just been a sign welcoming people into the monster capital, there is now a security gate blocking access. In some ways, it is impressive how quickly monsters were able to build such a thing. However, the reason why it is even there to begin with distracts from that. It is sad; monsters got out of their underground prison only to have to lock themselves behind gates to protect themselves from your people, essentially re-imprisoning themselves. At least this time, they are able to leave.

Once you are all the way to the gate, you turn off your radio and wait for two armoured guards to
approach. You roll down your window in preparation, shuddering as the frosty air enters your car.

“Hey, you!” The one with rabbit-like ears extending from his helmet calls out. “Like, what is your purpose in New New Home today?”

“I’m Frisk's case worker. On Mondays, I conduct house visits.”

“Cool. King Asgore told us you'd be coming. I'm gonna take a look at your ID while my bro here checks your car.”

“Of course.” Moving slowly, you first unlock your car doors so that the other guard can complete his search, then grab your wallet and hand it to the first guard. After a few moments of him switching between staring at your face and at the picture on your driver's license, he hands it back.

“All good over here, my dude. How about the search?”

“All clear, Owen,” the other responds more quietly as he closes the trunk of your car.

“Radical! All right, give us a sec and you can be on your way, social worker lady.”

“Thank you… Owen, was it?” The rabbit guard nods. “And thank you…” You look helplessly at the other guard, realising that he never shared his name.

“You can call him 02,” Owen fills in for you.

Strange, but you aren't going to question it. “All right. Thank you 02. I hope both of you have a nice day.”

“You too,” Owen replies as 02 waves in silence. You roll your window back up and make your way to the skeleton household, anticipating their indoor heating already. Next time you come into town, you should wear some warmer clothes, just in case they check your car again.

Thankfully, the drive from the town entrance doesn’t take much time. Before long, you are ringing their doorbell, breath appearing in small puffs in a way that brings back childhood memories of pretending to be a dragon once the weather started to become more chilly. All right, fine: you still sometimes take advantage of how your breath condensates in the winter to pretend to be a dragon. In fact, while you wait for someone to unlock the front door, you take an extra deep inhale, watching in satisfaction at the large amount of silvery mist which appears from your mouth.

Finally, you hear a small clicking as the door is unlocked. Sans opens up, covered in an unholy amount of glitter and what is either paint or marker. One of those sticky bows that you put onto presents is dangling precariously just above his left eye socket, barely sticking to the bone. What kind of arts and crafts apocalypse did he just escape from?

“are you gonna come in, or just stand out in the cold?”

“Oh, sorry.”

“don't worry about it,” he replies as he shuts the door behind you. “the cold just goes right through me anyhow.”

It takes a second for the joke to register, and when it does, you cannot help but give a slightly disappointed sigh. “Why do I feel like you say that anytime someone brings up the temperature?”

“THAT IS BECAUSE YOU ARE ENTIRELY CORRECT,” Papyrus announces, making his way
towards you. Carefully, you examine his arms, trying to assess how bad the damage is. It is slightly difficult, considering he is wearing a long sleeved smock, preventing you from seeing any bandages or casts. Hopefully, though, this is a good sign. Then again, it isn’t like you are anything close to being knowledgeable about monster healing. All you know is that you hear the words ‘broken bone’, and you assume that some sort of stabilising agent like a cast or a splint is involved to ensure that everything heals properly in place.

“MISS SOCIAL WORKER, I AM WELL AWARE THAT I AM A WONDERFUL SPECIMEN OF A SKELETON, BUT I WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF YOU COULD STOP OGLING MY BONES.”

Your eyes widen in realisation at his words, and you hurriedly avert your gaze to anywhere but Papyrus. You end up settling on Rocky, who is sitting on its table surrounded by sprinkles — this time, of the red and green variety — as per usual. There is one new addition, though: an adorably tiny Santa hat is perched on the pet rock’s… head, you guess? How festive. Still staring intently at Rocky, you clear your throat. “Sorry, I, uh, wasn’t meaning to stare. King Asgore had informed me of your injury, and, well...”

“AHA! I UNDERSTAND. IN THAT CASE,” he adds while rolling up his sleeve, “OGLE AWAY! AS YOU CAN SEE, MY ULNA IS ALMOST AS GOOD AS NEW.”

“thank the stars,” Sans contributes, leaning against the wall of the hallway. He looks about thirty seconds from falling asleep. Not that that is shocking in the slightest; he looks like that about every other time you see him.

“That’s good to hear.”

As you make your way towards the living room, you soon discover the source of the glitter. Frisk sits in front of the newspaper covered coffee table, eyes narrowed in concentration as they paint…

Wait a minute.

“Frisk, what are you painting?”

“Gyftmas decorations,” they answer cheerily, spinning their dirty paintbrush in a jar of water so quickly that you are impressed that it doesn’t spill everywhere. “You can help, if you want.”

“No, thank you.” You get closer to the table so you can see what Frisk is doing. You notice three separate piles of drying decorations, each one clearly belonging to a different occupant of the house. The pile closest to Frisk is obviously their own, based on the somewhat sloppy paint job which denotes more enthusiasm than skill and the copious layers of glitter glue and loose sparkles. To their right is a very organised stack of decorations, each one showcasing elaborate landscapes and scenes which almost remind you of Bob Ross paintings. These ones surely belong to Papyrus, mostly because you cannot see him being responsible for the remaining group. Unlike the others, it appears that these were embellished using sharpie in place of paint. In a familiar lowercase font, each one bears the word ‘decoration’. Sans made those, no doubt in your mind.

What all the decorations have in common, though, is the material they are made of. From a distance, you had wondered if they were all made of papier-mâché. However, now that you are looking up close, each ornament is solid. You suppose clay or ceramics could have been used, or even plastic, but the specialised shape makes you suspicious, considering the type of monsters that live here. Out of curiosity, you poke at an ornament from Sans’ pile.

“Are these… made of bone?”
“INDEED THEY ARE! BONE ATTACKS, TO BE SPECIFIC.”

“I see.” Recently, you had looked up magic attacks, remembering a comment Papyrus had made regarding them during an earlier visit. From what you understand, magic attacks, also known as bullets for whatever reason, have multiple purposes. Although, as the name implies, they can be used in fighting scenarios, a monster’s bullets are simply a way in which they use their magic to express themselves. The document you found had gone more in depth about different bullet types and functions, but you had gotten a headache and decided to stop reading after covering the absolute basics. “Has there been anything else interesting going on, other than making, uh...”

“We went shopping for presents today,” Frisk says, gluing a shiny red ribbon to their newest ornament. Somehow, a matching one ended up tangled in their hair when you weren’t looking.

“Didn’t you have school today?”

“They were supposed to,” Sans explains, attaching a yellow ribbon with dark blue polka dots to Frisk’s bangs while Papyrus is busy working on a new ornament, “but we had to schedule some of their doctor’s appointments for today. Figured that, while we were in ebott, might as well get some shopping done between them. After all, there’s no time like the present to do that kind of thing.”

“SANS.” Papyrus groans, “YOU ALREADY USED THAT ONE TODAY.”

He just grins and points to the wintery background his brother finished painting. “snow what?”

Frisk giggles as Papyrus gives an exaggerated sigh. “I’M GOING TO PRETEND YOU DIDN’T JUST SAY THAT.”

“bro, don’t give me the cold shoulder ‘cuz of that.”

Papyrus looks up from his bone attack to stare Sans down. “BROTHER, IF YOU AREN’T CAREFUL, I WILL TAKE A PAGE OUT OF UNDYNE’S BOOK AND TRULY GIVE YOU A COLD SHOULDER VIA SNOW WRESTLING.”

“heheh, nice. A plus for adding in a physical comedy element.”

“THANK YOU. I THOUGHT YOU WOULD ENJOY THAT.”

You have a feeling those two could continue like that for a great deal of time. Therefore, you decide to direct your attention to Frisk, who is busy eying a rainbow sticky bow and the empty space above Sans’ other eye socket like a cat getting ready to pounce. “Anything else interesting going on?”

Frisk shrugs. “They’re starting the reconstruction of the school tomorrow. Papyrus is grumpy because he’s not allowed to help.”

“I DON’T SEE WHY I SHOULDN’T BE ALLOWED TO HELP. I’M NOT EVEN TAKING ANY PAIN MEDICATIONS ANYMORE,” he pouts, folding his arms over his chest.

“We’ve been through this, paps,” Sans says, his tone truly indicative of the fact that this must be an argument they have had a lot in the past few days. “The healers said that you should take it easy for the next little bit and like it or not, fluffybuns isn’t gonna let you anywhere near the construction site until you’re fully healed.”
“I STILL THINK THIS IS JUST ONE BIG PLOT TO MAKE ME AS LAZY AS YOU.”

“Just think of it as an early vacation,” you suggest, only to have Papyrus stare at you, eyes bulging in horror.

“WHY WOULD I EVER WANT TO DO THAT?”

“Uh…” How are you supposed to respond to that? Perhaps, the best solution is to simply ignore it and move on. Yes, that sounds like a better alternative to trying to figure out why Papyrus is anti-vacation. “So, is there anything else that is going to be happening with the holidays?”

“Alphys and Undyne invited a bunch of us over to open presents and stuff. Mom’s already started on making cookies.”

“That sounds like fun.”

“IT WILL BE! I CAN’T WAIT TO SEE WHAT SANTA WILL GET EVERYONE THIS YEAR!”

“i bet that whatever it is, it will be santa-stic.”

“YES, LIKE MAYBE A NEW JOKE BOOK SO SOMEONE CAN LEARN SOME ACTUALLY DECENT MATERIAL.” Oof, the sass is strong in this one today.

“You’re smiling,” Frisk points out.

“IT IS A PITY SMILE.”

“uh huh.”

“ALSO, I WAS THINKING ABOUT OUR GIFT EXCHANGE.”

“uh huh.”

“SANS?”

“yeah, bro?”

“PLEASE CEASE YOUR SKEPTICAL VOCALISATIONS REGARDING THE NATURE OF MY DENIAL.”

“nah,” he yawns, laying his skull down on the table, using his arms as a pillow. Frisk takes advantage of this opportunity, practically leaping across to stick the rainbow bow on the back of his head. A small snort, which could arguably be a snore, is his only response to the disturbance.

While Sans naps, Frisk and Papyrus continue to produce more decorations. Somehow, Frisk manages to wrangle you into helping place the completed ornaments on their tree. Glitter trails everywhere, getting ground into the living room carpet as you go. You hope Papyrus is prepared to find the stuff all over the place for the rest of his life. And you mean all over the place; experience has taught you that the stuff has an outstanding ability to migrate.

Looking down at your pants, you suppress a sigh. It looks like your home is going to be the next place infected by the shiny menace.

To increase the holiday cheer, Papyrus turns on a Mettaton Gyftmas special, eagerly informing you that is a rerun from back in the Underground. In no time at all, tree decorating transforms into high-
spirited dancing and singing. You end up returning to the couch, watching the whirlwind that is Frisk and Papyrus from a distance. Due to their guardian’s excessive height, Frisk stands on his feet, letting Papyrus twirl them around the room with ease. A sentimental smile breaks free and you don’t bother hiding it. You remember doing the exact same thing with your dad when you were a kid, letting you dance without any fear of getting your little feet stepped on by accident. The music from the special isn’t very different from the holiday songs you know, save for a few changes in lyrics. In fact, you end up humming along to most of it.

“must be nice, having that much energy, huh?”

Startled, you turn sharply to face Sans, who hasn’t moved in midst of everything going on. With his face still hidden by his arms and his lax posture, he could easily pass for being asleep even now. “Yes, it sure could come in handy. It would cut down on how much I spend on coffee, at least.”

“you have no idea,” Sans snorts. “papyrus not needing coffee has bean a real blessing for the budget.”

You roll your eyes at the pun, returning your focus back to the others. The dancing continues with no decrease in intensity up until the recording shifts from music to an all Mettaton production of what you assume is a parody of A Christmas Carol. Frisk adds one last ornament to the tree before plopping down on the other end of the couch and curling up in a green blanket. Papyrus starts tidying up the table of art supplies. The way he moves around the spot where Sans is resting has an efficiency which screams of practice.

When Mettaton’s Scrooge is visited by the Ghost of Christmas Yet-to-Come — which is just Mettaton swathed in black sheets — you feel as though it is time for you to return home. Slowly, you stand up, resisting the urge to stretch. “Well, that’s all for today. And for the year, I suppose. With the holidays coming up, I’ll be out of your hair until the first Monday in January.”

“that’s good for frisk, but what about me and pap?” Sans runs a head over his hairless skull, accidentally hitting the sticky bow as he illustrates the joke. Other than that, he still hasn’t moved. In a way, it is oddly impressive.

“Well, unless the two of you get wigs for Gyftmas, you had better hope that I’m being metaphorical.”

“I HAD BETTER ADD WIGS TO OUR LISTS, THEN,” Papyrus replies lightly. “PLUS, HAVING A WIG WOULD MEAN THAT I WOULD FINALLY BE ABLE TO FEEL THE WIND BLOW THROUGH MY HAIR.”

“that sounds hairy nice.”

With Sans punning once again, you find your cue to leave. “I hope you all enjoy your holidays.”

“YOU TOO, MISS SOCIAL WORKER.”

You are halfway out the front door when Frisk stops you. “Here,” they say, holding out a homemade card. A quick peek of the inside shows a drawing of Frisk with their guardians under a short message, which you decide to read once you get home.

“Thank you, Frisk. This was real nice of you.”

“You’re welcome.” They take a moment to brush a strand of brown hair behind their ear, accidentally smearing a thin streak of red paint on their cheek. “Thanks for giving Sans and
Papyrus a chance. You know, to be my guardians.”

“I’m just doing my job.”

“I know,” Frisk responds solemnly. “But not everyone would.”

“hey kiddo,” Sans says from right behind you. Remarkably, you manage not to jump; maybe you are starting to get used to him suddenly talking out of nowhere. “papyrus is making some hot chocolate and was wondering if you’d want to help.”

“Oh,” they grin, a welcomed shift in mood. “Do we have any marshmallows?”

“marsh you ask such a ridiculous question? of course we do.”

“Sweet!” Frisk starts to run off, only to hit the brakes just before the entrance to the living room. “Bye! See you in January!”

“Goodbye, Frisk,” you call, even though they have already scampered off to the kitchen. That just leaves you and Sans. The bow above his eye socket finally loses the last of its meager grip, fluttering to the floor. Instinctively, you lean down to pick it up.

Unfortunately, it seems Sans had the same idea. It doesn’t work out that well for either of you.

“Sorry,” you mutter, rubbing your head with one hand while holding the bow with the other. “Did I hurt you?”

“nah, i’m fine. i’ve always been told i was a bit of a numbskull, so i barely felt it. how about you?”

“I’ll be fine.”

You hand over the bow, and he sticks it back into place. When you raise your brow questioningly, he shrugs. “can’t disappoint the kid.”

“I see. Well, until next time.”

“until next time.”

Chapter End Notes

I have been thinking about the Gyftmas tree ornaments since New Year's Eve. Like, if I remember properly, half my motivation for writing this chapter originally came from the idea.

Bonus: The next morning, they all wake up and find Annoying Dog dangling from the tree with a decoration in his mouth, much to Papyrus’ dismay.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
You wake up on New Years Eve with an important voicemail.

Regrets.

So many regrets.

The second your alarm goes off, you are instantly filled with them. Namely, you regret not turning it off when you got home from Ivy’s pre New Years Eve get-together last night. Blearily, you fumble around your night stand, trying to figure out precisely where your phone ended up without needing to get up. This, however, doesn’t work, as when you find it, you accidentally knock it down to the floor instead of turning off the alarm.

Well, it seems you are awake now, like it or not.

When you put your now blessedly silent phone back in its charger, you notice a new voicemail. Did Ivy or Malcolm try calling to make sure that you got home safe? If so, that was very sweet of them, although they should know that it would be easier to send you a text instead. Also, why would they be calling at… four in the morning? Half the reason Ivy wanted to have a pre New Years Eve party was so that she could celebrate with friends without having the social pressure to stay up past midnight. After all, with Libbie in the full swing of teething, neither her or Malcolm have gotten a good night’s sleep in forever and a day.

You adjust the brightness of your screen to a more tolerable level, squinting in confusion. François, of all people, sent you the voicemail. “What the heck, boss,” you mutter with a yawn, “why you up at obscenely early o’clock?”

“Sorry for calling so early,” the message starts, and you instantly know it must be important if he went straight to his point without some sort of greeting. “I had tried to get her to leave you alone, or at least wait until the holidays, but she is being an absolute terror.”

“You better not be talking about who I think you are,” you contribute uselessly as François pauses to take a breath.

But, of course, he is.

“Judge Andrews is insisting that you meet with her today this morning. I’ll email you the rest of the information in a minute. Good luck.”

With that, the message ends. So much for having a nice, relaxing day. You take a minute to scan through the email, wincing when you see the actual time she wants to meet. Much too early for your tastes, especially considering how last minute this whole disaster of a thing is in general.

Your time to get ready passes in a blur. You start working on making coffee before realising that
you are in desperate need of a shower. Breakfast is eaten while you get dressed, because there is no way you are dealing with whatever Andrews has planned for you on an empty stomach. While brushing your teeth, you find a large speck of green glitter that somehow ended up on your cheek and just won’t budge, no matter how hard you try to remove it! You knew this would happen after your last visit.

Before you know it, you are out the door, nearly forgetting to remove the five large holiday scented candles you received last night from your purse. You still can’t understand whatever possessed Ivy to become a person from a math textbook and buy forty-three candles last time she went shopping, but you aren’t going to complain too much; after all, now you have five free candles in some of your favourite holiday scents.

You just barely arrive at the courthouse on time for your meeting. Without the hustle and bustle there normally is, the slight clacks of your footsteps echo through the halls. Butterflies build in your stomach as you think back to François’ previous warning: you may not be a lawyer, but with her, you will need to argue like one. You don’t feel prepared for this in the slightest. If you had been given earlier notice, you could have brushed up on Frisk’s files, prepared concrete arguments and counterarguments. Now, you have no choice but to fly by the seat of your pants.

Steeling yourself for the worst, you enter the judge’s chambers.

“Are you the social worker Charbonneau put on the monster case?” Andrews starts, not even bothering to look up from whatever she is reading to greet you. Not going to lie; considering how you were summoned here last minute on your holiday break, it feels a bit insulting. The least she could do is, you don’t know, try to acknowledge your existence. Or maybe even bother to use your name. That would be nice.

Instead of showing your frustrations, however, you do the proper thing and politely respond, “Yes, I am, Your Honour.”

“Good. Have a seat.”

“Thank you,” you say, ignoring her brusque tone. For the sake of your own sanity, you tell yourself that Andrews just wants to get this done as quickly as possible so she too can go home, which is the cause of her behavior. The lie isn’t very convincing, but what can you do?

Finally, the judge looks up, fixing her steely blue eyes on you. You suppress a shiver, reminding yourself that you cannot allow any weakness to be seen. “After the recent events in the monster capital, I’d like to discuss the upcoming changes in custody arrangements.”

“I’m sorry, Your Honour, but I believe you’re mistaken. There have been no plans to change Frisk’s guardians.”

“Really?” Andrews challenges, raising a nearly invisible blonde brow. “Not even after the terrorist attack? I was under the impression that it is your job as their case worker to ensure the child’s safety.”

Oh, you see what this is about. Andrews is definitely taking advantage of what happened as an excuse to remove Frisk from monster custody. Which is infuriating, by the way, because she does not work for family court and technically should have no jurisdiction over any of this. Unfortunately, that doesn’t seem to matter due to her ties with cases pertaining to monsters. Ugh.

Time to put your lawyer pants on, you guess.
“Yes,” you smile somewhat passive aggressively, “that is my job. Which is why Frisk will be remaining with their current guardians. After having evaluated the situation, I’ve decided that Frisk is safest with them.”

“Explain,” the judge demands.

Challenge. Accepted.

“Certainly, Your Honour. First of all,” you begin, stalling as you try to mentally prepare the verbal essay you will need to argue, “Sans and Papyrus have more experience than the average foster parent when it comes to security measures. Both had worked positions in the Royal Guard. Additionally,” you add, recalling some of the information from the new files and pairing it with things you have heard during visits, “they are both close to the Guard’s captain.”

Judge Andrews eyes you skeptically. Is she trying to call you out on your slight BSing? Because, to completely honest, she would be justified. You are definitely just regurgitating information while adding the odd inference in an attempt to prove a point.

Remember, for the love of everything, you cannot allow her to see any weakness. Not if you want to succeed.

“Sans is also capable of teleportation,” you blurt out, suddenly realising how well this can work in your favour. “Obviously, this provides an advantage in getting Frisk out of potential situations.”

“What you’re saying is, then, that the child would be in danger in New New Home, but with security guards.” Andrews shakes her head, unimpressed. “I’m sorry, but I cannot see how that would be better than simply removing them from the danger.”

Great. Now she is twisting your meaning.

You count to ten, concentrating on the degrees hanging behind Andrews. With how the lights are positioned, most of the writing is obscured behind the glass of the frames due to the harsh glare. Feeling a bit calmer, you return to looking her directly in the eye. If you aren’t careful, you could say something careless — meaning something real dumb — in your anger, jeopardising the whole situation.

“Regardless of where Frisk lives,” you explain, hands tensing up into fists in your lap, “there will be the risk of danger. They are a public figure at this point. Due to this, there is the risk that they could become a target, whether or not they live with monsters. Even if they give up their role of ambassador, they are very much the face of human-monster relations.

“If I were to place them under human custody in Ebott, Frisk would lack the security they have now. Additionally, it would be easier for extremists to target them. A parent could show up to school, for example. Certainly, you must agree that such a situation would be unideal.”

You give her a chance to respond or to counter your argument. Nothing. She makes absolutely no response, verbal or physical, to your statement. That could either be a really good sign, or a really bad one.

You are going to hope for the former.

“Right now, Frisk has lots of security. Additionally, I’ve spoken with King Asgore, and extra measures are being taken, which I will share with you later once all the finer details get worked out.”
Andrews’ mouth slightly twitches. “I trust that you will.”

“Of course.” You wait a moment, silently daring her to try another argument. The judge continues to sit statuelike, seemingly acceptant of the situation. However, there is an expression hidden in her eyes which reminds you of some of the parents you have dealt with over the years. A barely shielded rage, restrained out of sheer stubbornness.

After what feels like an eternity but in reality is probably but a few seconds, Andrews clears her throat with a slight cough. “That will be all,” she utters clippedly.

“Of course. Thank you for your time, Your Honour,” you mutter as you stand up. Remarkably, you manage not to sound entirely sarcastic. “Have a happy New Year.”

You storm out of her chambers, not waiting for a response. This time, you relish in the sound of your shoes against the hardwood floors. Outside, you barely even notice the harsh wind, even as it blows snow around your ankles in strong, steady gusts.

How dare she!

Until now, you had held on to the slightest thread of hope that the rumours about her prejudice against monsters were exactly that: rumours. After all, some of the decisions she has made have favoured monsters. But if her attempts today are any indication, she is just good at justifying her bigotry.

To you, she was anything but subtle. However, you knew what to look for. What truly infuriates you is that the average human could easily fall for the kind of thing that she said today, because they wouldn’t know any better. They would only see a judge worried about the safety of a young child. Even some of your coworkers you could see agreeing with her, because they wouldn’t have any other context. Andrews did well in painting her narrative.

You are very much the exception, in that you know what is actually happening in New New Home. Thanks to professional experiences with monsters and documents given to you by Asgore, you have information which allows you to see through the judge’s illusion. You, thanks to your role, are able to fight it. As it is, if Andrews had demanded for you to meet even two weeks ago, you doubt you would have been able to help like you did. Thank goodness that your boss has been trying to stall her while acting as intermediary.

Moving forward, you have no choice but to be even more prudent than you are now, if possible. You are going to need solid proof that Sans and Papyrus are worthy guardians. Today, Judge Andrews wasn’t even questioning their personal competences so much as the fact that they are monsters. And sadly, you don’t think that this will be an isolated incident moving forward. You knew before François assigned you the case that this would be a problem.

Pulse racing, you unlock your car and climb inside. You cannot allow Judge Andrews to ruin your day. Stewing about this won’t help anyone.

The important thing is that you are victorious.

For now.

Chapter End Notes
This chapter fought me. A lot. I can't wait to get to writing what comes next. My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
From the moment Sans lets you through the door, you can tell something is up in the household. Whether that something is necessarily good or bad, you aren’t quite sure.

Sans is smiling and greets you with a snow pun, but his posture seems weirdly tense and there are dark circles beneath his eye sockets, which seems like it shouldn’t even be possible for a skeleton but okay. However, none of these things really give you a sign one way or the other. The skeleton is pretty much always smiling and constantly seems to be tired, after all.

Walking through the house, you look for any physical signs of something being up. Nothing really stands out. Rocky is chilling in its normal spot, nothing new there. Well, nothing other than some fresh sprinkles, of course. The Gyftmas tree that had been in the corner of the living room has been put away, the only indicator of where it had once sat being the odd sparkle in the carpet catching the light.

Truly, the only real difference you can find isn’t even something of note: a single golden flower sitting in a decorated ceramic pot on the coffee table.

A Mettaton program running quietly in the background, Frisk sits cross-legged on the floor, scowling at what you assume to be their homework for the day. Upon seeing you, they put their pencil down. “Did you ever put dish soap into a dishwasher and have a bubble volcano happen?”

“What?” Sans sounds completely baffled as he interjects from the doorway to the kitchen.

You turn to him first, somewhat surprised that he hasn’t clued into this little game yet. “Frisk heard about what my friend likes to call me from a certain someone, and has been since trying to figure out how I got the nickname. No, Frisk, try again next week.”

“Fiiiiiiine,” Frisk sighs dramatically. “I have someone for you to meet.”

“Really?” You are surprised Sans didn’t mention that there would be a guest today. Or, at least, you are assuming Frisk means today. Either way, before you can ask, Sans disappears into the kitchen. That is, it looks like he goes into the kitchen; the guy can teleport, after all.

“Yup!” They spin the flower pot around and… is that a face? Oh boy. “Meet Flowey! Flowey, this is my social worker that I was telling you about.”

“Howdy,” Flowey responds with an overdone cheer, almost as though reciting lines from a script. “Like Frisk said, I’m Flowey. Flowey the Flower. I live here now, I guess.”
“Oh, that’s ni—” You cut yourself off as the words click in. “I beg your pardon?”

“What’s so hard to understand? I. Live. Here. Now.”

“Flowey, be nice,” Frisk scolds, quickly scribbling down an answer for their homework. “Don’t mind him; he’s just a bit of a grouch sometimes.”

“now that’s the understatement of the year.” Sans wanders back with a light blue mug emblazoned with the words ‘I make bad chemistry puns, but only periodically’ in a darker blue. Based on the font, you would hazard a guess that it was custom ordered, perhaps as a Gyftmas present. You wrinkle your nose in disgust as the scent diffuses your way.

“What on earth are you drinking?”

“Don’t ask,” Frisk and Flowey groan in perfect unison. Flowey’s stem quivers, almost like a full body shudder.

With a loud thud, Papyrus shoulder checks his way into the house, carrying a large sack. “HELLO EVERYONE! I HAVE RETURNED FROM VISITING WITH KING ASGORE AND HAVE NOW ACQUIRED SOME EXTRA NUTRIENT DENSE FERTILISER FOR OUR NEW FLOWERY HOUSEMATE.”

“No thanks. I’m not eating animal crap. That’s disgusting.”

“BUT FLOWERY—”

“It’s Flowey. Two syllables.”

“— WE JUST WANT YOU TO BE HEALTHY AND HAPPY.”

Did Sans just mumble “speak for yourself, bro,” under his breath? In any case, he takes a long swig, almost more like a chug, of the mystery substance in his mug. Morbidly curious after Frisk and Flowey’s reaction, you try to discern the scent again. There is an undertone of burnt coffee, with paired with something familiarly sweet and acidic. You know that you should know the second ingredient, but it is currently escaping you.

“Well, if that’s the case, Papyrus buddy, maybe don’t buy me actual shit to eat.”

“FLOWERY!”

“Still not my name.”

“YOU KNOW THE RULES,” Papyrus calmly states, grabbing a jar that you hadn’t noticed. Flowey scowls, grabbing a coin from… actually, you aren’t quite sure where it came from. All you know is that he makes a vine to toss it into the jar, clinking as it lands on a handful of other coins.

“swear jar,” Sans explains.

“Ah.” Out of all the things you have been wondering about in the past few minutes, that was at the absolute bottom of the list. Plus, the answer to that one is at least fairly obvious.

The mystery of Sans’ beverage, on the other hand, is still bothering you an unreasonable amount. Seriously, what is it?

“So, I suppose we have a lot to discuss today.” You pause for a moment, furrowing your brow slightly in reflection as you receive a few nods in response to your statement. Do you need to dig
out a notebook for this? Probably. Needless to say, this development was not at all anticipated. Then again, who expects to show up to a home visit only to discover that the family has suddenly grown in number without warning? Not you, evidently.

Hopefully, you won’t have to try to explain this one to Judge Andrews anytime soon.

“So, uh, Flowey,” you start, “tell me a bit about yourself.”

“Golly, what would you like to know?”

You blink, thrown off by the shift back to a more friendly persona. Perhaps the fertiliser thing just really grates on his nerves? To be honest, you wouldn’t really blame him if that was the case.

“Well, to start, where have you been living until now?”

“Underground.”

“Oh. I see.” You suppose it makes sense. You had heard reports that some monsters had not yet made the move to the Surface yet, for various reasons. Supposedly, some were just really attached to their old homes, whereas others with more particular ecological needs were waiting for suitable habitats to be completed. Based on the fact that he is sitting in a pot, you suppose that the latter might be applicable to Flowey. After all, you can imagine that the ground outside would be rather inhospitable for him, particularly now that it is winter.

To your right, Sans slurps loudly from his mug. Ew. The liquid sounds weirdly viscous. Why does his beverage sound like a texture?

…

The answer is probably magic, isn’t it?

“What did you do when you were Underground?”

Out of the corner of your eye, you notice Frisk and Sans exchanging a look. Ignoring them, Flowey simply chirps, “Oh, just normal flower stuff.”

Normal flower stuff? What does that mean? Like, photosynthesising? Moving on. “All right, then. What made you decide to come to the Surface?”

Flowey nudges Frisk’s elbow with a vine, causing them to mess up where they were writing.

“Hey!”

“Sorry,” he answers, not sounding the slightest bit apologetic. “Why don’t you tell her, Frisky.”

They set down their pencil, stretching a bit before moving Flowey’s pot into their lap. “Flowey spent a lot of time alone in the Underground,” they solemnly explain. “He deserves to be happy up here with us.”

“And what better place to be happy than in our house, with his friends!” Papyrus adds cheerfully.

You just nod. In a little bit, you will ask for some more information. In the meantime, you feel as though you should probably update them to your meeting over the break. “So, I have some… unpleasant news for you.”

“What kind of unpleasant?”
“YES, IS IT UNPLEASANT LIKE HEARING THE SAME OLD SKELETON PUNS ALL DAY, EVERY DAY OF YOUR LIFE —”

“hey! you know my skele-puns are ulna-believably good.”

“— UNPLEASANT LIKE HOTLAND,” he continues, ignoring his brother’s comment, “OR UNPLEASANT LIKE LIMES IN THE EYES?”

“Um…” You do not understand this scale. “Limes, probably?”

“YIKERS.”

“yeah, limes in eyes level is pretty serious. we should probably sit down for this, huh?” Without a second’s hesitation, Sans does just so. Directly on the floor. When the couch has free space and he could easily grab another chair from the kitchen table if he didn't want to sit there. Well, whatever floats his boat. Papyrus, however, acts like a normal adult and finds a spot on the side of the couch.

“Well, if everyone is ready then…” Feeling awkward as the only person standing, especially considering how half the people in the room are right on the floor, you primly seat yourself on the other end of the couch. “I met with Judge Andrews.”

“Oh.”

Frisk’s grip on Flowey’s pot tightens. “What happened?”

You might as well get this over with, like ripping off a bandaid. “She found out about the attack and wanted me to remove you from monster custody. She ‘claimed’ it was for your safety.” Which is still the biggest load of bull you have heard in quite some time, although it is not appropriate to mention that given your current audience.

“i knew it. how... how much longer do we have?”

“I’m sorry?”

“how much longer do we have,” Sans repeats a bit more firmly, “until frisk has to leave?”

You shake your head. “Frisk isn’t leaving.”

“I’m not?” Frisk asks, voice filled with hope.

“No as long as I get my way.” Things have been going so well, and you would hate for everyone’s hard work to be put to waste.

“And if you don’t?” Flowey inquires, although it almost sounds like a challenge.

“For now, I’m hoping it won’t come to that.”

Before you can continue, a classic marimba ringtone goes off. “SORRY,” Papyrus says, whipping out his cell as he leaps up from the couch, “I NEED TO TAKE THIS.”

“Of course.” While Papyrus is gone, you might as well make sure that Flowey is up to date with the Andrews situation. As long as he will be living here, he will be another variable you will need to keep track of. “So Flowey, have the others told you about Judge Andrews?”

“Don’t think so.” His form bobs slightly, in a way which you decide to interpret as a shrug.
You were expecting as much. “She’s the judge who has been dealing with a lot of the integration cases. Also,” you sigh, “she has taken a particular interest in Frisk’s custody. And, based on my dealings with her, that interest is especially in getting Frisk out of monster custody. So even though you aren’t one of their guardians, as long as you live here, I will need to monitor you during my visits. I don’t want there to be any issues if she finds out there are more monsters in the household.”

“Well, that shouldn’t be a problem for you, because I’m not a monster.”

Confused, you simply stare at Flowey. But…? “If you aren’t a monster, what are you?”

“You worst nightmare.”

Before you can even begin processing the drastic shift in character, the physical twisting of his face into something worthy of a maniacal cartoon villain or the threatening tone of his voice, Frisk grabs a spray bottle from under the coffee table and squirts him like a particularly mischievous cat.

“Hey!” Flowey sputters in disbelief, shaking in an attempt to remove the water from his petals. “What gives?”

“You know what you did,” Frisk scolds. “Behave.” Paying no heed to any of Flowey’s grumbling, they give you a casual apology. “Sorry, ignore him. He isn’t entirely serious. I mean, he’s serious about the not being a monster thing, but not the nightmare thing, right Flowey?”

Still slightly dazed, you decide to shrug it off for now. Later you might regret your decision, but you aren’t quite sure if you could mentally handle it at the moment.

Luckily for you, Papyrus returns from his phone call, providing a convenient change in subject. “I’M BACK,” he announces as he strides in to the living room. “SANS, ALPHYS ASKED UNDYNE TO ASK ME TO REMIND YOU TO ANSWER ALPHYS’ EMAILS SHE SENT YOU LAST WEEK.”

“cool.” Sans goes to take another sip, only to pause halfway and stare at his mug, smile twitching the slightest bit downwards. With a disappointed huff, he places it on the table instead. You decide to take a look to try and figure out some more context clues on what he was drinking.

The mug is empty, although there is the telltale rings of staining along the inside which show where the liquid had been. At the bottom, you can see a small speckling of miniscule, dark brown dots, further supporting your earlier theory of it containing coffee. As for the other mystery ingredient, all you can tell is that it left a reddish tint to everything.

All of a sudden, you remember your time at Grillby’s, realising what unholy concoction Sans had created, and you lose any resemblance of having a filter.

“Did you seriously mix ketchup into your coffee?!!?!”

Sans just smirks. “Maybe.”

As Papyrus start going into a disgusted rant about how awful that combination is — you absolutely agree — and how his brother should work on making healthier choices, you allow yourself to relax a bit. Somewhere along the line, Sans makes the argument that he is making perfectly good decisions, since ketchup is made of fruit. As the only adult human in the room, you are asked for confirmation of that fact.

Coincidentally, that just so happens to be the time you decide you need to leave.
Funny how life works out, sometimes.

Chapter End Notes

Finally, after 25 chapters, Flowey has arrived. Frisk needs another Reset-aware buddy, and Flowey just needs friends in general.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
Sans asks you out for supper. You accept.

Just a few more hours, you promise yourself for the nth time today, barely managing to stifle a yawn. It is such a good thing that today is Friday, because you are in desperate need of some rest. All you have to do is survive two hours and twenty-two minutes before you can pack up for the week, go home and curl up on the couch with some mac and cheese and Netflix in your pyjamas. You can’t wait. Until then, all you have to do is stay awake enough to do your job.

The next time you look at the time, you cannot help but grin. With only thirteen minutes left, you are officially in the home stretch. Even better, you are pretty proud of the amount of work you had gotten done. Today was a productive day.

After coming at a good point to stop, you check the clock at the bottom right corner of your screen once again. Nice; only three minutes left. Not wanting to start on a new project only to be cut off in just a little bit, you casually read through what you had been working on, scanning for errors.

You jolt to attention when your phone goes off only a few seconds later. Fumbling momentarily, you save your document once more before answering, reciting your greeting with practiced ease.

“uh, hi.”

“Sans?” You ask, unable to mask your surprise. You were definitely not expecting him to call you, especially not today.

“yeah. i was wondering if there’d be any way for us to meet up and talk. without frisk or papyrus around, you know?”

Moving your phone to your non-dominant hand, you grab a notepad and pen from your desk. Although you don’t have any reason to suspect a red flag situation from this, you would rather have written evidence of your plans in case something goes wrong. After all, the way he is wording things right now, it almost sounds like Sans wants to speak to you without any witnesses.

“Do you mind telling me why?”

“i just need some advice, but i don’t wanna worry my bro or the kid. with your job and all, i thought it would be better to talk to you than try and rely on the internet and stuff.”

Sounds pretty valid. “I’m assuming you would like to meet before my next visit?”

“if we could, yeah. my schedule’s pretty open.” He pauses for a moment, while you mentally go through your plans for the weekend. Considering the fact that your plans had been to make absolutely no plan, it doesn’t take long. Almost hesitantly, he adds, “if you could, it would be real nice if we could meet in new new home.”
It would mean a bit more work for you, but why not? “Of course. Is there a particular place you have in mind?”

“how ‘bout grillby’s?”

Glad that he cannot see you across the line, you raise a brow, pondering the offer. After what happened last time you went there, you aren’t sure you would like to return with Sans. Then again, this time, it would be for business, and Ivy wouldn’t be there to make a scene. And frankly, even with the restrictions on human activity in the monster capital at the moment, it would be far less suspicious for you to go there than for Sans to come to Ebott. It would be safer too. Right now, it seems like you have no other choice.

Besides, the food was pretty good there. Might as well make it a business dinner.

“At what time would you be available tonight?”

“uhhhhh…” Patiently, you doodle a flower on the corner of your notepad while Sans works on figuring things out. “how does seven-ish work for you?”

“That sounds just fine. I will see you in a few hours then, I suppose.”

“yeah. goodbye.”

“Goodbye, Sans.”

Well, so much for your date with your couch. After saving your work one last time, you shut off your work computer for the weekend and stuff your notepad into your back pocket.

“Hey, what’s up?”

Biting back a shriek, you spin around to find Kyle looming over you. “Dude! Don’t do that.”

“Sorry,” he grins unrepentantly. “But seriously, what’s up?”

“It seems I’m going to be going out to meet with a client.”

“Ooooh~” he says teasingly. “Look at you leaving the office and becoming a regular social butterfly.”

Yeesh, it is like he has spent time talking to your mom. Or are you really that much of a hermit that people in the office have started to notice? In any case, you counter his teasing with a gentle nudge to the shoulder as you stand up. “Laugh it up, intern. One day, you’ll be old like me and you’ll understand.” To emphasise your point, you stretch, allowing your joints to crack loudly.

Kyle laughs, taking a second to clean his glasses with the hem of his shirt. “Sure, if you say so, old lady.”

“I’d be insulted, but I walked into that one, didn’t I?”

“Absolutely. Well, have fun at your meeting.”

Wryly, you respond, “I’ll try.”
You show up to Grillby’s fairly early, wanting to scout out a good table that will allow you and Sans some privacy. While you wait, you scan through the laminated menu. The trick is figuring out what you can eat tonight without making a huge mess. Sure, you doubt Sans will care too much — you don’t think you have seen him wear anything other than his scruffy hoodie, gym shorts and slippers — but you know you would feel embarrassed if you stained your shirt or got your face covered in sauce during a work meeting.

In the background, you can hear some raucous laughter. Out of curiosity, you turn to see that it is a group of young adults, just barely out of college if you were to hazard a guess, pointing at the phone being held between them as they hang out at the bar. In some ways, it surprises you to see other humans in New New Home right now. The guard post at the city gates is still there, and they checked your car as always when you came in. You suppose, though, that it is only natural for them to start opening up access again. It has been a month since the incident occurred, and a lot of monsters have been relying on human tourism for business as of late.

Less than a minute after you place your order, Sans pops up in your field of vision. A series of hellos greet him, and he responds jovially while making his way to your booth.

“hey, thanks for agreeing to this.”

“No problem. I just hope I can help out.”

“me too.” Briefly, his eye lights flicker down to the menu resting on the table. “you order something?”

“Yes.”

“good. so, do you want to start talking now, or wait for your food?”

“Whatsoever you’d prefer,” you shrug agreeably. You mean, personally, you would prefer to start now; that way, you wouldn’t need to fill in the time doing something else. However, if he would like a bit of time to prepare himself for what he wants to ask, or something, you won’t get in the way.

“in that case, i’m gonna place my order real quick, then we can get started.” Before you can respond, he is gone again.

Barely thirty seconds pass before Sans returns, holding a ketchup bottle — which still disgusts you, especially now that Papyrus confirmed that drinking condiments isn’t some kind of skeleton thing — and a second drink (if you are being generous and consider ketchup as a beverage only on the criteria that Sans will be drinking it) in a tall, condensation covered glass. “grillbz said your grub will be ready in just a few minutes,” he informs you, sliding the second drink across the table.

“Thank you.” You take a small sip, letting the mildly sweet flavour wash over your tongue. To be honest, you aren’t entirely sure what you ordered; you had just pointed to something on the menu when you realised you had no idea what you wanted. All you know is that it is some kind of monster drink and that it doesn’t contain any monster alcohol. Even if Ivy’s reaction to the stuff was supposedly uncommon, you would rather not risk it. Not with the reason that you are here tonight.

“no problem. so, uh, you know how you gave us the phone numbers for all those different human doctors, right?”
“Yes?”

“yeah. well…” He pauses, rolling his ketchup bottle between his hands as he figures out how to continue. “i was wondering if you’d have any thoughts or recommendations about a therapist for frisk.”

“A therapist?”

“yeah. i mean, i’m no expert, and i have no idea if they even need one or if it could help. but, sometimes, i just worry ‘bout the kid, you know?”

Oh, you know. With all the craziness that seems to be their life, how could you not? At this point, you are a definite member of the ‘worry about Frisk’ club. All you need is an official pin and you will be good to go. “Have you seen any specific behaviors that you are concerned about?” When Sans visibly hesitates to answer, you reassure, “It’s all right, Sans. I’m here to help, remember?”

“i know.” Still, though, he does not elaborate.

Maybe you can help ease him into it. “Are your concerns over something more recent?” This whole thing seems to have come out of nowhere, after all. However, that does not mean that he hasn’t had his worries for a while now; he simply might not have known how to act upon them. The fact that he is asking you specifically for help seems to point to that. As awful as it sounds, you doubt that until recently he would have trusted you enough to come for help.

“kinda. the attack on the school really shook them up. but, the thing is, i got thinking recently. apparently, you humans thought of mt ebott as some kind of suicide spot, right? yeah. don’t get me wrong, frisk is a pretty happy kid. but unless i’m missing something, frisk deciding to run away to there should probably ring some warning bells.”

Your eyes widen. Forget warning bells; that should have been a blaring warning siren! Heck, even if you didn’t take all that into consideration, you should have included mental health into the series of check-ups you wanted them to complete. The kid is a freaking dignitary, which is a high stress position if you ever knew one! You should have made sure by now that they were equipped to handle that stress.

Just as you get ready to list off every single bit of information for Sans that you can currently think of, you feel an approaching warmth. Wordlessly, Grillby passes both plates over. The fiery bartender lingers between you and Sans for a weird amount of time before finally going to see some other customers. It is only after he steps away that you remember the ‘entertainment discount’ you earned last time you were here. Tough luck for him; you are personally going to make sure Grillby has a boring night.

The savoury scent of your food makes your mouth water, but you wait to dig in. Sans, however, has no such reservations. Hopefully, you have managed to suppress the side-eye you feel like giving him, because wow. Just wow. How is that blue hoodie of his not completely covered stained? You can only think of two ways. The first would be that he has several versions of the same hoodie that he just rotates through. Considering you have never seen him without it, you wouldn’t be surprised. The second is that Papyrus has an impeccable stain-remover. Or third, you guess, would be a combination of those two options. Because, based on what you are seeing right now, it should look more tie dyed thanks to the sauce and grease falling on it. Or perhaps splatter painted would be a better way of describing it? Yes, splatter painted.

Are you stalling right now? Possibly. Okay, fine; definitely. In your own defense, you feel a bit odd trying to discuss different mental health resources for Frisk when their guardian is demolishing
his food with the grace of a faulty garbage disposal.

Besides, it isn’t like Sans would be able to notice you postponing the conversation with the way he is currently going at his burger. Seriously; you have seen people making out with less gusto than he is currently going at his meal.

At least he seems to be enjoying it.

And there goes a dribble of ketchup, all the way down his front.

Oh, you just thought of something. If Sans drinks ketchup, does that mean that he technically puts beverages on his food? Ew. Now, you can only imagine him pouring something like orange juice over his fries, or coffee on a salad. Thanks brain; you hate this thought process.

“uh, are you just gonna stare at me, or are you gonna say something? or maybe eat your own food before it goes cold.”

Well… so much for him not being able to notice. Whoops. Not trusting yourself to avoid saying something stupid — or worse, just keep staring after he called you out on it — you start picking at your own meal. And if picking soon transforms into shoveling, well, what can you say? Grillby makes some good food and you were hungry.

As the only two people in the booth, you cannot help but feel a bit awkward because of the silence between you and Sans. Really, you should be advising him as to his options for child therapists in the area, but you feel as though that it would be better for you to write that out for him. Still, you feel as though you should say something, if only for your own sanity.

“So, do you, uh, come here often?” Nice one. Awkward small talk is soooooo much better than awkward silence. Ten out of ten. You definitely didn’t make things weirder here.

Wow. You should probably cut down on some of the sarcasm in your personal monologue.

Sans snorts. “you could say that, i guess. you?”

It is your turn to laugh. “You know the answer to that one. Besides, I’ve apparently made a reputation for myself of being a recluse. A kid at the office felt the need to bug me about being a social butterfly tonight because of this.”

“heheh, nice one.”

It takes a second for you to realise the accidental pun. When you do, though, a small part of you can’t resist adding, “To bee honest, that was unintentional.”

“really? i thought it was pretty good considering it was on the fly. then again, it’s amazing what people can come up with when they’re just winging it.”

What have you done? Sighing internally, you take another sip of your drink.

Time to find out how many insect related puns Sans can fit into a conversation, you suppose. You are certain that it is an un-bee-lievably large amount.

…

Great. Now he has got you doing it too.
This went surprisingly well. Look at that.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
The Shocking Sighting

Chapter Summary

You and Sans have a special encounter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Despite having finished eating several minutes ago, here you are, still talking with Sans. Additionally, you are now certain you have heard every possible variation of insect pun in the existence of the English language. You don’t know how many that actually is, though; you lost track somewhere after twenty-five.

“Okay, I have a question. What’s with the sock in the living room?” You might as well take advantage of the overall informality of the situation and ask. Goodness knows you have been curious about that one for quite some time now.

“heh, that? well, that started as a joke, and it just grew from there.”

“Why am I not surprised?”

Sans shrugs in a ‘what can you say?’ type of way. “i guess i’m toe-tally predictable.”

You groan. ”Is your ketchup laced with pun juice or something?” His grin grows, and you know he is already winding up for something. “You know what? Forget I asked. Anyways, are you going to continue?”

“sure. tibia honest, there isn’t much to talus,” he grins, taking an obnoxiously loud slurp of ketchup. You want to lay your head down on the table in frustration with yourself. You definitely walked right into that. “seriously though, it isn’t a big thing. more of an inside joke, if anything. first time papyrus asked, i was just really tired and didn’t feel like cleaning up after myself. i was going to get to it later, but when i woke up and saw the slightly passive aggressive sticky note, well, how could i not mess with my bro for a bit?”

“So you added to the note.”

“you betcha,” he affirms with finger guns. “i read the note, looked him right in the eye socket, picked up my sock and dropped it back on the floor before writing my response. he hated that.

“what really made the whole thing continue is that paps might be a neat freak, but he can also be mega stubborn. the next morning i found a poster pointing down to the sock, along with another message.

“what really gets him though is when i move the sock, only to put it back in the living room.”

“What?” As far as you are aware, you have never seen the sock move before.

“oh yeah. just the other day, i took it because i needed a sock. laundry day, you know? anyways, just before my bro got back from picking frisk up from school, i returned it to its home.”
You try to restrain yourself. You really do. However, you simply don't manage. “That’s so gross!”

“eh, not really. bones don’t really sweat as much as skin does, which makes stuff like bacteria less of a problem.”

All right, you suppose that makes sense. Then, a smaller detail in what he said makes you do a double take. “Wait a minute. Your bones can sweat?”

Sans tilts his hand back and forth, indicating you aren’t completely off base. Light flashes through the gaps between his finger bones onto the table at the gesture, almost like when you rapidly open and close a set of blinds. “i mean, that’s the best way to describe it to humans. the process is pretty close, but the composition of it is very different, since monsters are made of magic and you have weird water-based fleshy bodies. no offense.”

“None taken.” Honestly, you are too intrigued right now to care. Even though you know that he and Papyrus are monsters, it is sometimes hard not to just think of the skeletons as, well, just that: skeletons. It is so easy to look at them and only see their bones, despite how different they are from human ones. Sure, the overall form is there, and if Sans’ jokes are any indication, they classify their bones in the same way humans do. However, there is still the fact that their skulls are malleable, capable of different facial expressions and blinking. They have lights in their eyes, similar to pupils. They are very much alive, and apparently their magic is capable of much more than you had expected.

“g for your thoughts?”

“Depends,” you joke half-heartedly. “What’s the conversion rate at these days?”

“good question. besides, i should be charging at least 5 g.”

The corner of your mouth twitches in amusement. “That’s not how that works.”

“you’re right. 50 g sounds much more acceptable.”

You just shake your head. Grabbing out your notepad, you start scrawling down phone numbers and email addresses for some local child therapists. “Here. This should at least be a start. Like last time, I’ll probably send some more information your way. Feel free to contact me if you have any more questions about this.”

“sure.”

“Well,” you say, sliding out of the booth, “have a good night then. I’ll see you Monday.”

“yup. see you.”

You make your way to the front of the bar to pay. At the moment, it is remarkably empty, the humans from earlier having left some time ago. As for the others, it seems their attention has been caught by some card game in another corner of the building. Behind you, you hear the front door open and two guys rush past, bumping you in the process. Before you can say anything, they are gone, bathroom door slamming shut behind them. They must have really needed to go.

While you are grabbing your wallet, you feel a displacement of air slightly to your right. You turn, only to see Sans holding out your notepad and pen. “here. you forgot these.”

“Thanks.” You go to say anything else, but loud shouting catches your attention.
It is the humans who had shoved you on the way to the bathroom.

Carrying large buckets.

Running towards Grillby.

Water sloshes out as they approach.

Water…

Grillby!

Before you can react, the world around you shifts rapidly to black and white.

For some reason, you cannot see your body. Instead, a yellow heart hovers directly in front of you. A small splotch of a light turquoise colour floats around, reminding you of a lava lamp. Somewhat subconsciously, you know that this heart is a part of you. This knowledge is reinforced when it seems to follow along with how you move. You take a ‘step’ to the right, and the heart follows.

In front of you are the two humans, washed out until they appear only in greyscale. The only colours you can see would be two hearts, an orange and a dark blue. When you look at them, the words *These humans are ready to douse some flames* flash through your mind. You believe it. Vaguely, you register Grillby standing behind you, but you don’t risk the time to go and look. Sans has spun around with you, and you see an upside-down heart. In many ways, it is the inverse of your own. Shining with the same shade of cyan as your splotch, a small section of yellow, almost like a butterfly in shape, circulates around it in the same way as your splotch does in your heart.

Your instincts say that you need to do something. However, before you figure out what that something is, you hear two small pings. The orange heart turns blue, and there is an increased glow around it and the other heart. You look again to Sans, who has one hand raised steadily.

“use your act to disarm them.”

“What?” What does he mean?

“use your act,” he repeats, leaving no room for argument.

Concentrating, you let instinct take over. Almost like a mirage, you can see the words FIGHT, ACT, ITEM and MERCY in front of you. Cautiously, you move your heart to the second word, pushing forward with all your might. You are given the choice between two names, which you assume match up to the humans. Moving to the first one, a new set of words pop up: Check, Talk, Disarm and Yell. A part of you wants to see what will happen if you choose the other choices, but you decide to heed Sans’ words. Clearly, he understands what is happening here better than you do.

You select Disarm.

*Seth has lost his weapon.*

Immediately after you make that choice, your heart is pulled up into an enclosed area, the lurch of the movement vaguely reminiscent of being on a rollercoaster. Sans’ upside-down heart follows along.
“What the hell is happening?”

“I don’t know. Just get them!”

The other human tosses his bucket at you and Sans. The skeleton shortcuts away from you, leaving you to be hit. Serves you right, you suppose, for just standing there like an idiot. Below the enclosed box, you notice a yellow bar labelled HP, which goes down by a few numbers. The bucket somehow returns, almost like a boomerang, until there is nothing left in the box but your heart and Sans’.

*Smells like desperation and body spray.

Your ability to choose comes back. Without hesitation, you Disarm the second person.

*Brenden has lost his weapon.

This time, the attackers have no alternative than to use their fists when your heart jolts back into the box. Again, they both manage to miss Sans. This time, now that you are expecting it, you are a bit better at dodging. Still, sadly, they get you. The amount of yellow in the bar decreases once more. It is less than halfway full now.

“good job. now spare them.”

Spare. That option never showed up under ACT, so you decide to check MERCY; that is the only other place you can think of to find that. Sure enough, your extrapolation proves true. Upon selecting Spare, you don’t notice anything different. However, just as their turn comes up again, Sans says, “spare us. we don’t want to fight you.”


“nah. let’s just say it will make it nicer for everyone if you choose spare.”

“Unless,” you add, hoping that you are able to mask any shakiness in your voice (how does Sans sound so calm right now?), “you feel like continuing your attack while the Royal Guard is watching you.” Assuming they can currently see what is happening, of course. You cannot see any of them, but you are hoping that they are just being blocked from your vision by the strange darkness. However, you at least know that you recognised some of the guards who have checked your car before playing at the card table. They are in the building, which means things should be okay.

This gets Seth’s attention. “Dude, do what the skeleton says!”

“But Seth!”

“It’s not worth it! I don’t want to get in trouble with monster cops!”

Too late for that, you think to yourself. There is no way either of them are getting out of here without some kind of consequences for their actions, even if you have to escort them to King Asgore yourself. And presumably, this would be a sentiment shared by at least a few others in the room.

“Fine.”

A few seconds later, the world fades back to normal, the bright colours hurting your eyes like when you leave a dark movie theatre too quickly in the middle of the day. Strangely, neither of the two
guys are moving, even though they seem like they are trying to get away. You don’t bother pondering that for long, however, as some of the Royal Guards stride forward. Good; they should know what to do next.

“Grillby,” you ask as Dogamy and Dogaressa, a married couple from what you figured out from the times you have met with them, work on putting cuffs on the humans, “are you all right?”

“... yes. I only got few drops on my vest, thank the stars.”

“Good.” You hand over the buckets to a guard you haven’t met before, who gives you a loud bork in what you assume to be thanks.

With both men restrained and already being escorted out of Grillby’s, Sans goes to sit down on the nearest bar stool. A light blue sheen covers his skull. Magic sweat, your brain helpfully supplies. Good to know that your earlier conversation has already been put to use.

A tap on your shoulder causes you to jump, adrenalin still rushing through your veins. Realising it is just Dogamy, you heave a sigh of relief. “Yes?”

“I’d like to take your statement of the incident.”

“Of course.” You were directly involved, after all. Besides, should any human authorities question the validity of the various monster accounts, heaven forbid, your testimony would be beneficial. You hate to think that this could even be a possibility, but with all your dealings with Judge Andrews, you cannot help but be paranoid. Promptly, you recount what you know, ignoring how confused you still feel over what happened. Once Dogamy is satisfied, you hand him a card with your contact information, telling him to call you if he has any more questions.

Feeling strangely exhausted, you slump into the stool beside Sans. Something is off with his expression, but you can’t tell what. He seems almost zoned out, but not quite. Is he in shock? Because right now, you don’t feel super equipped to deal with that. In any case, when he notices your presence, he stares intently at you. The slightest of shivers runs up your spine.

“grillbz, can you get her something to eat? thanks.”

“But I’m not hungry...” you protest. However, after staring at you, Grillby simply nods and hurries back into his kitchen. “Feel like explaining why you ordered me food without asking me?”

“your hp is low. not as big of a deal for humans like it is for monsters, but better safe than sorry, you know?”

“I still don’t get what that has to do with food.” Nor you you get what it is to begin with, but baby steps.

“magic rich food is one of the quickest ways to raise hp back to normal, even for humans,” he explains. “more fun than direct healing magic too, especially if you aren’t good at it.” Throughout his explanation, he darts between staring intently at you and at the door of Grillby’s kitchen. Back and forth, back and forth, like he is keeping track of an invisible ping pong ball.

Once you start eating what is apparently Grillby’s most efficient healing food, you cannot help but feel weird. Not necessarily because of the food, though. Although, when you realise that the forming bruises from being hit dissipate completely with each bite, you do have a small internal freak out over how cool magic food is. Seriously, you really need to buy some to keep on hand one of these days. No, the true source of the weirdness is Sans. He is sitting quietly beside you, doing nothing, which, in and of itself, isn’t too bizarre. However, while he is doing nothing, his eye lights
are focused entirely on you, watching you eat.

Finally, you work up the courage to address it. “Sans?” Absently, he hums a response, gaze unwavering. At times like this, you truly notice how rarely he needs to blink. No matter; he gave some kind of acknowledgement, which is good enough for you to continue. “Are you okay? You seem a bit… off.” Yeah, that seems like a good way to put it.

Clearly, that question is what it takes for Sans to shut his eye sockets for half a second. And again. After a third blink, he manages to string together some words.

“eh, it’s nothing. don’t worry about it.”

“All right,” you acquiesce. Even with the boost of magic food, you currently don’t possess the energy to argue about how false that statement is. You have dealt with his avoidance enough to know that by now. “So, um, do you think you could explain what all…” you gesture somewhat aimlessly, hoping he will understand, “that was?”

“huh?”

You suppress a sigh of exasperation. “You know. When those guys showed up and colours disappeared? Those weird hearts? Those Act things and all those other words that just… showed up?” Please, let him know what you are talking about, or else you are going to seriously start wondering about your sanity.

“right. that. well, it’s a monster thing. we call it an encounter.”

All right, confirmation that you aren’t crazy. That is at least a start. “Okay… And the heart things?”

“those are souls.”

“Souls,” you repeat, feeling slightly frazzled as you make sure you heard properly. Is he being real right now, or is this some sort of strange, elaborate joke on his part? Make the social worker feel confused, for some reason? Perhaps the word simply has different meaning for monsters than it does in the traditional human sense.

“yep. souls.” A few beats pass, then Sans seems to clue into your complete and utter confusion. “right, forgot that humans don’t really know about souls. are you up to a quick lesson?”

“Yes, please.” You would much rather get information right now than wait until you go home to google it.

“all right. so, the easiest way to explain it is that your soul is the essence of who you are. as a human, your soul is housed in your body, which is really physical. monster souls are a bit different, because we’re made of magic. for us, the soul is the entirety of our being.”

You nod, even though you still aren’t sure if you understand at all. “Is that why yours was upside down? Because monster ones are different?”

“kinda. if you were to ask most monsters, they’d say that your soul is upside down. but yeah, that’s a difference between monster and human souls.”

Grillby walks by to serve someone at the other end of the bar, sliding a fresh bottle of ketchup to Sans, who gives a small wave of thanks. The brief pause gives your mind the opportunity to overflow with some new questions. “Why were the Souls different colours?”
“human souls are each associated to a particular trait, which has a corresponding colour. yellow, for example, stands for justice.”

“Hmm.” Justice. You can see how that would be pertinent to your personality. But, if each Soul has its own colour and trait… “Why did the orange Soul turn blue?” Unless you are missing some important detail, it doesn’t make sense for a person’s trait to change so suddenly like that.

Sans takes another sip of ketchup — which is somehow the most normal and logical part of your current conversation for you to process — before answering. “that would be because of me. do you remember at the market, when i used my magic to pick up your friend’s kid’s toy?” Once you nod, he continues, “well, that’s blue magic. it can be used to mess with gravity. in encounters, certain types of magic can be applied directly to the soul, changing its colour.”

“So, you were changing his gravity? Through his Soul?”

“yeah. i mean, i was doing it for both of them, but it’s hard to see blue on top of blue.”

You suppose that makes sense. It would be like adding a layer of paint on top of something of the same colour; the new colour is there, even if it looks the same. Still… this is all a lot to take in. Maybe it would be a good idea to move on to another topic. Or, even better yet, go home for the night and process all this information later.

Thankfully, it seems Sans has come to a similar conclusion. “it’s starting to get late, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I should probably be getting back to Ebott soon.”

“yeah.”

You grab some cash to leave for Grillby, but Sans blocks you, covering your hand with his own. “i’ve got it.”

“Are you sure?”

“yeah. just think of it as thanks for helping out with everything tonight.”

“Thanks, I appreciate it.” You still leave some of the money on the counter, as a tip. “Have a nice weekend.”

You make it a few feet from the door before Sans calls your name. Did you forget something again? It wouldn’t surprise you; you do feel a bit scatterbrained right now, all things considered.

Sans leads you to a quieter spot, just left of the entrance. “hey, i’ve been thinking. i know i’ve been a bit of a pain in the coccyx, as papyrus would say. or an irritating lump.”

“A numbskull?” You offer with a half smile.

“I was getting there, but yeah,” he says, grin stretching the slightest bit wider, “a real numbskull. no matter how you want to put it, i shouldn’t’ve acted like i did and i’m sorry for it.”

Well, you weren’t sure what to expect when you were stopped from leaving. However, you can certainly say that this was not it. You would have never expected such a turn of events, especially since the two of you had been ignoring your previous antagonism as of late. For him to bring this up and admit the fault on his part is a pleasant surprise, very much welcome after some of the other events of the night.
“I accept your apology, and I trust things will be better between us moving forward.”

“of course, in fact,” Sans continues, offering his hand, “how’s ‘bout a fresh start?”

“To a fresh start.” Sure, the request, hand shake and all, is a bit cheesy. In fact, it is probably the cheesiest way the two of you could resolve this, short of having him shortcut you to his house to reenact your first meeting at the door. However, if it means that you won’t have to worry about his attitude as like you used to, you aren’t going to complain. Wiping your hands clean with a nearby napkin, you accept his offer.

Pfffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffffff.

“Seriously?”

Sans simply offers you a smug grin, revealing the small pink whoopee cushion he had managed to hide in his hand.

Without much success, you try to hide an amused smirk. Why aren’t you the slightest bit surprised?

Chapter End Notes

Finally, Sans was able to do his whoopee cushion greeting, thank Asgore's fluffy beard!

Well, Bubbles learned a lot of stuff here. For example, it sadly seems that empty buckets don't raise any concern during car searches. And skeleton sweat is a thing.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
Chapter Summary

Sans reflects upon what happened at Grillby's.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

To his relief, by the time Sans finally makes it home, Frisk, Papyrus and Flowey are already down for the night. After his meeting with you, he would just like to go to sleep.

Not that he will be able to, of course. Far too many things are rattling in his skull right now. A maraca of thoughts.

All he had wanted to do tonight was bring up the therapy thing with you. The kid really needs someone else to talk to. Well, someone other than the flower. Sans still can’t believe he let Frisk and his brother talk him into letting the little maniac live with them. As far as he is concerned, Flowey could have — and should have — stayed in the Underground, where there is far less risk of him killing someone. Sure, Frisk might have made Flowey promise not to harm anyone, but how is Sans supposed to trust the word of a Soulless anomaly? Well, former anomaly, but still. The key point here is the Soulless part. After all, if monster Souls are made of love, hope and compassion, what does that say about Flowey, who lacks one?

Is his hope that providing Frisk with a trained professional to talk will result in Flowey leaving a bit optimistic and very unlikely? Yeah, absolutely. So sue him for wanting something nice. Life on the Surface is supposed to be a happy ending; might as well enjoy it in the ways that he can.

Obviously, Sans knows Frisk cannot share everything with a therapist. That would just be opening up a whole new door of trouble to Reset. In his opinion, there are already too many of those kinds of doors open. and he would like to lock them shut. However, the kiddo should still be able to talk about other stuff, like their life from before or some of the stress of being ambassador, without any problems. They could still get some help. Some is better than no help at all. Besides, Frisk is a clever kid; they should be able to figure out how to apply what a therapist would tell them to the more secret parts of their lives.

Even if it doesn’t work out, asking your for help about this is probably one of the best decisions Sans has made with this whole disaster of an adoption process. First of all, if you are willing to handle some of the work of researching potential therapists, why wouldn’t he give it to you? Less work for him, which is always a plus. But more importantly, Sans is aware of how crucial it is to keep your trust. Especially considering all the effort he knows you are putting in to help with everything. Being proactive may not be his strong suit — in fact, the opposite is far closer to the truth — but there comes a point where he needs to act. In this case, taking the initiative to look into Frisk’s mental health before the human government asks should be a sign that he and Papyrus want what is best for the kid. That is what he is going for, at least.

The important part is to make sure his concerns are played off as elements outside of his and Papyrus’ control. That is why he brought up Mt Deadbott, as some of the locals had apparently been calling the mountain. Not that they would be too far off in the nickname. There is a reason for
the unspoken collective agreement among monsters not to discuss that, after all. Angel knows Frisk has had enough difficulties in gaining a positive public opinion for his people; rolling up and saying, “Hey, you know those people who disappeared over the years? Yeah, well, our king killed them for their Souls so we could break a magical force-field. Sorry, but not really because we wanted to be free,” would not go over well. Hell, even as a monster, having experienced the history and the desperation to feel sunlight, his inner Judge has issues with that.

Luckily, his plan has been successful up to this point. You are helping, in more way than one.

Sans slumps deeper into his tangled cocoon of blankets and pillows that make up his bed. Man, was that ever true today. When those two humans tried to extinguish Grillby, he was not expecting you to get dragged into the Fight. Or for you to adapt to the Encounter system so well and listen to his advice.

Or for you to be his…

“nope, cutting that one off right there.”

Anyways.

Your participation sure made his side of things easier. While you were Disarming, Sans was able to keep his focus on properly restraining both of the attackers with his blue. By himself, he would likely have been able to do it, but this way, he knew no harm would come to the pair; he doesn’t need them to claim that he hurt them with his magic and create a public relations incident. All in all, the teamwork made everything more efficient, and the problem was taken care of in less turns than he had expected. Especially considering how the Blue Soul had LV. Not much, but in his opinion, any LV is a bad sign when it comes to this type of thing. To think that it was the Orange Soul who chickened out of the Fight at your mention of the Guard. Not that Sans is complaining, though; it certainly made his life easier.

And on the plus side, he didn’t have any déjà vu from the whole thing. To be honest with himself, that has always been a concern since coming to the Surface, that getting involved in a fight would bring back fragments from those timelines, back in the Judgement Hall with Frisk, promises broken, dust everywhere, everyone dead…

Sans doesn’t Fight. Not anymore. Heck, not even before the Reset madness. Never really his thing. End of story, add a stamp to the envelope and mail it away. Regular, social Encounters have always been more than enough for this skeleton. On the Surface though, it seems he might have to start. But hey, at least now he knows he is able to do it, barring end of the world emergencies in which he has no choice but to Fight. Useful information to keep track of, and all that.

Adding to the list of what he has learned tonight, Sans now has another example of how you tend to manifest your Justice to add to his unofficial list. During the entire Encounter, your Soul was radiant with that sunny yellow glow, pulsing even brighter as you countered the injustice of the attack. Your Soul…

Your Soul…

Abruptly, Sans sits up. “time to drink away the think.”

Despite how exhausted he is, Sans shortcuts down to the kitchen. It is faster, plus there is less risk of waking up the others compared to trudging through the hallway and down the stairs.

Not that his caution does him any good, though. In fact, all it does is get him to bump right into
Papyrus. “uh, hey. watcha doing up? and in the kitchen? after…” Sans pauses to squint at the display on the microwave, “midnight?”

“I COULDN’T SLEEP, SO I THOUGHT I WOULD GET SOME LIGHT READING DONE,” he explains, holding up a book that by sheer size and density alone cannot be considered ‘light reading’. If he wanted, Sans could probably use it as a stepstool if he placed it on the floor. Upon closer examination, it's that one text Pap got for Gyftmas from Tori. Something about the history and evolution of puzzles from the pre-Sealing era to today. If Sans were to choose to read it because he couldn’t sleep, it would be to help knock himself back out, providing it didn’t give him a headache first. For him, puzzles are just an obstacle for him to shortcut around and their history was just his favourite class to sleep through when he was younger. But that isn’t the case for Paps. As much as he doesn’t understand it, his younger brother adores this type of thing. It's his jam. To him, puzzles are a fun logic game, reflective of monster culture. Supposedly, there is also a social aspect to it, which Sans misses out on completely, but he believes him. While Sans can go on about space and the stars, Papyrus can spend just as much time talking about puzzles in depth, if not moreso.

“WHAT BETTER THING THAN TO READ WITH A NICE HOT BEVERAGE?” Papyrus continues, setting the brick of a book on the counter with a large thud. “AND YOU? I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT YOU WOULD HAVE GONE TO BED AFTER YOUR MEETING WITH MISS SOCIAL WORKER AT GRILLBY’S. ARE YOU HAVING TROUBLES SLEEPING TOO?”

“You could say that.” Which is truly unfortunate, because physically speaking, he is wiped. If only his mind could get the memo. Paps hums in response before grabbing the milk from the fridge and adding more of it to the pot on the stove, a subtle hint that Sans is supposed to partake in whatever is being made. Then, some of the details of what his brother said snap into place. “wait. how did you know that i was at grillbz with her?” He might have said he was going out, but he definitely didn’t mention you. Not at all.

Papyrus scoffs, rolling his eye lights as he stirs in some sugar. “ PLEASE, BROTHER, I HAVE MY SOURCES.”

“sources? what sources?”

“SANS,” he sighs, “BELIEVE OR NOT, THAT WAS A JOKE.”

“a joke.” Right. There is no way that Papyrus knows what all happened. Even if he did find out from someone, no one else was in the Encounter. Just you, Sans and the humans. Plus, either way, they wouldn’t be able to know about your —

“YES!” Papyrus exclaims, startling Sans out of his spiralling thoughts. “REALLY, BROTHER, WHAT DID YOU THINK? YOU AREN’T EXACTLY THE BEST AT KEEPING THINGS SECRET. ALSO, YOU LEFT HER CONTACT INFORMATION ON THE GROUND RIGHT BESIDE YOUR SOCK, WHICH YOU STILL NEED TO PICK UP, BY THE WAY!”

“oh.”

“OH INDEED, SANS. I SWEAR, HOW HARD IS IT TO PICK UP A SINGLE CLOTHING ITEM?”

Right now, Papyrus doesn’t care about the sock, and Sans knows it. Nah, Paps is just providing an easy out for a conversation they both know needs to happen, no matter how much Sans may want to avoid it. Something for which he is very grateful.
“i dunno, bro,” Sans says, accepting the out as he turns down the heat on the stove a smidge, “all i know is that it sure socks.”

“NYEH! HOW DARE!”

That’s it; maybe it is the overtiredness kicking in, but Sans can no longer restrain himself at Papyrus’ overly exaggerated, appalled expression. He doubles over, unable to contain his laughter as his brother continues a tirade against the awful nature of his puns.

By the time he is calmed down to a point where he can actually breathe again, Papyrus has already divided the homemade hot chocolate into two mugs. “thanks, i needed this,” he says, tossing a few marshmallows in from the bag left on the counter. However, the true meaning of his words goes unspoken; as grateful as he is for the beverage, it wasn’t the hot chocolate that he was referring to.

“YOU’RE VERY WELCOME,” Papyrus responds knowingly. “I SUPPOSE I WILL BE UNABLE TO CONVINCE YOU NOT TO RUIN ALL MY HARD WORK BY SHOVING THAT TERRIBLE CONDIMENT IN IT.”

“Nope.”

“HOW IRKSOKE. WELL, I’M GOING TO GO READ NOW. GOOD SIBLING INTERACTION, BROTHER.”

“you too, my dude,” he chuckles. “have fun.” As soon as he stirs in a shot of ketchup, he shorts out back to bed.

Sadly, it seems his venture to distract himself was unsuccessful. Each time he closes his eyes, he sees your Soul, the image and its significance burned into his skull.

Soulmates.

In some ways, Sans is upset with himself. As Judge, knowing Souls is his job. Literally. He should have known, or at least have noticed something. Did his earlier resentment really make him so blind?

He sure wasn’t blind this evening, though. How could he be, with how distractingly vivid your Soul was? The Justice, mirroring his secondary trait to a tee. Your Cyan secondary, demonstrating Patience he didn’t even consider in you until now. Hell, if he was to guess before tonight, that probably would have been one of the last traits to come to mind. Instead, he might have said Integrity, based on your frank honesty in all your dealings, or perhaps even that infamous Red of Determination.

Then again, even if your Patience wasn’t super obvious, it was always there, wasn’t it? You are pretty decent at reading people, steadily and quietly observing instead of rushing into action. Analytical, you seem to take your time in considering the situation before passing judgment. Sure, that might not have all been true tonight, but even Sans, master of passivity and waiting for the “perfect” moment, felt the call to jump into action.

If nothing else, you have been pretty patient when it came to putting up with Sans’ crap, so there is that.

The real question is, if it weren’t for those humans tonight, how long would it have taken for him to figure it out? Would it have even happened? Short of someone losing complete control during one of your visits, there should be no reason for you to ever enter an Encounter. Certainly not one with him. And if that did happen… well, his personal feelings about you being his Soulmate would
be the least of his problems. Realistically speaking, he would have gone on with the rest of his life never knowing. Or until another Reset occurs, but same difference. In some ways, he should thank those assholes who tried to kill Grillby. Fantastic.

On the bright side, at least out of all the humans who were a part of the Fight, it was you and not them. Needless to say, Soulmates or not, that would not have worked out.

To add a true positive to this situation, all the feels from fully seeing your Soul gave him the kick in the coccyx to officially make nice to you. In fact, when Papyrus eventually asks about tonight’s meeting — because there is only so long he will be able to put it off before his brother wheedles it out of him — he should probably make that the focus. A repaired relationship would be a good thing to have, considering he has to see you at least once a week until the time comes that they can officially adopt Frisk.

Also, the better the two of you get along, the more likely you are to open up to Sans. Whether you end up being a platonic Soulmate, a romantic one or anything in between, the natural bond between the two of you is worthless unless he gets to know you better.

That is, providing you accept being his Soulmate, of course. Although super uncommon, you wouldn’t be the first person to reject a Soulmate. It would hurt, but what could he do?

First, though, Sans needs to tell you about it. How, though, is the real question. Ignoring it and keeping it a secret forever, as much as he would like to at the moment, isn’t a real option. To put it simply, it would be a dumb thing to do. You have the right to know about this; it is your Soul.

It doesn’t take much for him to realise that telling you now would be equally as stupid as never telling you at all. Only a few hours ago, you didn’t even know you had a Soul, for Asgore’s sake. Jumping all this information on you would probably end up with you questioning his sanity and taking Frisk away.

Oh stars!

What if Frisk has to Reset again?

Without a second’s delay, Sans shortcuts down to his lab, rummaging through his drawers for his notebook. After the school fire Loading extravaganza, he had resolved to keep it more easily accessible, but life happened and he no longer knows what happened to it. Eventually, he knocks a stack of rough equations from the table, revealing the missing notebook.

The instant he puts his pen to the paper, he freezes. Does he really want to record the fact that you are his Soulmate to read in other potential timelines? What if Frisk changes their mind, and the cycle of Resets restarts? Things were bad enough before; the last thing he would want is to know of a life where he has met his Soulmate on the Surface, especially if it was because of the kid going through the Underground and possibly decimating through the population. And what would he do if Frisk freed them again? Normally, you aren’t the kid’s social worker. Normally, Frisk has the Green Soul lady, not Sans’ Soulmate. How would he find you without seeming like a total creep? He wouldn’t.

But if Sans doesn’t record this and he does meet you in another timeline, he would have to go through this song and dance all over again. Tonight was already enough for him. After the Encounter, he was unable to concentrate on anything.

Well, actually, that isn’t quite true.
After the Encounter, he was unable to concentrate on anything but your Soul.

At first, it was all too much. Everything had just happened so fast. The appearance of the humans, the rapid realisation of the buckets and their intent, the Fight, you being in the Fight, your Soul, his Soul… it was a lot to take in.

Before he was anywhere near dealing with this new information, though, you came back and he instinctively Checked you. From there, all he could see was that his Soulmate had been harmed and he needed to help fix it. The worst was while he was waiting for Grillby to make some healing food. Until your HP was fully recovered, Sans struggled to think of anything else. In retrospect, it probably creeped you out, dealing with a skeleton staring at you as you ate. At the very least, he was being weird enough for you to make a comment.

Having to deal with this awkwardness again in another timeline sounds gross, even if he wouldn’t be able to remember it. Unless, of course, déjà vu happens. Even if he doesn’t record it in his notebook, there are often the strangest little things that spark the feeling. He isn’t even the only one who deals with that during the Resets; he knows for a fact that Papyrus has had moments of recognition back in the Underground, and Frisk sometimes lets loose and mentions how Tori and Asgore had remembered things that shouldn’t be possible.

Then again, none of this should be possible, but here he is, trying to plan for a future that might not exist. Or would it technically be a past that might not exist, considering how the events in question happened already?

Ugh, no one should have to think about hypothetical divergences in time this late at night. Or at all, but Sans might be biased; the average person doesn’t know that the hypothetical could easily become real at the whims of a twelve year old kid. So, so easily.

Tiredly, Sans leaves the notebook and pen out on the table and returns to his room. He finishes the remaining, now lukewarm sludge of ketchupy hot chocolate. At this rate, he isn’t getting anywhere with all this thinking. If anything, he is even more confused and conflicted than when he started, which is really saying something.

He stares blankly at the residue still inside his mug, tilting it idly in his grasp. This could really be a pain to clean if he leaves it to sit in his room. Especially considering his track record of remembering to bring dirty dishes from his room to the kitchen sink. Might as well bring it down now and let it soak; it isn’t like he is going to be able sleep at this rate.

Unsurprisingly, Papyrus is still in the living room reading when Sans bites the bullet and deals with his mug. And the pile of plates that have been accumulating over the past week. And the other mugs. In the end, the sink is half full with dishes which need to be washed, but at least they are no longer missing in his room.

Before he can go back to bed and not sleep, Papyrus pats the spot beside him on the couch. His younger brother barely lets him sit down before Sans is bundled up into a bony blanket burrito. Without allowing a chance for Sans to question it, Papyrus resumes his reading, this time out loud in an abnormally soft register. Not feeling any need to resist, Sans simply lets the words lull him closer to sleep. The more he listens to the Elder Puzzler’s commentary on the merits of block puzzles, the easier it is to put this whole Soulmates thing on the back burner.

After all, if Pap’s book is to be believed, the best puzzles aren’t constructed without time; what’s the harm in waiting?
Papyrus might have been joking, but we all know he has a special source who can tell him things, if you catch my drift. Flirting fire friend privileges, and all that jazz.

Poor Sans has feels now.

Also, I have a feeling that these next few chapters are going to fight me, so expect longer times between updates.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
A Hot Mess

Chapter Summary

After a long day of work and getting attacked by some humans, Grillby decides to call his crush good friend Papyrus.

Chapter Notes

Surprise, I'm back!

Also!

I don't know guys. I had absolutely no plans to write this chapter. All I know is that on April 2nd, my brain decided to scream "more self-indulgent Papby" for some reason. I don't know why, but it just did. Also, my brain was very unhelpful, and refused to give me anymore context than "more Papby". As in, I was writing with literally no idea of what was happening, which was a thing.

Long story short, people on tumblr encouraged me to be self-indulgent, and that's why this is here now instead of the actual plot I've had developped for a few months, gosh darn it. C'est la vie.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Closing time could not come early enough tonight. After the incident, all Grillby wants to do is go and rest in the safety of his home, where there is far less water to deal with. First, though, he has to deal with clean up, which means suiting up for water-based cleaning products because of humans and all of their stringent regulations.

Stars above, Grillby loves living on the Surface, but does he ever hate dealing with the health and safety regulations.

By the time he is finally done — along with the extra work of making sure any leftover water is properly evaporated — Grillby is this close to just giving up and curling up at one of the booths for the night. Angel knows it wouldn’t be the first time; there was a reason why Snowdin natives used to joke about his restaurant being just like home. To be completely honest, he still isn't sure why he even bothered with his tiny apartment back Underground, considering how many times he used to sleep at his original location.

Bundling up in a way that protects his flames without feeling suffocating is always a challenge. Luckily, years of living in Snowdin have more than prepared him for his trip home. Tall snow boots, a thick, waterproof coat, a strategically draped scarf, fingered gloves and a heavy-duty umbrella to keep the snow away from his head-flames all make the way onto his person before he locks up for the night.

In some ways, winter on the Surface is vastly different than living back in Snowdin. First, to state
the obvious, there is the shifts in weather. Even the simple breezes which swirl snow around the sidewalk as he walks is different. Secondly, dealing with actual daylight and nightfall really changes the overall atmosphere. Now that monsters are fairly acclimated to it, the busyness of the city has really been affected. As of leaving work, he has seen one, maybe two monsters out and about, the quiet ambience so odd compared to what he would have seen in Snowdin at the same time of day. On the other hand, when he goes out in the middle of the day, New New Home is almost alarmingly active. And yet, that is nothing compared to what it is like just over in Ebott.

How are humans able to deal with this type of insanity on a regular basis?

Grillby barely unlocks his door before his wifi kicks in, flooding his phone with UnderNet notifications. As soon as he removes the various layers, he puts his phone on the counter and pours himself a bowl of Temmie Flakes to munch on. Most monsters — excluding temmies, of course — can’t stand the stuff, but Grillby has always found something strangely satisfying about how the construction paper snack incorporates into his magic.

Returning to check on his phone, Grillby doesn’t bother hiding a smile or how he glows brighter, happy little wisps of fire rising, when he sees a familiar username at the top of his screen: CoolSkeleton95.

“... Papyrus.”

A quick glance shows that the message isn’t anything super urgent. Papyrus just wanted to check in since they haven’t had any of their lessons since before Gyftmas. In fact, he even added a postscript, telling him not to feel pressured to respond if he is tired after work. Considering how much the tall skeleton thrives on answering his own messages as punctually as possible and has energy which surpasses that one battery mascot rabbit, that really means something. Truly, it is tempting to take him up on the offer.

However, Grillby still has some Temmie Flakes left to eat before going to bed. Might as well spend some time chatting with his crush — good friend Papyrus.

His really good friend.

Hopefully, one day, a better friend.

...

Moving on.

Typically, Grillby prefers texting people to phoning. Although he has gotten better at speaking at a pace and register which is easier for non-fire elementals to understand, he is still very aware of how much harder it is to decipher his voice over the phone due to the crackling of his flames. However, after a day like today, it would be nice to hear his friend’s voice.

One ring…

Two —

“HELLO GRILLBY, DID YOU SEE THE MESSAGES I SENT YOU?”

Classic Papyrus, reliable just as always. “... I did.”

“EXCELLENT! I’M GUESSING THAT’S NOT THE ONLY REASON YOU CALLED, THOUGH.”
“... I felt like talking,” Grillby admits, grabbing a small handful of Temmie Flakes. Somewhat absentmindedly, he starts sorting them by colour.

“WELL, YOU’VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE! WELL, METAPHORICALLY, OF COURSE. I DON’T ACTUALLY KNOW WHERE YOU ARE RIGHT NOW, BUT YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.”

“... yes. What did you do today?”

“OH, YOU KNOW,” he starts casually, “JUST NORMAL MASCOT THINGS. DID YOU KNOW THAT KING ASGORE IS CONSIDERING THE ADDITION OF A PUZZLE PARK TO HELP TEACH HUMANS ABOUT OUR CULTURE?”

Grillby narrows his eyes, moving a blue Temmie Flake that had accidentally gotten sorted with the greens into its proper spot. How did he miss that? “... no, I didn’t. Would you be interested in working there, if it gets built?”

“WHAT KIND OF QUESTION IS THAT?” Papyrus gasps, sounding completely scandalised. Probably because he is. “EVEN THOUGH ASGORE IS DISAPPOINTINGLY STILL VERY ANTI-SPIKED PUZZLE, NO MATTER HOW MUCH I TELL HIM KIDS LOVE THOSE THINGS, THIS IS MY DREAM LIFE!”

A soft chuckle escapes as Grillby remembers the passion-filled rant Papyrus went on during one of their first cooking lessons. That was also the day, now that Grillby thinks about it, when he learned that knife safety skills were certainly not taught during his time cooking with Undyne. In fact, if he didn’t know any better, he would say the Captain encouraged such a thing; it sure would go along with all the other ways she had Papyrus “demonstrate his passion to cook”.

On the plus side, flying knives have a tendency not to do much harm to his fire without the (im)proper intent. If he were any other type of monster, on the other hand… Needless to say, proper knife training became the focus of that morning. And the lesson after that, just to be on the safe side.

“ANYWAYS, THAT’S ABOUT IT FOR ME. HOW WAS YOUR DAY?”

“... exciting.” Actually, that might not be the most accurate word. It isn’t wrong, though. “... I saw Frisk’s social worker. She was eating with Sans.” Frankly, Grillby was hoping that the pair would be doing more than just eating, but that didn't seem to be the case. How disappointing.

“I KNEW IT!” At Papyrus’ extra loud exclamation, Grillby is forced to move his phone farther away from his head. “HE WAS BEING FAR TOO SKETCHY TODAY. AND THAT MEANS SOMETHING, CONSIDERING I'M TALKING ABOUT THE SKELETON WHO RAN AT LEAST ONE ILLEGAL HOT DOG STAND AT HIS SENTRY STATIONS. FEEL LIKE SHARING THE DEETS?”

“... there isn’t much to share. They got into a Fight, I guess.”

“THEY WHAT?!?!?!” Papyrus shrieks and stars! Grillby thought he was loud before. “WOULD YOU EXCUSE ME? I NEED TO HAVE AN EXTREMELY FIRM WORD WITH MY BROTHER.”

Suddenly, the elemental understands why his friend is so upset. “... wait, I worded that wrong.”

“OH, I SEE. MAYBE TRY WORDING THAT AGAIN, THEN.”
Grillby nods to himself, already working on it. “... they were in a Fight, but it wasn’t against each other.”

“GRILLBY?”

“... yes?”

“I APPRECIATE THE CLARIFICATION, BUT THAT DOESN’T EXPLAIN WHY MISS SOCIAL WORKER WAS IN A FIGHT TO BEGIN WITH. OR SANS, FOR THAT MATTER. HE’S FAR TOO LAZY FOR THAT.”

“... I was getting there.” Without any further preamble, he recounts the story. He has no illusions that he could probably find a more interesting way to tell it, but it is late and the bartender would rather not spend too much time dwelling on how two humans decided to kill him — or at the very least, provide significant bodily harm to him — for absolutely no reason. “... so that’s it,” he concludes. “... the two of them jumped in and saved the day. And they did it with a Fight.”

“OH,” Papyrus exhales, sounding extremely relieved. “WELL, IGNORE THAT OUTBURST THEN. ARE YOU OKAY?”

Grinning like an idiot, he considers those last three words. From the depths of his Soul, Grillby can tell that Papyrus isn’t just asking to be polite. The skeleton is genuinely concerned for his well-being, and doesn’t that just warm his flames with joy? True, Papyrus would probably react the same way with anyone else, but it still nice to know that he worries about him. It makes him feel special, knowing Papyrus cares for him, even if it is even just the slightest bit.

“GRILLBY? ARE YOU OKAY?”

Say something and answer him already, for angel’s sake! “... huh?” All right, that might not have been the best response. It is progress though, so yay?

“ARE? YOU? OKAY?” Papyrus repeats for the second time, speaking super slowly in an attempt to help him understand. “DO I NEED TO SEND HELP?”

Somewhat frustrated with himself, he manages to stammer out an answer. A real one, that is. “... y-yes. I mean, n-no? I’m fine.” Get it together! With a small cough, he continues, “Somehow, I managed to stay just outside of the field of the Encounter; any closer, and I think I would’ve been drawn in.”

“THAT’S GOOD TO HEAR. NOT THE THE FACT THAT THERE NEEDED TO BE AN ENCOUNTER, OF COURSE. THAT’S RATHER UNFORTUNATE, EVEN IF IT MEANT SANS SUCCEEDED IN DOING SOMETHING PRODUCTIVE TODAY; REMIND ME TO CONGRATULATE HIM LATER. BUT THE FACT THAT YOU WERE ABLE TO STAY OUTSIDE OF IT. THAT IS A VERY GOOD THING. I’M ASSUMING THE PERPETRATORS WERE DEALT WITH?”

“... the dogs were there,” Grillby confirms simply. “... they took care of everything.”

“EXCELLENT! THEY’LL DO A GOOD JOB.”

“... mhm.”

His tiredness finally catching up to him, Grillby lets out a small yawn with a puff of smoke.

“ARE YOU NEEDING TO GO TO SLEEP NOW?”
As much as he wants to deny it so he can keep chatting, he knows he would greatly regret it tomorrow. The last thing he needs is to start falling asleep at the bar on a Saturday night because he pushed himself too far tonight. Still, he finds it hard to admit. “... probably.”

“OH. OKAY.” How is it that two small words can make Grillby feel so dampened? Maybe it is because Papyrus sounds disappointed? Does he also want to spend more time talking? With Grillby? Or just in general? After all, even if it isn’t a school night, Frisk should most certainly be in bed by now. It is also highly doubtful that Sans is still awake. Who else could he talk to without worrying about waking them up?

Grillby is probably reading too much into this, though, isn’t he?

To his relief, it doesn’t take long for Papyrus to bounce back to his cheerful self. “WELL, I WON’T GET IN YOUR WAY, THEN. ARE YOU DOING ANYTHING TOMORROW? OR, TO BE MORE ACCURATE, TODAY SINCE IT’S OFFICIALLY MORNING AS OF A FEW MINUTES AGO?”

“... nothing outside of work.”

“EXCELLENT! WELL, I’LL BE SURE TO... VISIT ... TOMORROW. TODAY. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.”

“... visit?” Does he mean the restaurant, or…

“YES, OF COURSE! LATER IN THE MORNING, SINCE YOU DON’T HAVE ANYTHING ELSE GOING ON, I’LL COME OVER TO YOUR PLACE. YOU OBVIOUSLY MUST BE SHAKEN UP AFTER TONIGHT, AND WHAT BETTER THING TO HELP WITH THAT THAN TO SPEND TIME WITH A FRIEND.” All right, Grillby isn’t going to argue with that logic. “AUDIBLE WINK.”

Wait, what? Audible wink?

Oh!

That was the wrong moment to decide to eat the last of his Temmie Flakes. Thanks to that mistake, Grillby chokes in silence, not wanting to alarm Papyrus across the line.

Also!

Oh stars, oh stars, oh stars!

Is the audible wink implying what he thinks it does? Because there aren’t many other ways he can think of to interpret this.

Then again, this could clearly just be Papyrus being Papyrus. Or he may only be continuing with their unofficial flustering competition. Just because Papyrus can’t see him, it doesn’t mean that he wouldn’t be able to tell if his flirting has had any effect.

Yes, that is probably the answer. It isn’t like Papyrus feels that way about him, right? It has always been a game, nothing more.

“I’LL CALL TO LET YOU KNOW WHEN I SHOW UP,” he says, oblivious to Grillby’s inner freak out. “UNTIL THEN, SLEEP WELL!”

“... you too.”
“I WILL! MWAH!” And he hangs up.

Flickering frantically, Grillby stares blankly at the screen of his phone. Did Papyrus just… give him a goodnight kiss? Through the phone?

Oh boy.

Without bothering to put his bowl away, Grillby walks straight to bed. Although, everything considered, his Soul feels so light that he may indeed be floating. Even some of his tiredness seems to have faded away, replaced by an eager anticipation for what the morning may bring.

Angel help him through these feelings, because one of these days he will make a fool of himself. And with how things are currently going, that day will be sooner than later.

Chapter End Notes

For everyone who signed onto this expecting a Sans/Reader... whoops. Next chapter.

Hey, now we have a better idea of how much Grillby's lessons have helped out. For some reason, I don't think it would have gone over well if Papyrus had accidentally yeeted a knife during a home visit because he was speaking with too much enthusiasm while cooking.

I'm also unreasonably proud of this chapter's title, and I considered changing the summary to that. It fits on so many levels, including the actual creation process of the chapter.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
The Confession's Consequences

Chapter Summary

Sans has something very important to confess to you. The question is, how will you take it?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As the last week of January rolls around, so does a terrible flurry of snowstorms. Local news has proclaimed it the worst weather the Ebott area has had at this time of year in decades, and you don’t doubt it one bit. With days like these, you are half tempted to call in to work with some excuse, not wanting to brave the roads to get to the office. Luckily, first thing this morning, François sent out an email telling everyone to be safe, even if it means coming into work a bit late. After all, as he reminded, there is no reason why most of you can’t get some paperwork done at home, if need be.

As much as you would like to take your boss up on the offer, today you don’t feel like you have much choice in the matter. Sure, there won’t be a disaster if you didn’t make it to New New Home for once; your weekly visits are more of a formality than anything at this point. Certainly, Sans and Papyrus would understand if you couldn’t make it. If anything, they might appreciate having a week to be left in peace.

Once the afternoon arrives, you decide there is no point in calling off this week’s home visit. You may have to leave the office earlier than normal to get there on time, but that is completely fine with you. Someone on your end of the building cranked up the heat. Normally, this would be completely warranted in this type of weather, but you are pretty sure you saw the water in the watercooler start to boil because of how excessively high it was turned up. Going outside for the few seconds it takes to reach your car is a relief, even if the blowing snow is like thousands of tiny knives against your unprotected face.

Since you have to wait for your engine to heat up a bit, you decide to check your email one last time. This, it turns out, is a very good idea, as Papyrus sent you an email barely a minute ago. In the message — which is written entirely in capital letters, for some reason — he explains that he and Frisk are in a meeting at the Embassy, and will likely be running late. He invites you to let yourself into the house, saying that Sans might be too busy in the lab to open the door. You really wonder where the lab is in New New Home, if it is close enough for him to stop work to let you in.

Then again, should it surprise you at this point? The guy can teleport, after all. For all you know, Sans could work in Antarctica and still be able to make it back to New New Home to drink disgusting ketchup-infused beverages and pun at everyone during a home visit.

The Christmas lights on the house prove to be very useful today, providing a colourful beacon for you to follow through the blindingly white snow. Upon entering the house, you notice that all the lights are on, but there is no sign of anyone being home.

Strange.
Even stranger yet, though, is the clattering sound coming from the living room.

A quick inspection brings an unexpected sight. Sans is slumped against the couch, but shaking so hard that his bones are rattling and he looks like he could fall off at any moment. Although his sockets are closed, small streams of blue and yellow light escape from his one eye, like the world’s sketchiest light show. Around you, a large book and a glass of what, knowing him, is ketchup levitate around the room, rapidly changing directions.

What the heck is going on here?

“heh heh heh...” he chuckles darkly, eyes still shut. “that's your fault isn't it?” A series of chalk white bones appear just above the carpet, forcing you to sidestep them.

Almost tripping over the last one, you ask, “What’s my fault?” He doesn’t hear you.

Suddenly, it dawns on you: this must be a nightmare.

And here you are, trapped along with him.

“you can't understand how this feels. knowing that one day, without any warning... it's all going to be reset.”

Not knowing what to do, you back away, calling his name over and over, louder and louder. It doesn’t matter. You have no choice but to dodge whatever comes near.

“look. i gave up trying to go back a long time ago,” he continues as you duck away, narrowly avoiding a bone as it shoots up too close to your head.

“And getting to the surface doesn't really appeal anymore, either.” Before you can let any of that flood in, some sort of skull appears with an awful whoosh. Instinctively, you hit the deck, just in time for a beam of energy to shoot from its mouth, only to be followed by another and another.

What the hell is going on?

“'cause even if we do... we'll just end up right back here, without any memory of it, right?” More bones are brought into existence, thankfully not of the laser-shooting skull variety.

You need to wake him up. If you don’t, he is probably going to destroy the house at this rate. Or you. Or hurt Frisk and Papyrus when they get back home, and that would be a real problem. As it is, you are officially defining this whole situation as a problem right now.

In an act that you can’t decide is either smart or stupid, you leap close enough to clasp his shoulders, shouting one last time at the top of your lungs. “SANS!”

With a start, his eyes fly open, and you feel a tightening in your chest, feeling heavier and heavier. Colours start to fade away.

Just like at Grillby’s.

Before everything shifts completely to black and white, Sans freezes. Behind you, the book falls to the floor and the glass shatters, leaving a puddle of red on the floor. The weight on your chest leaves, allowing you to breathe fully again. A shiver runs up your spine as he stares at you, eye lights completely absent.

“S-Sans?” You try again, hating how shaky your voice is. “What’s going on?”
Quietly, in a tone that can barely be considered a whisper, he says your name. Sweat drips down his skull, not that you think he notices. In fact, you are starting to wonder if he might be in some kind of shock.

In any case, he has acknowledged your presence, which is at least something.

Before you can ask him what the hell just happened, his head turns sharply towards the ketchup on the ground. He flinches hard, and you aren’t entirely unsure that he didn’t teleport a few inches away or something. Warily, you move in front of the spill, hoping to block it from his line of view. With how his breathing has picked up — which is something you can apparently add to your growing list of bodily functions you weren’t aware were shared between humans and skeleton monsters — it wouldn’t surprise you if he starts hyperventilating.

Luckily, things don’t escalate from there, which is nice; you were half expecting Sans to go into a panic attack. A few seconds after it started, Sans freezes, seemingly aware of what is going on. His eye lights reappear, which is oddly comforting. Without them, he just looks so lifeless.

“are you okay?” Sans asks, like he just didn’t just go through whatever the hell that was.

“I’m pretty sure I should be asking you that.” As awful as that was, there are clearly some issues going on with him. Issues which need to be addressed immediately.

He shakes his head. “are. you. okay?”

“I’ll be fine,” you decide, despite the fact that your hands are clearly starting to shake and the building desire to sprint to the bathroom because of the bile rising up to your throat and the nervous butterflies swirling around your stomach. Squeezing your hands tightly into fists, you move to sit down on the couch. You would rather not disprove yourself by doing something dumb like collapsing, a possibility which seems more and more likely.

“but…” Sans trails off, looking between you and the ketchup on the ground.

“I’ll be fine. Feel like explaining this? Because I’m going to be frank with you; this type of thing doesn’t look good.” That is an understatement, but Sans seems a bit fragile right now. Besides, you are sure he is smart enough to figure out the true gravity of the situation.

Sans doesn’t say a word for what feels like an eternity. Just as you consider repeating your question, he hoarsely whispers, “have you ever felt déjà vu?”

“Uh...?” You aren’t sure what déjà vu has to do with him almost destroying the house, but you will humour him, just this once. If it turns out to be a distraction tactic... well, Sans will regret it. “I mean, maybe? Sometimes when I do paperwork, it feels like I’ve already written something before, but that’s probably just because I’ve used similar phrasing in another case.”

“what if it was real?”

“I’m sorry?” This is too much right now.

“the déjà vu. what if it was real? what if each time you feel like you’ve done something before, it’s because an anomaly decided to reset and go back in time, leaving you with the memory of what once was and yet also didn’t happen? what if the fate of the future is dependant on some kid who asks you to adopt them? what if the present that exists now is only happening because this kid decided to free monsters from the underground?”

... knowing that one day, without any warning... it's all going to be reset...
Under his breath, he adds, “what if frisk was a coin flip away from deciding to kill everyone again?”

Again.

The pit in your stomach grows at the implication.

“Sans,” you warn, “this isn’t funny.”

Like flipping a switch, Sans goes from nearly hysterical to too laidback, a fake grin stretched over his skull. “you’re right. it’s not. it’s not funny at all. just a bad joke on my part. sorry about that. paps and frisk back yet?”

“Sans, don’t —”

Before you can rail at him for trying to play this whole thing off, a flower pot on wheels rolls down a small ramp installed on the edge of the stairs. Until this point, you had nearly forgotten about the newest addition to the family.

“HEY!” Flowey yells, a set of headphones dangling carefully on some of his vines, “What’s with the ruckus? I’m trying to level up, but I can’t concentrate with all this —”

He cuts himself off to sneer at the scene at hand, only to replace it with a sadistic smile. “Awww—Did Smiley have another scawy wittle dweam? How sad. What was it this time, Trashbag? Did little Frisky kill precious Papyrus again?”

Frisk, the sweet twelve year old who gave you a card for Christmas, kill Papyrus, one of the friendliest people you have ever met? Hearing such a thing from another source does nothing to diminish the shock about Sans’ earlier allegations. “What?”

“Oh right, the human doesn’t know the truth.” An almost gleeful expression makes it way onto his face. “Don’t tell me that you were dumb enough to attack her, Sans. Golly, this is fantastic! Did you give her a ‘bad time’? I thought that was reserved for dirty brother killers and genocidal maniacs, like Frisk.”

“s t o p    i t.” Sans growls, and you are torn between putting distance between them before things escalate and getting far, far away.

“Why should I?” Flowey taunts. “It’s not like you’re gonna do anything. Now that the social worker knows, Frisk is going to Reset again. What kind of run do you think they’ll do this time? I mean, sure, they’ve been going hard at the whole Surface thing lately, but who knows?”

The beginning of a headache looms near. Resets, going back in time, mass murder; you did not come here expecting any of this. The worst part is, now that Flowey is here, his gibes at Sans serving as some kind of confirmation, you don’t know what to think.

Time travel is impossible, right? A concept only used in fiction to serve as a fun and convenient plot device. Then again, only months ago, magic was supposed to be impossible. Goodness knows how false that turned out to be. Perhaps time travel, or Resets, are just the same.

However, even if that is true, why is Frisk of all people involved? They are just a kid! Weirdly mature for their age sometimes, but that isn’t too abnormal, is it?

Yet… if Sans and Flowey are telling the truth about Frisk going back in time, over and over, wouldn’t that make it like they have lived longer than someone their age really has?
No! No, that can’t be it. It can’t be! Time travel has to be impossible!

Besides, if Frisk was able to go back in time, shouldn’t things be going better for monsters here on the Surface?

Although, there have been some very lucky breaks. Unbelievably lucky breaks.

Reports you hear about successful negotiations.

The reparation act, providing monsters a place to live on the Surface.

The close call during the school fire.

Oh god!

Not caring how it looks, you bend over to cradle your head in your hands. “I need you both to back up and try explain this whole Frisk going back in time and killing people thing.” Before you have a nervous breakdown, you would like to add.

Sans and Flowey exchange a glance.

“What do you say, Trashbag?”

“Well,” Sans shrugs tiredly, “it’s like you said: it’s not like we can do anything at this point. what’s the harm in sharing?”

And share they do.

Despite already knowing some of the details, it is a hard tale to hear. Determination, death, Souls, genocide, Resets, friendship… there is just so much to take in, each bit as fantastical as the last. As far as you can tell, they leave nothing out, but you would have to talk to Frisk alone for reference.

The worst part is, you don’t know what to do at this point. Logically speaking, you should remove Frisk from Sans’ custody effective immediately. Even if things are going just fine and dandy this ‘timeline’, there is no way for you to leave him as the guardian of someone he has killed countless times. Sure, Frisk might have killed him back once they got the proper practice — and that is its own issue to think about some other time — but there is just so much that is ethical questionable about this.

Not that you can bring this up to anyone to talk about. As much as you need to go forward and give an official statement as to why you are suddenly taking issue to Sans’ ability to serve as Frisk’s guardian (not that Judge Andrews would care), there is no way to tell the truth without sounding like you have lost your mind. No one will believe you. Heck, you still hardly believe it yourself! And you don’t want to lie about it; you wouldn’t be able to live with yourself.

Something else that makes this all so difficult is how you have seen Frisk thrive living with Sans and Papyrus. They don’t seem unstable in the slightest! Sure, Sans may have asked you for advice finding a therapist — which is suddenly making a lot more sense — and sure, you know there is no way a kid can go through everything they have without some (fine, lots of) trauma. Yet, you can’t help but compare the Frisk you know with the one Amanda talked about, or even the one who ran away to Mt Ebott for yet unknown but likely questionable reasons.

You don’t know what to do.

And even if you had the slightest inkling of how to go about this, would it matter in the end? If
Sans and Flowey are telling the truth, you have to agree with them about one thing: what you do now doesn’t really matter. If you take Frisk away, they will just go back in time and make it so you never find out their secret. If they learn about you knowing and are scared that you will do something, they will go back in time. If the consequences of you discovering this even point towards the negative side of the scale, they will go back in time.

You don’t really have a choice in the matter.

The loud ringing of Sans’ phone breaks the silence.

“hey bro,” he says, somehow managing to sound normal and not like he has shared some earth-shattering information, “how’re things going at the embassy? … yeah, she’s here. … really?! nah, bro, you just wait right there. i’ll be over for you guys in a minute. see ya.”

“What’s going on?”

“i need to pick frisk and paps up. possibly some other monsters too. the weather’s real bad, i guess.” With that, he is gone.

Ever so slowly, Flowey turns to face you, staring you down intensely. You gulp, trying to look as collected as possible. Wordlessly, he wheels himself to the other end of the room, narrowly missing the pool of ketchup and glass on the floor. That should really be cleaned up before someone gets hurt.

Before you know it, the rest of the family returns, Papyrus speaking animatedly as always.

“— I’M TELLING YOU BROTHER, IT’S WORSE THAN THAT TERRIBLE AVALANCHE WE HAD ABOUT THREE YEARS BACK!”

Sans shudders. “don’t remind me.”

“I WISH I DIDN’T HAVE TO. HELLO FLOWEY, MISS SOCIAL WORKER. DID YOU TWO GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER WHILE WE WERE GONE?”

“You could say that,” Flowey answers, sounding believably chipper.

“WONDERFUL! NOW, IS THERE ANYTHING SPECIFIC YOU WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS, OR —”

Before Papyrus can finish his question, everything goes dark.

Chapter End Notes

Who was expecting that confession?

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
A piercing shriek breaks through the darkness. Is this what a Reset is? Is this the goodbye to the world you know, only to go back several months? You wonder how things will be different this time. Would you still be put in charge of Frisk’s case? You suppose you will never know.

“kiddo, are you okay?”

“Y-yeah. The lights going out surprised me.”

Or that. That is also an option, far more logical than the idea that the timeline is coming to an end. At least you kept your overreaction to yourself; you would rather not let it out that you now know about all this. And definitely not in such an embarrassing way.

Papyrus takes out his phone, turning on the flashlight app to illuminate the room a bit. “THE STORM MUST HAVE CAUSED AN OUTAGE. SANS?”

“Yeah, give me a minute.” Sans shortcuts away, presumably to check on the breakers.

You continue to sit quietly, unsure if you will be able to look Frisk in the eyes without giving everything away. They haven’t Reset yet, which must mean that Sans hasn’t told them. If you can keep things that way, even for just a few more days, it would be great. Maybe, you would be able to figure out a way to work with this before Frisk turns back time, ending the cycle.

Thankfully, it doesn’t take much time for Sans to get the lights back on. Before your eyes even have a chance to adjust, he shortcuts back directly to the couch, dusting his hands off on his hoodie.

“there. we should be good for a while now.” He coughs before turning to face you. “i know it’s earlier than normal, but you might wanna go home now, instead of waiting.”

“Yes, that sounds like an excellent plan.” Goodness knows you could use an additional week to start processing everything you learned today. Or longer. Preferably longer, but there is no way you can take enough time without it looking suspicious at this point. “I’ll be seeing you next week, then.” Providing that next week is still a thing, of course.

Just as you try to get up and leave, Papyrus blocks the way, a tall bony barricade. “AS THE GREAT PAPYRUS, I SIMPLY CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO LEAVE!”

Somewhat shocked at this development, you cannot help but splutter. “I-I’m sorry?”

“YOU’RE EXCUSED, BUT I INSIST THAT YOU STAY HERE. I COULDN’T DRIVE SAFELY FROM THE EMBASSY TO HERE. THAT MEANS IT IS FAR TOO DANGEROUS
FOR YOU TO BE DRIVING ALONE TO EBOTT, WHICH, AS OF THE LAST TIME I CHECKED, IS MUCH FARTHER AWAY THAN THE EMBASSY.”

You frown, diverting your gaze past him, focusing instead on the black screen of the television. Your reflections stares you back, albeit paler than normal.

As much as you hate it, Papyrus is right. But, if Frisk and Papyrus were able to get home, maybe… “What about having Sans teleport me to Ebott?”

“no can do.”

“Nope.”

“Nuh uh.”

“THAT IS SADLY IMPOSSIBLE.”

You could have done with only one response, but all right. You get the idea.

“can’t shortcut to places i’ve never been. so unless you happen to live at the community centre, the dentist, the doctor's office or a shopping mall, i can't help you.”

“Oh.” Well, if that is the case, you can't be too upset that he can't bring you home. You would be concerned if Sans has been to your house, to say the least.

Still, it sucks that you won't be able to go home.

“Is there a hotel or something I could stay at?”

Sans and Papyrus exchange a glance before shaking their heads. “TECHNICALLY, YES AND NO.”

“there’s the snowed inn, but they’ve been closed the past few weeks because of some major plumbing problems. guess you can say that you’ll just have to stay snowed in here instead.”

“SANS!”

“am i wrong, though?”

Papyrus pouts, giving an overly dramatic sigh. “NO.”

“Golly,” Flowey offers from his spot near the kitchen, a saccharine smile, bordering on malicious, spread widely across his face, “it looks like we’ll be getting to know each other really well tonight. Won’t that be fun?”

No. It won't be fun. At the risk of sounding childish, you want to go home. You have already learned more than you wanted to, thank you very much.

“YOU ARE ENTIRELY CORRECT, FLOWEY! THIS WILL BE AN EXCELLENT BONDING OPPORTUNITY, ALMOST LIKE A SLEEPOVER! IN FACT,” he adds, practically bouncing on the balls of his feet in his excitement, “WE SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OCCASION AND LIVE OUR BEST SLEEPOVER LIVES! PILLOW FORTS! POPCORN AND MOVIES! HOT CHOCOLATE AND BRAIDING EACH OTHER’S HAIR! EXCHANGING OUR DEEPEST, DARKEST SECRETS!”

Yeah, you might want to pass on that last one. Call you crazy, but you have already had your fill of
dark secrets, probably for the rest of your life.

Papyrus leaps forward, clearly rearing and ready to go prepare everything, only to lurch to a stop right in front of the coffee table, pointing at the spill. “WHAT IS THAT?”

“uh…”

“The remains of Sans’ ‘beverage,’” you supply. Internally, you gag at the thought of drinking ketchup, but what else is new?

“I CAN SEE THAT,” he sighs with annoyance. “BUT WHY IS IT STILL ON THE FLOOR? THAT SEEMS TO BE A BIT OF A SAFETY HAZARD. AND DON’T YOU TRY THE EXCUSE THAT YOU’RE TRYING OUT IDEAS FOR AN OBSTACLE PUZZLE. BESIDES THE FACT THAT THE BOTH OF US KNOW THAT SIMPLY ISN’T THE CASE — NOR WAS IT WITH YOUR SOCK — IT DOESN’T FOLLOW EVEN THE MOST BASIC OF PUZZLING PRINCIPLES.”

“sorry bro.” Sweat beads down his skull again as he falters for something else to say. Nothing leaves his mouth, and he looks to you in desperation.

“It’s my fault,” you blurt out before you even know what you are doing. Whatever excuse Sans was trying to concoct isn’t coming, and between the two of you, it should be easier to come up with a convincing story. After all, if either of you were to reveal the real reason why the glass shattered, that would just be a Reset waiting to happen, wouldn’t it? You hate needing to lie, but you can’t see any other choice right now. Besides, technically, it is your fault; the glass didn’t break until you woke Sans up and startled him.

“My, uh, shoes are more slippery than I thought.” Shoes? Really? This is the same pair you always wear during your visits!

“I accidentally slipped and hit the glass on the way down. Sans was going to clean it, but then he got your phone call, and I don’t know where all your cleaning supplies is.” Liar, Papyrus showed you everything your first visit. Could it be plausible that you have forgotten by now? Hopefully.

“yeah, and then the power went out once we got back and i had to deal with that.”

“I SEE. DID YOU INJURE YOURSELF, MISS SOCIAL WORKER?”

Hoping that you succeed in faking a dry tone, you go with, “Only my pride. Sorry about the glass.”

“NO PROBLEM. FRISK, YOU ARE OFFICIALLY IN CHARGE OF PILLOW AND BLANKET ACQUISITION FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF OUR MAGNIFICENT FORTRESS! MEANWHILE, I WILL BE SECURING THE PERIMETER, WHICH IS CODE FOR CLEANING ANY AND ALL SHARDS OF GLASS FROM THE CARPET TO AVOID HARMING YOUR FLESHY HUMAN BODIES.”

Frisk giggles, sprinting up the stairs two at a time. As innocent as the action is, your stomach churns. Why does something so normal for a child suddenly seem so ominous? Nodding as Frisk disappears to complete their task, Papyrus twirls into the kitchen, because that seems to be a thing today. Whatever floats his boat, you guess. After a pause, Flowey follows up the stairs, presumably to join Frisk, leaving you and Sans alone on the couch.

With the others gone, you take the opportunity to tap his shoulder and get his attention. “We aren’t talking about it,” you mouth silently, arching your brows. He nods, offering a hand to shake in agreement. Learning from past mistakes, you examine it for a whoopee cushion before accepting.
Just in time, it seems, as Papyrus returns, fully equipped with various cleaning supplies. Cheerful as always, he narrates through the proper techniques to remove ketchup stains from various materials he has learned over the years. There is definitely some side-eye sent towards Sans when he mentions that detail. For carpet, it turns out that the trick is to scrape away any excess or dry bits with a butter knife before using a detergent and water solution to take care of the rest.

“THE MOST IMPORTANT PART,” he informs you after a brief rabbit trail in which you are enlightened to his ranking of his favourite soaps he has discovered on the Surface, “IS THAT, WHATEVER YOU DO, YOU NEVER RUB THE STAIN. THAT JUST SETS IT INTO THE FIBERS, WHICH MAKES EVERYTHING WORSE AND EVEN WOSHUAS STRUGGLE TO DEAL WITH IT AT THAT POINT.”

“I see…” Well, not really. Not at all, in fact. You have no idea what a Woshua is or what that has to do with ketchup removal, but you will take his word on it. Besides, you aren’t exactly planning on spilling massive quantities of ketchup any time soon.

“Frisk, you are not going to wrap that stupid smiley blanket around my pot!” Flowey squacks from the hallway, followed by a thud as he accidentally hits the edge of a door. “It’s dumb and it keeps getting caught in my wheels, which defeats the point of having Alphys make this thing!”

Frisk trails behind, unable to properly chase the flower thanks to the enormous stack of blankets blocking their vision. “But Flowey!”

“Not happening.” He whips around the corner, narrowly missing the edge of his ramp as he heads down to the living room.

Beside you, Sans calls out, “hey frisk!”

“What?” Frisk asks, voice muffled as they draw the blankets closer to work their way downstairs. Sans rolls his eye lights, lazily lifting a hand. A sharp flinch makes its way through your body at the appearance of a blue glow, a reminder of his earlier display of magic. Exhaling somewhat shakily, you force yourself to analyse the situation. Clearly, this is only Sans trying to ease Frisk’s burden by levitating the objects, ensuring that they won’t accidentally hurt themself by tripping down the stairs or something.

This is fine.

It is going to be fine.

Everything is going to be fine.

As much as you keep telling yourself this, you don’t believe it. At least some of your concerns are alleviated when the blankets are gently placed in front of the television, Sans’ magic fading from sight.

Some, but not all. But what can you say? It is a start.

“ready to try for a new record, kiddo?”

New record? “Huh?” Did you accidentally tune out to some context, or is this just a thing?

Frisk jumps down, skipping the last three stairs and landing with their arms raised like a gymnast. “Sure am,” they exclaim, still in pose. After waiting a solid ten seconds for Papyrus to finish his polite applause, they lower their arms and sprint back up the stairs. “Lemme get the pillows!”
“Pillows?”

“you’ll see,” Sans answers cryptically, allowing his grin to grow as you continue to stare at him, confused. You turn to Papyrus, who has started returning the cleaning supplies to its proper home. He doesn’t explain either. Instead, he mimics his brother’s cheeky expression and, with an extra sparkle in his eye lights, mimes zipping his mouth shut before exiting to the kitchen.

This is going to be a long, long night.

Much to your relief, you manage not to react when Sans helps Frisk bring the pillows down. Outwardly, that is; you may feel slightly startled (fine, more than slightly), but you don’t do so much as blink. That counts as a victory, right?

With the pillows piled beside the couch, Sans and Frisk give each other conspiratorial nods. Theoretically, you shouldn’t think anything of this. However, in the back of your mind, there remains the slightest tinge of concern that they are talking in some kind of code. That maybe the record they are talking about is actually about the Resets.

You know it doesn’t make sense for it to be that. There shouldn’t be a need for secrecy if that was the case, right? It wouldn’t be like you would remember, if Frisk went back in time. Yes, Sans and Flowey seem to know things, but they are the exceptions which prove the rule, right? At most, there would be the déjà vu. For all you know, you have already been through this specific song and dance.

Four chairs in hand, Papyrus enters and asks, “DO YOU HAVE EVERYTHING TO COMMENCE THE PILLOW STACKING?”

Pillow stacking? Is that all the record is?

“Yup! Ready Sans?”

He stretches, slowly making his way to his feet. “sure thing, kiddo.”

Now, when you hear the words ‘pillow stacking’, you are expecting to see a tower of pillows on the floor. Possibly the table or the couch, but the concept is still there.

Needless to say, you were not anticipating the pillow stacking to take place on top of Frisk’s head.

About five pillows in, you have to ask. “What exactly is Frisk’s record for this?”

“FOURTEEN, I BELIEVE.”

“Fourteen!”

“It would’ve been fifteen,” Frisk says slowly, concentration put into every word as they try to remain as still as a statue, “but Undyne happened.”

Do you want to know what that means? Before you can decide, Sans continues, “yeah, that was too bad. at least it wasn’t as bad as the time she ruined our attempt at beating the ‘dog record.”

“‘Dog record?”

“YES,” Papyrus huffs. “THE HOTDOG STACKING RECORD. I MUCH PREFER THE PILLOW STACKING, AS IT IS FAR LESS GROSS. ALTHOUGH, EVEN I MUST ADMIT THAT THE AMOUNT OF HOTDOGS FRISK IS ABLE TO BALANCE ON THEIR HEAD IS
“IN THE MEANWHILE, I SHOULD BE WORKING ON SUPPER. MISS SOCIAL WORKER, DO YOU HAVE ANY PREFERENCES?”

“Not really?” To be honest, the idea of food is not an appealing one at the moment.

“Well, then I suppose I will simply have to surprise you with my culinary expertise.” He bounds to the kitchen, only pausing briefly to wish Sans and Frisk good luck in attaining a new record, requesting them to let him know so he can come see.

“Out of curiosity,” you start, hesitating, “what’s the hotdog record?”

Sans waits to add another pillow before answering. “thirty.”

“Thirty!?” How on earth?

“Yeah, the kid has a real talent, doncha frisk? they could probably do more, but a guy can only reach so high up,” Sans shrugs, “ya know?”

Of course something like that is the only obstacle. If anything, you should probably be impressed that Sans can reach high enough for that number. However… “Why can’t you just use your magic to stack them?”

Even Flowey sends you a scandalised glare at the suggestion. “That’s cheating!”

You don’t think it is, but who are you to argue with the experts here?

“It’s actually pretty interesting,” Sans adds, stopping with a thoughtful expression before grabbing the next pillow to join the stack, “all the differences between hotdog and pillow stacking. in general, pillows are easier to balance, because they have a flat surface, making them easier to layer and balance. if you aren’t careful, ‘dogs just roll off. however, they’re also bigger, which creates a weight challenge.”

“I see…”

Even if you didn’t, Sans is making sure everyone will by the time they are done for the night. Note to self: Sans is perfectly capable of dropping impromptu physics lectures when all you wanted to know was how many hotdogs he could pile on Frisk’s head without them toppling over. In a way, you envy Flowey, who simply rolls his eyes and ditches to go upstairs and play video games as soon as the skeleton starts bringing up mathematical formulae. Instead, you stick around, nodding when it seems appropriate, as the smell of a garlicky marinara wafts in from the kitchen.

Frisk, through the entire process, manages to retain their perfect posture, despite the excitement building in their expression. It is as though they aren’t even breathing. The only sign of movement they give is the occasional blink. Somewhere along the way, Sans starting inserting puns into his lesson. Or, at least you think that is the case; you weren’t paying enough attention to actually process what he was saying as real words, and for all you know, all these things could be real. Unlikely, considering how few puns he has made beforehand and how his shoulders keep shaking as he brings them up, but you have certainly heard stranger things today.

So, so much stranger.

Nope, don’t want to think about that again. You would like to go back to pretending that everything is perfectly normal, that the end of the world isn’t an imminent threat due to the abilities
of the twelve year old standing in front of you, face scrunched up as they try not to sneeze and ruin their progress. You would like to have a normal house visit, and not be forced to stay overnight because of a blizzard.

Apparently, you aren’t going to get what you want anytime soon.

“paps! we’re ready to go for the record!!”

“I’M ON MY WAY! I JUST NEED TO FINISH STRAINING THE PASTA.” A brief clattering in the kitchen, and Papyrus eagerly arrives in the living room. “WHERE’S FLOWEY?”

“Upstairs,” Frisk supplies, only to stick their arms out and freeze as a few pillows wobble. The room is dead silent, everyone holding their breath, until the stack’s equilibrium is restored. A collective exhale, strong enough that it could probably cause the pillows to shift once more, passes.

“Should We Get Him?” Papyrus whispers, and wow, you didn’t think the tall skeleton was capable of being that silent. It is almost like he is scared that his voice might cause the pile to collapse. The more you think about it, the more likely that seems as a scenario.

“I don’t think I can wait that long.”

Sans nods. “i guess here goes nothing. ready?”

“Ready,” Frisk confirms. Papyrus takes out his phone, probably to document the moment.

The record breaking pillow is a simple yellow throw pillow. Sans picks it up, turning it over in his hands. With a soft hum, he decides on how he wants to place it. He climbs onto the couch, which allows him a better view of the top of the stack. Ever so slowly, he reaches out. Nearby, Papyrus is practically vibrating in excitement. You can only imagine how shaky his camera is right now. Not that you are much better, though. Leaning forward, your eyes are wide, still struggling to believe that this is even happening.

The pillow is only inches away.

It gets closer.

Closer.

It hovers over the top of the tower.

You take a deep breath.

Sans lets go.

…

“VICTO—”

The stack collapses before Papyrus can finish his cheer.

Four sets of eyes all stare at the pillows littering Frisk’s feet in disappointment. Papyrus taps a finger against his phone and puts it in his pocket with a sigh.

“welp. that happened.”

“Does… did that count?” You mean, technically, they did achieve a new record of fifteen pillows.
It just didn’t stay for very long.

Frisk tilts their head, considering the question. “Sans?”

He shrugs, bouncing down to a seated position. “eh, why not?”

Well, at least you can qualify that as a win for the day. Yay.

Chapter End Notes

Can I just take a moment to say how much I enjoyed laughing maniacally at your reactions to the last chapter? Although, it was bold of some of you to assume that I would dare throw all this away for a Reset. Load, maybe, but Reset? I would cry, tbh. So much work would feel lost.

Surely, nothing interesting will happen now that Bubbles is staying the night, right? Right? Right?

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
The Suspenseful Sleepover

Chapter Summary

You endure your impromptu sleepover in New New Home.

Chapter Notes

Fun fact: this was originally supposed to be combined with the last chapter, until I saw how freaking long it was getting and decided to slice it up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Once the pillows are shoved out of the way, Papyrus proclaims that supper is ready. He has Frisk run up to get Flowey while you and Sans assist in bringing everything to the living room. Since all the chairs are already there with the pillow fort preparations, it had been decided that you would all just eat in there tonight. Besides, the general consensus was that there would be no point in returning the chairs to the kitchen to eat, only to have to drag them back.

As much as you would like to enjoy Papyrus’ spaghetti, you simply can’t manage. You poke at the plate in your lap, trying not to show your unease. As much as you recognise the nausea that has been mildly present since finding out about the Resets, you haven’t actually needed to pay it any heed until now. It isn’t like you can do anything about it. You don’t want to explain why you aren’t hungry, as you would be forced to share your knowledge or to think of a lie. And the only lies you can think of right now would be to feign the flu or something, which would only cause more concern. Besides, the logical part of your brain insists that you need to eat something, even if your queasiness makes the thought of eating less than pleasant.

Carefully, you choke down the first bites, hoping not to grimace. In theory, this should be a great meal. Certainly, it far surpasses the first bowl of spaghetti Papyrus presented you. This one has the perfect savoury smell, a delicate sprinkling of parmesan to top the sauce. The noodles even look homemade, for goodness sake! One could take a picture of it to display in a cooking magazine. Be that as it may, you might as well be chewing on cardboard, or perhaps a damp ball of yarn.

If it is any consolation, Sans doesn’t seem to be doing much better than you at the moment. Ever since the pillow stacking collapse, he has been weirdly zoned out. When you sat down beside him, he wouldn’t stop staring. At first, you wondered if you had spilled something on yourself. However, you dismissed that notion almost immediately; Sans would be the last person in the house to notice a stain.

But why was he staring?

Scratch that. Why is he still staring at you?

At this point, it can’t be that you have made some sort of faux pas. Surely, someone would inform you if that is the case. As far as you can tell, you aren’t eating any differently than the others. Can he tell that you aren’t hungry? Possibly. But that wouldn’t warrant all this attention.
You take a sip of water, hoping it will help the pasta go down easier. It does, but not by much. On the bright side, no one has expected you or Sans to contribute to the conversation for the past little bit. The other three have been yammering about video games for a solid five minutes, too occupied to notice any weirdness from your end.

And man, is that a good thing right now, because there is a lot of it going on.

Part of you is wondering if Sans is simply in the same boat as you with the Reset dilemma. It seems pretty obvious that he had no plans about sharing this information with you. Understandable, in your opinion, as much as you wish he hadn’t hidden such important information from you. Even if he were to omit some of the darker details, it would probably spell trouble.

Today, you discovered a vulnerability. One that would normally put an end to this process. Except, none of this is normal. In fact, you can confidently say that this specific situation is entirely unprecedented in the legal system. Not that this argument would do any good.

Although, the idea of trying to defend this point to Judge Andrews is almost amusing enough to bring a smile to your face.

Almost.

Getting back to the topic at hand, though, Sans is probably just as scared that you will say something as you are that he or Flowey will tell Frisk. Yes, there was the implied, non-verbal agreement the two of you had not to discuss it, but that doesn’t necessarily mean much moving forward. Now that you think of it, this situation could probably count as an example of mutually assured destruction. If you say something, Frisk Resets. If he says something, Frisk Resets. But, if neither of you act upon your knowledge, life should go on just fine.

Well, as fine as it gets.

“SANS?”

The couch jostles slightly as someone jumps at Papyrus’ voice, startled to attention. That someone, as life would have it, turns out to be you, and not the individual who was explicitly named. Sans is still spaced out, chewing his pasta slowly. And staring at you. Or maybe past you. In any case, his eye lights are still focused in your direction instead of his brother’s.

Blinking slowly to hide an eyeroll, you gently tap his shoulder. “Sans.”

He shudders briefly, eyes widening. “huh?” Before you can grouse that it was Papyrus who wanted to get his attention and not you, he shakes his head. “sorry bro, i was just enjoying supper. what’s up?”

“I WAS JUST WONDERING WHAT YOU AND MISS SOCIAL WORKER WERE UP TO BEFORE YOU CAME TO GET US.”

You can feel the blood drain from your face. Someone is going to have to come up with another lie, and you really don’t want that person to be you.

“Yeah, Sansy, what were you doing?” If looks could kill, Flowey would have been murdered by two people then and there. Good to know that he isn’t going to be helping.

Slowly, Sans places his fork on his plate. Glancing down, you notice that he has it pinched between his thumb and index finger. Puzzled, you furrow your brow slightly, only to notice how, even after letting go of the fork, he keeps his hand in that shape. Then, it clicks; Sans is making an
okay sign.

You are choosing to trust him on this, then. If all of this backfires, he can officially bear the blame.

“we were just talking.”

Is that seriously all he’s going with? You could have said that!

“ABOUT WHAT?”

“not much, honestly,” he shrugs noncommittally. “the weather snowed up in our conversation. i taught her up to date about the school’s repairs. I—”

“ARE YOU JUST GOING TO ANSWER WITH PUNS?” Sans gives a false innocent grin, as if to ask ‘who, me?’, causing Papyrus to groan, exasperated. “NEVERMIND. I DON’T WANT TO KNOW ANYMORE.”

Huh. You would have never thought of annoying Papyrus into changing the topic. As a strategy, it is weirdly effective. You also have no doubts that this isn’t the first time Sans has employed it. He was too smooth not to.

You finish eating without a single other hitch, which is a relief. You are not prepared, however, for the chaos that is Papyrus’ pillow fort constructing mode. Yes, it is controlled chaos — he brought out a binder of fort layouts for Frisk and Flowey to choose from — but it is still chaos nonetheless. The Mettaton action movie running in the background pales in comparison.

Your senses are at constant alert; accidentally getting hit in the face by a pillow once is more than enough for you. Sans has disappeared from sight, although not through his normal means of teleportation. No, you just can’t see him anymore because at least three blankets have landed on top of him. Now, all that remains is a vague lump on the other end of the couch.

“Hey,” Frisk says, stepping to the side to clear a path for Flowey to roll through, “do you think you can help us?”

“I don’t know, it looks like you’ve all got it covered.”

The blanket lump shifts slightly. “ayyyyy!” Papyrus sends a sharp glare to his brother, strong enough that Sans likely can feel it despite being hidden under all his layers.

“Please?” For good measure, they add some puppy eyes to their plea, not that it will impact your decision.

Still…

You know what: why not? You should probably do something other than sit on the couch tonight. “Sure, Frisk, I’ll help.”

“Great!” They offer a hand to help you up, which you reluctantly accept. “Sans, you’re helping too!”

Already yanked halfway off the couch by Frisk, he acquiesces, “whatever you say, kid.” The clatter of his bones hitting the ground is muffled by the blankets.

With Flowey having left for upstairs, Papyrus assigns you the job of making sure the fort’s floor is comfortable. Naturally, Sans offers to help “test” this. Translation: he just lays on the ground,
offering critiques in the form of puns. Surprise, surprise.

You really don’t understand what happens next. One second, you are tucking the bottom of a grey quilt under a pillow. Next thing you know, Frisk is giggling and you are swaddled into a fuzzy blanket with Sans and how the hell did that just happen? Like, did you black out for a minute or something? How? Also, why isn’t Sans reacting at all?

The soft snoring against your ear answers that last question.

You shift awkwardly, trying to get away from Sans without waking him up. You are unsuccessful on both counts. If anything, you accidentally got closer to him. Now, you are stuck staring straight into his eye sockets, way closer than you should ever be with a client. His eye lights look oddly fuzzy, like when the moon is partially obscured on a hazy night. Sockets wide, he starts wiggling away, probably cluing into your extreme proximity. You grunt when his elbow shoves into your stomach. Ugh, to think you have complained about Ivy having bony elbows; those are nothing compared to actual bones, protected only by a blue hoodie.

To your relief, Papyrus comes to your rescue. “THIS IS QUITE THE INTERESTING ENTANGLEMENT. FRISK, YOU WILL HAVE TO TEACH ME SO I CAN ADD IT TO A FUTURE PUZZLE.”

“uh, paps?”

“What?” Sans gives his brother a pointed look. “AH. RIGHT. AHEM. FRISK, YOUR BEHAVIOR HERE WAS RATHER IMPOLITE. YOU SHOULD APOLOGIZE TO SANS AND MISS SOCIAL WORKER.”

“Sorry.” Without missing a beat, they announce, “I want hot chocolate,” and head to the kitchen.

“Well then.” Papyrus shakes his head, humming as he finishes unraveling the blanket. “THERE YOU GO.”

“Thank you.” You scooch away from Sans, grateful for the space. As you stand up, you notice how stiff your back feels. You stretch, sighing in relief at the series of pops which result from it. Man, is that satisfying.

“eep!”

“Are… are you okay?” Putting that weird squeak aside, Sans’ skull is glowing so brightly blue that if you shoved him outside, he could serve as a makeshift beacon to help people find their way home in the blizzard.

“y-yeah.” He coughs after that voice crack. “don’t worry about it.”

That doesn’t sound convincing, but you don’t want to argue about it. You have got enough stuff on your mind to worry about tonight, anyways. “If you say so.”

With a hot chocolate milk mustache decorating their face, Frisk returns from the kitchen, carrying two mugs. “Here,” they beam, handing you the fuller one, “I made this just for you!”

“Thank you, Frisk.” You don’t bring yourself to drink it. Not yet. “The, uh, marshmallow smiley face was a nice touch.”

“Thanks!” They chug down the rest of theirs.
“so paps, what’s next on the sleepover itinerary?”

“BROTHER, I AM SO GLAD YOU ASKED! FIRST, WE WILL ALL NEED TO CHANGE INTO OUR PYJAMAS SO WE CAN PROPERLY ENJOY THE EXPERIENCE! THEN, ACCORDING TO MY RESEARCH, WE WILL BE PUTTING ON A NEW MOVIE, BUT WITH POPCORN THIS TIME! SOMEONE SHOULD ALSO FIND FLOWEY, BECAUSE WE WOULDN’T WANT HIM TO MISS OUT ON ANYTHING.”

“I’ve got it!” Slamming their blessedly now empty mug on the coffee, they take the stairs two at a time. “Flowey,” you hear them call out, before slamming their bedroom door.

Papyrus not mentioning the hair braiding again is appreciated on your part. Maybe Frisk wouldn’t mind, but, as the only other person with hair here, you would rather everyone stay out of it. Literally and metaphorically. You do have a new problem, however. One you should have thought of ever since you were told you would have to stay overnight.

“I hate to impose,” you start, like you haven’t been imposing all night, “but is there any chance I would be able to borrow something to wear as pyjamas?” Needless to say, that isn’t something you tend to pack in your car when you go to work.

“CERTAINLY! WHAT KIND OF HOST WOULD I BE IF I DIDN’T ENSURE THAT ALL MY GUESTS HAVE PROPER SLEEPWEAR? A NOT-SO-GREAT ONE, THAT’S WHAT. SANS, CAN I ENTRUST YOU TO FINDING SOMETHING SUITABLE FOR MISS SOCIAL WORKER? I WOULD DO IT, BUT POPCORN ALSO HAS TO BE MADE, AND I REFUSE TO ALLOW YOU TO DRENCH IT IN GREASE.”

“bro, most people put butter on it. it’s normal.”

“SORRY FOR HAVING STANDARDS. EXCEPT, I AM NOT AT ALL SORRY FOR THIS. I AM PROUD OF MY INCREDIBLY HIGH STANDARDS, AS THEY ARE PART OF WHAT MAKES ME SO GREAT!”

“They sure do, bro.” His eye lights scan you up and down, and the slightest bit of heat travels to your face. You know he simply needs to estimate your size to find some options, but the way his gaze lingers… No, he is just assessing your size. After all, he has the job of finding a happy medium between him and Papyrus, which is probably going to require some mix and match. With one last glance, he takes a step, disappearing from sight.

You take a sip of hot chocolate while you wait. The extreme sweetness makes your teeth feel fuzzy already; Frisk used way too much powder. Is there any chance that they have an unopened toothbrush you could borrow? If not, you will have to resort to desperate measures. And by desperate measures, you probably mean squeezing some toothpaste on your finger, but still.

“here.” Sans barely waits to shortcut back into the living room before shoving a bundle of clothes into your hands. “feel free to change in the bathroom.”

“Thank y— and he’s gone.”

Exhaustion truly starts to steep in as you trudge over to the bathroom. Mechanically, you change into the dark hoodie and sweatpants. Your yawns seem louder with the acoustics, which only makes you want to yawn more.

By the time you wander back, everyone is ready to go. Even Flowey looks sleepy — albeit a little grumpy — with a small blanket draped over his pot. Ushering you to the middle of the fort,
Papyrus hands out individual bowls of popcorn and starts the movie. To no one’s surprise, it is another Mettaton featured picture.

As the opening number starts, you snuggle into the blankets around you. Say what you may about his process, but Papyrus sure knows how to construct a comfortable fort. You place your bowl aside, allowing Flowey to steal it for himself.

Ever so slowly, you drift off to sleep, thoughts of Resets and time-manipulating children far from mind.

Chapter End Notes

Frisk: not so subtly trying to get people together since the Underground.

(Papyrus may or may not have covertly taken a picture or two of the blanket burrito to send to a certain friend for intel. Or to use against his brother as blackmail. Again, there is no proof one way or the other...)

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time for updates, to talk or to find out some of my random, mostly sleep-deprived thoughts.
Reflection

Chapter Summary

Sans has many feelings about you being stuck at his house overnight.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

For the first time in years, Sans is still awake by the time the end credits of Mettaton and Me roll. Normally, he would have been out like those lanterns in Waterfall by the first time Mettaton monologues with himself.

But this certainly isn’t the case tonight.

Everything feels out of whack. Stars, he knew sitting down to rest his eyes was a mistake. He should have known better! With Flowey around, subtly taunting him about the Resets, nightmares have been becoming a more and more frequent phenomenon. Should it be a surprise that his subconscious betrayed him by bringing forth those pseudo-memories when you showed up?

Still, you handled everything… surprisingly well. The fact that you even gave him the chance to explain himself was more than what Sans would have expected. There is no way to get around the fact of how awful the situation must have looked. Even monsters, who are used to combat magic, would have probably been freaked out by the display. You, on the other hand, are a human, who has rarely seen magic used for anything, let alone for things Asgore has advised the monster population against doing in public since reaching the Surface.

In your sleep, you let out a soft breath, unknowingly stirring closer to Sans. He stiffens. Is this how you felt when the kid managed to swaddle you and him together? No, probably not. You were probably uncomfortable being squished with him; you sure as hell didn’t sign up for that. Sans may be feeling some mild discomfort right now, but for a very different reason. His magic rushes through his body, Soul screaming at the close proximity to his Soulmate. Stars, you probably can’t even feel it!

As much as he hates it, Sans scooches away from you. It is for the best.

Besides, it isn’t like he didn’t get the chance to get close earlier. That sure was an emotional rollercoaster to wake up to. Confusion as to how and where he was moved, panic as he realised he was confined, calm when he clued into the fact that he was in a blanket in his living room and finally, an emotion that can best be described as AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA when he realised he was touching his Soulmate. In the least creepy way possible, of course. If his thought process was a computer, in that moment, the software decided to freeze up entirely, rendering the rest of him useless.

And all that was before you cracked your back, making him painfully aware of your spine with each individual pop. Of course, that got him thinking: could he possibly feel your vertebrae under your skin, if he was to touch? What about your other bones? Sure, he has shaken your hand before, and fingers aren’t as fleshy as other parts of the body. However, that doesn’t tell him about your vertebrae, or your ribcage, or your…
Okay, that is a train of thought that needs to die. Shoot it with a blaster, hide the remains in the lava of Hotland, never to be seen again. It was bad enough the first time, thanks very much. Sans doesn’t need his younger bro — or worst yet, Flowey — to ask why he is blushing.

Besides, even if he was to write it off his desire to touch you as scientific curiosity or something, there is definitely some sort of creep factor there. And there is no way in the Underground or on the Surface that he wants to try to explain that one.

Not even if there is a high chance of Flowey telling Frisk what happened, ending tomorrow before it gets a chance to exist.

Might as well savour each moment before the kid Resets.

The last of the credits and Mettaton's awful, tinny singing — Alphys made a fantastic decision when she made those adjustments to his in-body mics — comes to an end. Ever so carefully, Paps scoops up Frisk, who is mostly asleep, to take them up to their room, blankets and all. Frisk makes grabby arms down towards Flowey, whose petals have started to curl into his face. If it weren’t for the fact that it is the weed, Sans might have said that it is sweet. But, nah. Papyrus obliges and bends down, allowing Frisk to scoop up the flowerpot’s occupant before being carried up to bed.

“Goodnight Brother. Sleep Well.”

“you too. hey. try to be quiet if you wake up at your normal time tomorrow, okay?” Sans gestures at you, and Papyrus nods.

“Of Course. I Will Be Most Considerate Of Miss Social Worker’s Sleep. Was It Just Me, Or Did She Seem More Stressed Than Normal?”

“eh, probably just the whole weather thing,” he lies through his teeth. “don’t worry about it.”

“Alrighty. Goodnight.”

“night.”

With a groan, Sans pushes himself up to a seated position, the first step to getting out of the fort. You mumble something incoherent at the movement, pulling a quilt up to your chin as you snuggle deeper into the nest of pillows. His Soul reacts with warm fuzzies and what the hell? He didn’t sign up for this! He needs to try to keep himself calm and collected with everything going on. How can he destroy the warm fuzzies?

“dear soul,” Sans mutters under his breath, “get with the program. you aren’t allowed to do this right now.”

Apparently, that comment is enough to wake you up a bit. “Whhh?”

“shhh,” he murmurs, gently stroking your head the same way he used to for Papyrus when he was little and couldn’t sleep (some things never change). He tries to ignore how his Soul flutters with little butterflies at the comforting action. “go back to sleep.”

“M’kay.” Without protest, you nuzzle yourself even deeper into the pillows and, okay, it is a good thing you are too out of it to notice any abnormalities on his part, because it is going to be impossible for him to remain even the slightest bit professional when you do cute things like that.

Sans would like to go back to not caring, please. It is a lot easier than trying to tiptoe around all these emotions, dammit.
Despite the huge small part of him that wants to stay with you all night, the logical part of his mind insists that it would be a mistake. Reluctantly, he gets up to turn off the tv, gathering empty bowls and mugs as he goes. With great care, he places them in the sink, not wanting to make a clatter that will disturb you. One of the bowls still has a few unpopped kernels left, which he promptly disposes in the garbage. They clink against the shards of glass from his broken cup.

Stars, is Sans ever glad that that was the only damage from earlier.

At least, the only visible damage.

Is it weird how much of a relief it was that your more negative emotions were directed at Frisk tonight, instead of him? Probably. But in his defense, there is probably some kind of biomagical explanation stating that as your Soulmate, his Soul gets uncomfortable when yours projects displeasure or something. Sans sure as hell doesn't know; as much as he likes to consider himself well-versed in how Souls work, he has to admit most of his knowledge pertains to his Judgements. If anyone could give him an answer on this, it would be Alphys, and he certainly isn’t bringing her into this. Ignoring the fact that she would tell Undyne about you and him, who would then tell Papyrus and Frisk, he also would like to avoid her shipping.

Stars above, that is the last thing he needs right now. He has enough of his own bullshit to deal with; he can't add becoming Alphys' next OTP to that list.

Welp, he should be going to sleep now. In his own bed, obviously. Sans shortcuts directly there, only to frown at his bare mattress.

Right.

Frisk raided the house for all the blankets and pillows. If they managed to find a baby blanket that was stored away who knows where, they obviously took all his things too. It looks like he needs to make a quick trip back to the living room.

Finding a blanket he can grab without waking you up is going to be a challenge. Pillows are easy; there is one beside your foot that should work well. However, Papyrus‘ clever placement of everything is not easily undone. You, of course, are using a decent amount. But if memory serves him correctly, removing blankets from the walls or the roof of the fort tends to be an ordeal. Intricate knotting keeps everything together, attached in ways that ensure structural integrity. Maybe the scratchy quilt near the edge of the couch? Sans gives it a small tug, but it doesn’t budge. Squinting in the darkness of the room, he realises that you are curled up on top of it.

Welp. That’s it; there is no way this is going to work. Sans simply can’t risk bothering you. He should be able to find a large, fluffy towel for tonight. That is basically the same thing, right?

It takes a few minutes of searching before he is able to sprawl out on his bed and go to sleep. Except, there is a small problem. As tired as he is, and as much as he desires sleep, he can’t. What is with that? He has joked about being able to sleep on command, for Asgore’s sake, and it was never much of an exaggeration. Tonight, he couldn't even manage under the ideal circumstances of watching a movie while he was comfy and warm!

Why does his Soul have to be such a mess because of your presence right now? It isn’t like anything has actually changed; even if he didn’t know it until recently, you were always his Soulmate. Theoretically, he should be reacting no differently than if this had occurred months ago.

Frustrated, Sans hides his head into his pillow. If he waits long enough, he should hopefully wake up to sunlight streaming through the edge of his curtains. If not, he will wake up in Snowdin, but
the point is still that he will get some sleep eventually. He can be patient.

...  

...  

...  

Yeah, it doesn’t look like he is going to be sleeping anytime soon. Not while you are still here.

The question is, what to do now?

He needs something to occupy his mind. The lab is out; that is just asking for him to make dozens of mistakes to correct later. Watching tv is also out, for obvious reasons. Thanks to the weather, it isn’t even like Sans can go to Grillby’s. If he were his brother, he would probably take the opportunity to get some cleaning done. He rolls over, taking in the various piles of clean laundry, dirty laundry, dishes, books… nope. That’s not happening tonight, no matter how much he may need something to do.

What else would Papyrus do? Go for a run? No, even he would agree it is too late for that, and the weather is unsafe. Clean? Wait, he already decided against that. Come on…

What about cooking? Normally, Sans leaves the kitchen to Pap, especially now with how he has improved with Grillby’s lessons, but it could be nice. Give him something to occupy his hands and thoughts. As long as he follows a recipe, he should be good. Plus, it would give Paps a break from making breakfast for once. With everything else going on, it might be nice for him.

The question, however, is what can he make that he can’t destroy? Hot dogs? No, even though you seemed to tolerate the one you bought, Paps has spent years complaining about how they “AREN'T A TRUE BREAKFAST FOOD”. Coffee? Well, he can make that, but he can’t just have that as the only thing to serve. Plus, he definitely shouldn’t make that now. He’s still got Tori’s pie recipe, but that also isn’t supposed to be for breakfast, no matter how good it tastes in the morning. Plus, he doesn’t want to get the quiche rant again.

Quiche. That would work. But what to put in it? Eggs, he guesses, but that one is a given, like saying that he will put bread in a sandwich. Heh, if he is making a sandwich, does that make it a sans-wich? Yes, yes it does. He needs to remember that one for later. Papyrus will hate it.

Concentrate.

So, quiche. Papyrus went shopping with Frisk yesterday afternoon, so he should have lots of options. In some ways, he has too many options. He could make a plain quiche, with just eggs and cheese. But he could also add vegetables, or chop up some meat. Hell, if he looks up some recipes, he could probably come up with some more choices.

But what if you don’t like them? He has no idea as to your tastes in food. For all he knows, you could be allergic to broccoli or something! On the other hand, what if broccoli is your favourite food? He would have had the chance to make something with your favourite food and blown it!

Okay, this is getting ridiculous. First of all, what are the chances that your favourite food is broccoli? Statistically speaking, it seems unlikely. Also, this isn’t helping him deal with you being here.

Sans takes a deep breath before shortcutting down to the kitchen to start looking for supplies. Later, he can decide on what flavour to try.
Later.

While he looks for a pie pan, a mini muffin tin tumbles to the floor. With a gasp, he lunges forward, reaching out with his magic to catch it. At the absolute last possible second, he does, ribs rapidly expanding and contracting from the rush. Not even an inch above the ground, the tin hovers, surrounded by blue. He raises his hand, prepared to float it back up to its home in the cupboard, only to let it hover at eye level as he is struck by an idea.

What about mini quiches?

That way, he can make several different kinds. Surely, you would like at least one of them.

Yeah, he can do this!

Chapter End Notes


Also, who needs sleep when you can mass produce mini quiches, am I right? (No, I'm not right. Don't stay up all night making mini quiches. Please value your sleep.)

Speaking of the whole breakfast thing... It's actually based on something my dad did on what could be argued to be my parents' first date (they aren't really sure, since they have multiple outings that could probably qualify). He decided to put on an Easter picnic for some friends who didn't have family in the area, and it turned out that my mom was the only one able to go. The day of, he made probably 5 different kinds of sandwiches along with all the other food he had made, just in case my mom didn't like any of the other flavours. Coincidentally, this was when he clued into the fact that he liked her. Also, whenever my dad can't sleep, he bakes.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time for updates, to talk or to find out some of my random, mostly sleep-deprived thoughts.
The morning after your impromptu sleepover.

The scent of freshly made coffee wafts in from the kitchen. Even if it is early, you cannot help but be enticed by the promise of some good, hot liquid energy, so you decide to get up, throwing up the hood of the borrowed hoodie to hide any bedhead.

“Good morning,” you croak blearily, squinting as you wait for your eyes to adjust to the brightness of the kitchen. Ugh, it is too early to technically be at work.

“mornin’.” Sans turns away from you, pulling on a large set of red oven mitts and taking a tray of food out of the oven. He places it on an empty burner to cool. “did you have a good sleep?”

“Yes. Thank you.” Suppressing a yawn (or three), you take a good glance around the room. “What are you making?”

“right now, cinnamon rolls. i just finished my last batch of muffins. there’s, uh, also some mini quiche over there.” Following where he points, you can say that ‘some’ is an understatement; you
personally see several recreations of Mt Ebott using bite sized quiches. “oh, and there’s coffee or tea if you’d want.”

“Thanks,” you manage to say relatively collectedly. On the inside, you are wanting to dance and sing in celebration. Of course, you don’t; that reaction requires an amount of energy you don’t currently possess. Instead, you wait for Sans to show you which cupboard the mugs are in, and pour yourself something to drink.

Quietly, you move to stand by the table; you would sit down, but the chairs are still being used for the pillow fort. And leaning against a counter, as comfortable as it could be, just feels a bit too informal. It is bad enough that you are stuck wearing borrowed clothes as pyjamas.

As cliché as it is, it seems like the perfect small talk, given the circumstances. “What’s the weather looking like this morning?”

Sans waves a hand back and forth, using the other to adjust the temperature on the oven. “meh. it’s looking better than last night, but that doesn’t really mean much. it’s still pretty gross out. tori called already, saying that school’s cancelled.”

“Really?”

“yeah. i mean, i’m a skeleton, the cold —”

“— goes right through you,” you finish. “I know.”

Sans’ smile grows. “i was going to say that it doesn’t really affect me, but yeah. the point is, me and paps find it miserable out right now, and we lived in snowdin. if it’s bad enough for us to want to stay inside, there’s no way monsters from other areas, especially hotland, would be able to make it safely. better to give the kids a day off than have a bunch of them get sick or something.”

“I see.” Leaving your half empty mug on the table, you go to examine all the quiches. Up close, you can see slight differences between each stack. “What kinds are these?”

“i can tell you eggs-actly what they are,” Sans says, moving close beside you. “the ones here on the left are just your standard egg and cheese. then, you’ve got —”

The kitchen door swings open, bringing a very sprightly Papyrus through the door.

“OH, GOOD MORNING, MISS SOCIAL WORKER.” And to think you thought his voice was loud at the best of times; now, as you are still trying to wake up fully, it seems even more blaring than normal. Clearly, Papyrus is a morning person. Or, you suppose, an all-day person, considering he sounds like this regardless of what time of day it is. “I SEE THAT YOU, LIKE MYSELF, CAN APPRECIATE GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR DAY BY STARTING IT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.”

“… sure.” You currently don’t have the energy to disagree with that statement; let him think what he wants.

Papyrus makes his way towards his brother like a monster on a mission. Picking him up into a rib crushing hug (dammit, you are accidentally punning already and you haven’t even had breakfast yet), Papyrus continues, “AND SANS! YOU’RE UP TOO?!?! DID I JUST WAKE UP IN SOME KIND OF STRANGE ALTERNATE UNIVERSE WHERE I AM SOMEHOW THE LAZY ONE, OR DID YOU FINALLY FOLLOW MY EXAMPLE TO BE A PRODUCTIVE MEMBER OF SOCIETY?”
“as far as i can tell, it’s a glitch in the system,” Sans jokes.

“ALAS! HOW UNFORTUNATE. AT LEAST I CAN ALWAYS HOPE THAT THIS GLITCH REMAINS A PERMANENT PART OF THE SOFTWARE THAT IS LIFE.”

“deep, bro.”

“THANK YOU,” Papyrus proclaims with a flourish. “I TRY.”

You take the first sip of your coffee, sighing silently. That’s the good stuff. Papyrus grabs a plate, then passes a second to you. Buffet style, you walk around the kitchen, grabbing what food you want for breakfast. With Papyrus’ firm prompting, you also add some fresh fruit to your plate. It is your own fault, really: you told him that during your home visits, you would abide by the rules of the house, and one of those rules just happens to be to eat a balanced breakfast.

Still, you can’t help but hide a childish scowl when he reminds you that humans need to eat lots of fruits and vegetables, pointedly staring at you until you place an orange and some grapes beside your cinnamon buns.

“I’M GOING TO HAVE TO CANCEL MY RUN THIS MORNING,” he says, cutting his already bite sized quiche into smaller pieces. “IS THERE ANY CHANCE I CAN BORROW YOUR TREADMILL?”

“i dunno, can you?”

Papyrus groans. “HONESTLY, YOU ARE INSUFFERABLE, BUT FINE. MAY I BORROW YOUR TREADMILL?”

“go for it, dude.”

You pause mid bite, a question popping into mind. “Wait. Sans is the one with the treadmill?” Disbelief colours your tone, but you think it is justified.

“YES. I GOT IT FOR HIM YEARS AGO AS AN ENCOURAGING PRESENT, BUT ALL HE USES IT FOR IS PRANKS AND JAPERY!” His frustration is obvious, accentuated as Papyrus gestures dramatically at his brother with his fork.

“yeah, it’s a bit of a running joke.” Okay, Papyrus walked into that one.

“SANS!”

“you ran right into that one, bro.”

You laugh. Strangely in sync, both brothers turn in to face you. “REALLY, MISS SOCIAL WORKER?” Papyrus pouts, looking surprisingly dejected by your reaction.

“I’m sorry,” you say between chuckles, “it’s just the timing of that one. I had just thought the same thing.”

“well, you know what they say.” You mentally prepare yourself for the upcoming pun. “great minds think alike.” Wait, where’s the pun in that? He was supposed to make another pun, right? “coffee?”

Still thrown by the relative lack of punning, you shrug. “Sure, thanks.” You could use a refill.

The coffee pot is passed to you, still nice and hot, perfect for the current weather. Mid pour, an all
too familiar song blares from the pocket of your borrowed hoodie, startling you into spilling some coffee on the counter. Quickly, you set the pot down and grab your phone, silencing your morning alarm. You wince when you see how low the battery is sitting.

"Sorry about that. I forgot to turn off my work alarm last night, it seems. Is there any chance there's a spare charger I could possibly borrow?"

Papyrus leans in, taking a closer look at your phone. "I BELIEVE WE DO. JUST GIVE ME A MINUTE." As he speeds off, you marvel at how soundless Papyrus can be when he wants. If you didn't know any better, you would say he just used a shortcut.

"hey," Sans says, walking over with a dishcloth to clean up your spill. You take it from him; it was your mess, after all. "you might wanna call your boss, or whatever you need to do. i dunno when you normally get to work, but i'm pretty sure you won't be on time today."

"Good call." Once you finish with the rag, you open your email, easily typing in a message. "Out of curiosity, when do you think is the earliest I could leave?" You would look it up yourself, but that requires internet. You open up your email, typing a message to François with ease. Near the end, you pause, uncertain. "Sans?"

“yeah?”

“Do you have any idea as to the earliest I could make it back to Ebott?” Ideally, you would like to give your boss an approximate timeframe, and it sounds like Sans has already checked the forecast.

“probably some time after lunch, just to play it safe. might be able to get you there faster, but the roads'll be awful."

"All right," you say as you type. Just before you hit send, you edit your phrasing. Despite extenuating circumstances, you would rather not spell out the fact that you stayed at a client's house overnight to your boss. Let him think you stayed at a hotel. "Thank you."

"no problem." He takes back the dishcloth and tosses it into the sink. It is a near miss, but he technically makes it. The cloth may shimmer with blue magic, something you doubt most humans would notice as it diverts it away from the floor at the last second, but what is important is that Sans put in the effort.

Footsteps thunder down the stairs. Sans clears his throat and holds up a hand. Steadily, he counts up to five.

"HERE YOU ARE!"

Papyrus bursts into the room, a yawning Frisk riding piggyback. Frisk waves and reaches down to hand you a charger.

“Thanks. Where’s Flowey?”

“HE IS STILL IN BED.” You wait for Sans to make the inevitable flower bed joke, but it surprisingly doesn’t come. Huh. Then again, he is currently preoccupied taking more cinnamon buns out of the oven.

Frisk climbs down off Papyrus’ back. “Flowey says the cold makes him sleepy,” they explain. You nod; it makes sense, you suppose, that a flower feels extra tired in the winter. Then again, that is also applying normal plant logic to a talking flower, so you don’t know where that gets you.
It doesn’t take long for Frisk to drag you into watching morning cartoons with them. During a commercial break, you have the bright idea to get back into your own clothes, which you had the foresight to neatly fold last night. Simply changing out of the hoodie and sweatpants — as soft and comfortable as they may be — brings a sense of relief. Like you have more control over the situation. At the very least, it adds a sense of normalcy, being here in New New Home. If you pretend, it is like you just had to reschedule a visit. Nothing more.

You toss your borrowed clothes into the hamper in the corner of the bathroom. A splash of water on the face and some strategic adjustments to your hair, and you officially feel good to go.

"so…" Sans starts once you return.

"So?"

"i checked into road conditions. things are slow on the highway, and there’s still a lot of snow, but it’s apparently doable now."

“All right.” That sounds like your cue to go, you guess. “Thanks again for being so accommodating.”

“any time.” Sans opens his mouth, then closes it again, hesitating. He smiles and runs a hand over his skull. “do you want me to go with you?”

You blink, confused. “I’m sorry?”

“just as a safety measure. i can shortcut back to new new home once you’re wherever you need to be, but if something happens, you won’t be alone. plus, i could always bring you back here if need be.”

You consider the offer. It honestly isn’t the worst idea in the world. Driving in winter is always a bit unnerving, especially for longer distances. If your car dies on the middle of the highway, you would be stuck in the freezing cold waiting for a tow. And that is ignoring the increased potential for getting into an accident because of poor driving conditions.

Oh, why not? Better safe than sorry, right?

“Yes, that would be appreciated.” Biting the inside of your cheek, you sneak a quick glance to the kitchen. It is almost noon, and you certainly don’t have the time to return home and pack something to eat for lunch at the office. “I don’t want to impose, but is there any chance I could take some of those quiches to go? They were quite good.”

If you were paying better attention, you would see Sans’ eye lights briefly flicker into little hearts.

“sure thing.”

Chapter End Notes

It looks like we're going on a road trip!

Sorry to disappoint those of you who wanted a morning cuddle pile (myself included). Even if I had thought of that before this, the timing just wasn't right.
So, I know that I don't need to apologise for updates being slower than usual (you guys are so supportive and understanding, and you don't know how much I appreciate it), but I have a feeling my brain is going to keep yelling at me if I don't.

There's a lot of things going on right now, which has affected how much I can write. I'm currently adapting to a new schedule, thanks to getting an internship that I wanted, but that means I'm also a bit more tired than normal. Add to that some health issues, and I just haven't had the same amount of time I normally do.

Also, updates will continue to be slightly less frequent for an indefinite time, as I made the impulsive decision to start a new fic, which you can find ~here~. So far, I've been trying to alternate between this one and that one, but sometimes I get stuck on a specific plot point. What can you do?

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
Feelings

Chapter Summary

Sans accompanies you to Ebott, much to his Soul's delight.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

_You think his quiches are good!_

This thought won’t stop running through Sans’ head. From the moment he joins you in the kitchen to grab a container to put them in to now, while he sits on the couch, it just keeps repeating and repeating.

You left about a minute ago, claiming that you need to let your car warm up for a bit before you can leave. Papyrus nodded understandingly, and he has always liked cars, so it is probably legit. That is the one thing about his shortcuts; even since reaching the Surface, he has never seen the need to know about car stuff when he has enough magic most days to simply blip wherever he wants.

Well, most of the time. Today, for example, is an exception, but that is fine with him.

If he had been able to shortcut back home, you wouldn’t have needed to stay the night, and Sans would have never discovered that _you think his quiches are good!_

A cinnamon bun smacks him on the side of his skull, snapping his attention to an impishly smiling Frisk. “what’s with that, kiddo? i didn’t know we were having a food fight.”

“We’re not. Papyrus was trying to talk, but you weren’t listening.” In other words, Frisk decided to take advantage of him not paying attention to chuck food at him, knowing there was a chance he wouldn’t dodge their hit for once. At least they chose something soft. The apple sitting on their plate, though… Yikes.

“huh. sorry bro.”

"I FORGIVE YOU, BROTHER, DESPITE HOW REGULAR OF AN OCCURRENCE THIS IS BECOMING." Sans nods, reaching beside him for the sweet projectile. No point in wasting it, even if the icing is covered in couch fuzz. Eh, he has eaten weirder things over the years; a little lint is nothing. "NOW, WHY EXACTLY ARE YOU SPACING OUT THIS TIME?"

The cinnamon bun needs something. Ketchup? It would add a nice sweet to complement it, along with some acidity to prevent the combination from being too cloying. However, the fridge is a bit too far away right now… What about his inventory? Bingo!

"SANS!"

"what?"

“PLEASE SAY THAT YOU ARE JAPING ME,” Papyrus groans in dismay. “IT MAY NOT BE
A GOOD ONE, BUT I RATHER A POOR JAPE THAN YOU NOT PAYING ATTENTION AGAIN.”

Right. That is how he got the cinnamon bun in the first place. Umm… “well, you know how it is. sometimes, you just think about something out of this world, and it’s hard to comet to paying attention to anything else.” There, that should work.

Sure enough, Papyrus’ skull twists in disgust. Although, to be fair, hedid just take a glance at the ketchup dripping off of his cinnamon bun, so it could be that. ”UGH, NEVER MIND. WHAT I WAS TRYING TO TELL YOU WAS THAT IT WAS VERY NICE OF YOU TO OFFER TO BE PRODUCTIVE FOR ONCE AND MAKE SURE MISS SOCIAL WORKER GETS HOME SAFE.”

Sans just smiles and nods. Yeah, he was genuinely concerned for your safety when he made the suggestion, but he would be lying if he denied having any ulterior motive.

Not that he is going to admit it any time soon, thanks.

“JUST REMEMBER, TRY NOT TO FALL ASLEEP ON THE WAY TO EBOTT. I DOUBT ANYONE WOULD APPRECIATE PUTTING UP WITH YOUR SNORING WHILE DRIVING.”

“a guy has a nap through one road trip and he never gets to live it down, huh?”

“SANS. YOU WOKE UP AFTER FIVE HOURS AT OUR DESTINATION AND ASKED IF WE WERE FINALLY READY TO ‘GET THIS SHOW ON THE ROAD’.”

“yeah, yeah.” Sans pauses to take another bite, only to freeze with the cinnamon bun halfway to his mouth.

His Soul feels like it does a somersault.

You return to the living room, still all bundled up from being outside, looking as soft as a marshmallow. Snowflakes sit on your eyelashes and eyebrows, although they soon melt in the warmth of the house. You shift your scarf — a perfect match to the colour your toque, which makes your eyes shimmer like the star stones in Waterfall — down out of your way to speak.

"All right, we should be good to go now."

“o-okay.” Sans coughs, internally cursing himself for the voice crack while you say your goodbyes to Papyrus and Frisk.

You lead him out to your car. The knowledge that he gets to spend time with you, his Soulmate, keeps on making his Soul do those weird little flip flops. Weird, but not necessarily bad. Is he giddy? That seems like the best way to describe it.

Dear angel above, it is a good thing he is outside right now. Something needs to force his Soul to chill out.

Just before he can climb into the passenger seat, you hold your arm in front of him. “Sorry, give me a second.” You open the car door, leaning in. Oh stars, are you ever leaning. “I, uh, wasn’t expecting to have any passengers.”

Sans averts his eye lights to avoid giving his traitorous Soul more ammunition to torture him with. “oh.”
“Here you go.” He looks back in time to see you straighten up, holding a large pile of papers and file folders. “Just let me put these in the back, and we can be on our way.”

“‘kay.” This time, he doesn’t even allow himself the temptation of watching as you bend down again. The skeleton climbs right into the car and buckles his seatbelt, all without looking behind him.

Heh, behind.

...

Yeah, this needs to stop. Sometime soon, ideally.

Stepping into your own seat, you fiddle with some dials on the dashboard. Heating, Sans soon realises. “Feel free to adjust things on your own side,” you tell him before shifting the car into drive. “Oh, and let me know if you want me to change the radio or something.”

Sans makes a vague affirmative sound, trying to gather his thoughts. Now would be a great time to share some things with you, since there is absolutely no one to interrupt. Not Soulmate things, per se; it feels too soon for that. Plus, that would mean he would have to stop trying to deny it. Not gonna happen. Or, it isn't going to any time soon.

The problem is, he has no idea how to initiate anything at the moment. He can't risk being too distracting, considering the fact that you are currently navigating snow filled roads. He already knows you, which eliminates some of his basic material, but things are too formal between the two of you to let him talk about some of the things he would with his pals at Grillby’s. And clearly, based on your quiet humming in tune to the radio, you aren’t going to make the first move.

A few songs pass by without Sans finding something decent to say. He does, however, come to a conclusion: you, humming to the radio? Adorable.

His ability to read faces is coming in handy. Sure, to the average person, you probably just look like you are driving. But to him? He can tell when a song is soothing, your slight swaying becoming more relaxed and the tension melting from your face, lines smoothing out from around the eyes and forehead. He can tell with the slight bob to your head and the upturn to your lips as you start to mouth lyrics that you think a song is more of a bop. The slight wrinkling of your nose when you aren’t the biggest fan of a particular song. The few seconds that you quirk your head, trying to figure out what song is playing.

All this brings a steady flow of happiness to him, Soul warming contentedly.

Ugh.

The thing is, Sans really doesn’t approve of all this feeling crap. Not one bit. Thinking, that is supposed to be his Thing™. Analysing Souls, crunching numbers to calculate income from making sales, the odd bit of research… that is what he has always been good at.

But with you, it is getting hard to think, especially to think rationally. Everything keeps derailing, until all he can think about is you. All this Soulmate crap is making him go mushy, and Sans doesn’t do mushy. It is too messy — but not in the fun way. It is like how Paps’ spaghetti used to be, with just as much sparkly nonsense and weird surprise ingredients. Apathy, although probably not the healthiest way to live life, was easy to deal with. It allowed him to compartmentalise, without messy feelings getting in the way. And they are definitely getting in the way.

Besides, Sans knows what living life based off of feelings can do to a person. He has Judged
Asgore. The weight of the king’s sins would be far less if he hadn’t made such an important decision based on impulse in a time of emotional turmoil. He wouldn’t get that empty-eyed expression caused by the LV, distancing himself from his people. He wouldn’t be brought down by the guilt of his actions, as necessary as they were for freedom.

But Fluffybuns sure isn’t the only one negatively impacted by feelings.

Tori, too, comes to mind. In her grief after her kids died, along with the pain caused by Asgore’s awful decree, she chose to run away, leaving the kingdom unstable. Old timers like Gerson remember her as the brains, the strategist behind the throne. His inner Judge wants to call her out for her responsibility, even though she is such a good friend. If she hadn’t dwelt in her anger, if she had gone back and maybe talked with Asgore, would history have been different?

Not that his wondering about alternate paths does him any good for once. Even Frisk can’t bring them back that far.

Of course, he has to play devil’s advocate for himself, though. As much as he would like an excuse to boycott emotions to continue on with life, he knows that would be ridiculous. Feelings can’t just be the bad guy in his life, or the scapegoat. After all, his bro is pretty emotionally driven, and that has rarely affected his decisions for the worse. Sure, his trusting, optimistic nature has gotten him into trouble (don’t think about the nightmares of the offered hug, the dust crumbling into oblivion in the snow on the edge of the town, the proclamation that he still believes that the kid could be better). However, it has also given him a happier outlook on life. Would that be so bad?

Stars above, how does this keep getting more and more complicated?

“So…” you begin, slowing down to a stop. It is only now that Sans realises that you are already in Ebott, sitting at some intersection. Has he really been stalling for that long? “Any plans for the day?”

“eh, not really. probably just staying around the house.” He pauses, considering. “will want to keep my phone on me, though. just in case undyne needs more monsters who can handle the weather.”

“That makes sense,” you nod. “I think I remember reading something about how the climate in the Underground tended to stay relatively similar, or something?”

“you can say that. the best way to describe it is that the underground was composed of five microclimates with small overlapping zones.”

“Ah. Hence Snowdin and Hotland?”

He snorts. From your tone, he has a feeling that Asgore’s (in)competence at naming stuff has been bugging you for a while. Not that he blames you; it is basically a monster rite of passage to question that specific area of the king’s authority. “yeah. feel like taking a guess about what the weather was like in waterfall?”

“Gee, I have no idea,” you respond dryly, a small grin making its way onto your face. It is different than the guarded, controlled smile you will sometimes share during your visits at the house. Sans likes it. “But that still leaves two regions.”

“the ruins and new home. they were pretty moderate, kinda like what it was like at the end of summer or the beginning of fall this past year, i guess. or, at least, new home definitely was. i never actually went inside the ruins until after reaching the surface.”

“Interesting. But if you have New Home, and you guys currently live in New New Home, what
came before them?"

"the ruins, technically, was home. but then monsters left..."

"And Home turned into the Ruins," you guess with an exasperated sigh. Under your breath, you add, “Of course it did.”

Is this working? He thinks it is working. The two of you are communicating, and it doesn’t seem forced. This is progress! Sure, it is little more than small talk at this point, but still his Soul reacts like you had exchanged tender words, whispered from a place of affection.

Stars, what is wrong with him?

But like pouring water over a flame, your next words douse his joyful Soul. "On a more serious note, do you think we could, you know. Talk about the Re— uh, the... elephant in the room?"

Damn it.

"... i guess."

“Good.” You pull into a large parking lot, but don’t turn off the car quite yet. Most likely, you still want the heating. Even though you are parked, you keep your eyes focused directly in front of you. As you speak, you drum your fingers on the steering wheel, an inconsistent pattern. “Does Frisk know?”

“i... i dunno.” Your fingers still, only to restart their nervous tapping double time. "i didn't tell them, but i'm not sure about flowey."

"Oh." You turn to face him, expression completely Soul-wrenching. “So this... this could be it.”

He wants to reassure you, but how can he do that when he is feeling the same way? He isn’t Papyrus; optimism isn’t something he is good at.

“maybe,” he manages. He is prepared to leave it there when another possibility makes its way through his skull, and how did he not think of this earlier? “there’s a chance they may not fully reset, though.”

This gets your attention. “Really? What do you mean, ‘fully’?”

“the kid can do this thing, they call it a load. they say they have these ‘save point’ things they can see. like a video game, right? depending on when they last saved, they can choose to go back in time to that point, instead of going back completely.”

“So, if I’m understanding correctly,” you start slowly, “Frisk, if they wanted to, could turn back time a little bit, if they don’t want me to find out about this.”

“as long as their last save was before you got to the house, yeah.” And ideally, long enough before that they could find a way to make sure Sans doesn’t fall asleep. He doesn’t want to deal with the constant looping, and he doubts Frisk does either.

“Okay. All right. That’s good to know.” You take your hands off the steering wheel, turning the key out of the... what is it called again? The ignition? Anyways, you turn off your car and give him a small smile. “I should be heading inside. Thanks again for coming with me.”

Don’t say something embarrassing. “any time.” Dammit. Is that too much? Should he have gone
with something more casual like ‘no trouble, bubbles’? No, you didn’t really want him to find out about that nickname, even if the kid asks about it every week. Oh well.

You climb out of the car, waiting for him to say the same until clicking a button on your keys until the car loudly beeps a few times. “See you next week.”

“see ya,” he mumbles, watching as you quickly walk to the front doors of the office building. Sans just stands there beside your car, snow blowing around him with a ferocity similar to his best trash tornados.

Welp. Can’t stand here all day. Better go home and (fail to) deal with his feelings for you.

Chapter End Notes

Sans. Buddy. Believe or not, you ARE allowed to have feelings. Accept the feelings already!

All throughout this chapter, all I could think of is the song "I Won't Say I'm in Love" from Hercules, which has always been one of my favourite Disney songs. I mean, listen to it.

Edit: Rimina_Buchanan went and drew a picture of Sans singing the song, which you can check out right here! Thank you again!

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time for updates, to talk or to find out some of my random, mostly sleep-deprived thoughts.
The Soulmate Schooling

Chapter Summary

You are given a lesson about Soulmates and a confession is made.

Chapter Notes

So, y’all thought it was June? Surprise; it’s actually Valentine’s Day based on the fact that I say so.

Happy Valentine’s Day.

Before you start, though, I want to share some fanart Rimina_Buchanan made for my one comment in the end notes last chapter! You can find it ~right here~ at their tumblr. Check it out, because they have saved us all from the sad attempt I made with Google Drawings at 3am because I couldn’t sleep.

Also, I would like a moment to acknowledge the fact that it seems like no one even questioned the ketchup + cinnamon bun from last chapter. I don’t know if I should be proud of that, or disappointed that it’s gotten to that point.

Anyways, on with the show!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It all begins when you ask Frisk if there was anything interesting they had recently learned in school.

“Well,” they start, sticking their tongue out as they decorate a card. You have barely been in the house for five minutes, but you can already tell that this is going to easily end up becoming the Glitterpocalypse 2: Electric Boogaloo. “With it being Valentine’s Day this week, we’ve been learning about Souls. Today, Mom came in and talked about Soulmates.” Carefully, they sign their name at the bottom and set it to the side to work on the next one.

“Interesting. Is there a particular reason for that?”

“Yeah, it’s one of the things about Souls that is the most related to love and stuff.” Nearly an entire tube of gold glitter glue ends up on the bright red construction paper, vaguely in the shape of… nope, you can’t tell if there is supposed to be a defined shape. Maybe a cloud? It could also be a potato. Or maybe they just felt like creating a big pile which will take forever to dry.

Flowey huffs. “Only because they’re cowards who won’t talk about LOVE.” What is with how he emphasised that?

“Love?”

“Yes,” he smiles widely, “LOVE. I could show you, if you want.” Something about how he said
that sounds ominous. Like a threat? Needless to say, you are only getting more confused.

Frisk tosses a handful of pink glitter at him. He hisses, trying to dodge to no avail. “Shut up, Flowey.”

“Yes,” Papyrus scolds, looking up from the puzzle schematics he has been making on the other side of the room, “That is rather inappropiate. One should never have that kind of love.” Is nobody going to explain what ‘that kind of love’ is? “Soulmates are a much better subject to tie along with your human holidays.” He taps a finger on his cheek consideringly, leaving a small trail of graphite behind on the white bone, before returning to his work.

“Yeah,” Sans adds in, “they’re soul much better.” Papyrus copies Frisk’s action from earlier, replacing the glitter projectile with a crumpled ball of paper. Unlike Flowey, however, Sans perfectly avoids getting hit. Good for him.

Still, you should probably put a stop before an official game of dodgeball breaks out inside the house.

“So, want to share what you learned, Frisk?”

“Sure!” Eagerly, they run up to their room. “Sans,” they yell, voice partially obscured by the distance, “can you get me a whiteboard?” All right, you can already tell that this is going to be a lot more in-depth than you were expecting.

“Sure thing, kiddo.” Slowly, Sans gets up from beside you, laying a joke book face down on the arm of the couch. Mentally, you count.

One…

Two…

Gone by three.

Frisk returns with a handful of different coloured markers roughly the same time Sans shortcuts back with a double-sided mobile whiteboard filled with equations. Or, at least as far as you can tell, those are equations. The rounded scrawl of numbers, letters and symbols you can’t recognise just look like a jumbled mess to you. In any case, the board is quickly wiped clean, ready for whatever Frisk has in store.

“First off,” Frisk says, tapping a lidded marker on the board, “what can you tell me about Souls?”

“Um…” You think back to that one night.

The world around you rapidly shifts to black and white.

A yellow heart hovers directly in front of you. A small splotch of a light turquoise colour.

Sans has spun around with you, and you see an upside-down heart. In many ways, it is the inverse of your own.

“Right, forgot that humans don’t really know about souls. Are you up to a quick lesson?”

Carefully, you respond, “Monsters and humans have them. Uh, it’s basically who you are? Oh, and there’s different colours. I think the colours have meaning?”
Frisk nods. “Good. To start, monster Souls are naturally white.” They draw an upside down heart, slightly lopsided. “During an Encounter, you can see a monster’s Soul. So, normally, this is what you would see.”

“EXCEPT YOU CAN ALSO SEE THE MONSTER TO WHOM THE SOUL BELONGS,” Papyrus adds in.

“Right!” They start drawing something, only to scowl and rub it off with their hand. “Pretend there’s a monster there.”

“Okay.”

“But if Soulmates were to get into an Encounter with each other, they would see something slightly different.” Another upside-down heart is added to the board, and Frisk messily colours them in. The first one is green with a small purple circle near the lower left, the other is purple with a matching green circle. “They will see the other monster’s primary trait,” pointing at the green in the first Soul, “and secondary trait,” pointing at the purple circle. “The secondary trait is usually their Soulmate’s primary trait, and it acts like a connection point between the Souls.” They add a dotted line in black, joining the two circles together. “Am I forgetting anything?”

“Sounds good,” Sans rushes out, so quickly that you have to pause and ask yourself what he just said. But that isn’t as puzzling as the growing blush on his skull. What is that for? Is this lesson like some kind of monster version of The Talk or something? If so, you may soon regret any and all life decisions that led to this moment.

As collected as his brother is flustered, Papyrus responds, “DON’T FORGET THE SIZE OF THE MARKS.”

“Right! The marks are the same size for both Soulmates. This is for… uh… Papyrus?”

“THIS IS TO ENSURE AN IDEAL SOUL CONNECTION.”

“What he said. The percentage is different varies between sets of Soulmates. For example, if these Souls belonged to real monsters, it would be...” Frisk’s face scrunches up as they consider their diagram.

“the soulmark-to-primary ratio is roughly eight point five percent.”

“That.” On the bottom of the board, they copy the number down. “The soulmarks also will look different between sets of Soulmates. I just made these circles because they’re easy to draw.”

“Interesting.” You do have one question, though. “Do humans have Soulmates?”

Before an answer can be made, the sound of coughing catches your attention. Sans is even brighter blue, choking on what unfortunately seems to be ketchup-orange juice. Next time you meet someone who complains about pulp in their orange juice, you are going to be morally obligated to bring this up, aren’t you? Thankfully, his fit stops. Otherwise, you fear you would have been forced to find out how to do the Heimlich maneuver on a skeleton, which sounds like a real challenge.

Without any reaction to Sans’ near demise, Frisk continues. “Mom said yes. Same idea, but the Soul looks like a human Soul instead of a monster one.”

Huh. You wonder who your Soulmate is. Provided, of course, that everyone has one. "So how do you find out if someone is your Soulmate?” It isn't like most people walk around, showing each
other their Souls. Humans don't, at least, and you haven't noticed monsters doing that whenever you have been around in New New Home.

"MAY I ANSWER MISS SOCIAL WORKER'S QUESTION?"

"Go for it," Frisk says, stepping away from the whiteboard and returning to their card making.

"EXCELLENT! AS THE MONSTER MASCOT, I FEEL QUITE QUALIFIED TO ANSWER YOUR QUERY. AHEM. ENCOUNTERS ARE AN ESSENTIAL ASPECT OF MONSTER CULTURE, NOT ONLY BECAUSE IT ALLOWS US TO EXPRESS OURSELVES, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF THE POTENTIAL TO MEET ONE'S SOULMATE.

"NOW, NORMALLY, I WOULD DEMONSTRATE —"

"paps," Sans interjects, warning clear in his tone.

”— HOWEVER,” he continues without a single falter, “THIS EXPLANATION IS VERY SIMPLE! DURING AN ENCOUNTER, AS PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED, THE OTHER PERSON’S SOUL BECOMES VISIBLE, AND IF THE PEOPLE ARE SOULMATES, YOUR SOULS WILL SHOW BOTH YOUR PRIMARY AND YOUR SECONDARY TRAITS.

“FROM THERE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO PROPERLY ENGAGE WITH YOUR ACT MENU, AS IT WILL ALLOW YOU TO CHOOSE TO ACCEPT OR REJECT YOUR SOULMATE.”

“Wait. You can reject a Soulmate? Formally? Why would someone do that?”

Surprisingly, it is Flowey who speaks up, his voice soft. “Because they hate each other, usually.”

“it’s, uh, pretty rare these days. remember being taught in school that some monsters had human soulmates they rejected and vice versa right before the war.”

Papyrus shakes his head disapprovingly. “SUCH A TRAGIC THING, TOO. NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF ALL THE UNNECESSARY BLOODSHED AND YEARS OF IMPRISONMENT UNDER A MOUNTAIN IT LED TO, ALTHOUGH THAT IS CERTAINLY A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR. RATHER, THE FACT THAT SO MANY DECIDED TO FOREGO SUCH A UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP.” He sighs dramatically. “OH WELL. BACK TO YOU, FRISK.”

“Okay.” They clear their throat, the epitome of seriousness from their posture to the steady expression on their youthful face. Is this what they are like when they are ambassadoring? The façade is only broken by the emergence of a perplexed expression. “What else is there?”


"of course you would remember that one," Sans mutters with a roll of his eye lights.

"Be nice," Frisk scolds. Whether they are scolding Flowey or Sans, it is unclear. Either way, the two of them quiet down as Frisk moves forward to the next part of your lesson. "Mom said something about the Fight Principle being this hypothesis thing some monsters have. Some believe that Soulmates won't get along well at first. The Fight Principle says that this is their Souls trying to force the monsters into an Encounter so they can find out the truth."

Huh. You turn to the adults in the room, curious for another opinion. “What are your guys’ thoughts on that?”
“WELL, I CERTAINLY CANNOT GIVE YOU A DEFINITIVE ANSWER, AS I WOULD NOT WANT TO ACCIDENTALLY MISLEAD YOU. HOWEVER, I CAN SAY THAT SUCH A THING MAKES SENSE TO HAVE. FOR EXAMPLE, I HAVE KNOWN GRILLY FOR YEARS! YET! UNTIL REACHING THE SURFACE, WE HAD NEVER HAD AN ENCOUNTER TOGETHER, THUS MAKING US UNAWARE THAT WE WERE SOULMATES!”

With a thud, Sans slams his cup onto the side table. His sockets are perfect spheres, taking up a large portion of his face, while his eye lights are barely pinpricks. If it weren’t for the fact that you have seen him freaked out before and feel confident in wagering that this is exactly what is going on here and now, you would say he looks almost comedic.

“wh- what do you? soulmates? you and grillby?! didn’t tell me?!?!?”

Not meeting his brother’s gaze in the slightest, Papyrus laughs awkwardly. “OH, YES. THAT’S… UH… FUNNY STORY… WOULD YOU LOOK AT THE TIME? I SHOULD BE STARTING SUPPER ANYTIME NOW. YES. SUPPER.” He stands up abruptly, papers flying.

Before he can make his escape, however, Frisk calmly asks, “Didn’t you realise they’ve been dating for about a month?”

“They what?!?!?!?!?!”

Sweating profusely, Papyrus remains frozen in place, as though his feet have been super glued to the carpet. “FRISK, NOW IS PROBABLY NOT THE BEST MOMENT TO BRING IT UP. ALSO, HOW DID YOU FIND OUT?”

They give a one-shouldered shrug, not taking their eyes away from their arts and crafts. “I have my ways.”

You… you have a lot of things you would like to get into. Sure, none of this trainwreck of a situation is super pertinent to your role here as Frisk’s case worker. Or, at least not yet; as the months draw nearer to the skeleton brothers being able to adopt Frisk, you might have to consider another new addition to their family in the form of a fiery bartender, but that isn’t a priority at the moment. Still, you would like to think that you might be able to help get some things sorted before you leave tonight.

Starting with your confusion at Sans’ confusion.

“Wasn’t it obvious? I mean, I’ve only seen them together once, and at the time I was pretty sure they were flirting.”

Papyrus nods, though his cheekbones start to glow with a faint orange. ”WE WERE.”

”They were flirting,” you confirm. “Even if they weren’t Soulmates, or whatever, there was some definite chemistry.”

“Definitely,” Frisk agrees. “Hey, how far have you gotten in your dating manual with Grillby?”

“I’M GONNA MAKE SUPPER NOW!” In a blurry flash, he is out of the room. The clatter of pots and pans in the kitchen seems to be intentionally loud.

“papyrus!”

Mockingly, Flowey whistles a low note. ”So much for your whole Judge thing, huh, Sansy?”
Reading Souls and expressions didn’t seem to help when baby bro and the bestie started ban—” He cuts off the very millisecond that Frisk pulls out the spray bottle. You have to give the kid some credit; they sure do manage to get that one out quickly.

“Be nice.”

“I hate you,” Flowey grumbles, hissing away when Frisk’s glitter-covered hand moves down to give him an affectionate pat.

“I love you too. Sans, can you help me for a sec?”

“huh?” He turns away from the kitchen door, where he had been staring intently. “uh, sure, kiddo.”

“Great! My fingers are sticky. Can you write the messages for me?”

“sure.”

Frisk starts dictating, a victorious grin emerging. Distracted by writing, Sans doesn’t have the opportunity to freak out because of the bombshell of news Papyrus shared, you soon realise. Clever. Really freaking manipulative of them, but still clever.

Briefly, you check on Papyrus, who is still scrambling around the kitchen, putting something together. His cheeks are still fairly orange, although the exertion of whirlwinding around the kitchen could be a contributing factor.

Decided that all should be fine if you go, you say your goodbyes. As you leave the house, though, you feel like you are forgetting something. Not as in you left something at the house. No. It is more knowledge based… like there is something you should be putting together based on what you talked about today. Something about Souls…?

Whatever.

It probably isn’t too important if you can’t remember.

Chapter End Notes

Ooooh, I wonder what Bubbles forgot?

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time for updates, to talk or to find out some of my random, mostly sleep-deprived thoughts.
A Great Time Together

Chapter Summary

Papyrus goes to visit a close friend — screw it, he can say that he's visiting his Soulmate now.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this chapter took so long: I kept dying of feels. Y'all don't want to know how many times I almost cried during the creation of this thing.

With that said, enjoy!

Well, tonight was awkward.

Tugging on a jacket and his favourite scarf — more for the aesthetic than anything else, considering how rarely the cold bothers him — Papyrus decides to head to Grillby’s before he closes for the night. Out of habit, he pauses, listening for any signs that Sans is awake, before sighing quietly to himself.

Clearly, that isn’t necessary anymore.

This… this was not at all how he had planned on sharing the news with his brother, to say the least. Of course, he had planned on telling Sans; it isn’t like he would be able to hide the fact that he and Grillby are Soulmates forever. It is just that… he hadn’t gotten to it. He wasn’t sure how to.

Unfortunately, there isn’t a guide explaining how to break the news of dating a Soulmate to an overprotective older brother without making him freak out.

Honestly, sometimes Papyrus wonders if Sans forgets that he isn’t a babybones anymore. Most people would be thrilled to learn that one of their best friends is Soulmates with their sibling. They would be even more thrilled to find out that things are working out perfectly for the pair. But not Sans. Sure, during supper after you left, he said he was happy. Genuinely, Papyrus thinks he is; Sans has often said that seeing him happy makes him feel better. But there was that tiny twitch in his socket as he said it, one that years of living with Sans has taught him to know otherwise. The twitch that means he isn’t being entirely truthful about something that’s bothering him.

And then, Sans has also been acting weirdly, and not just because of what he found out tonight. Normally, Papyrus wouldn’t question any weirdness from his brother, but this isn’t the normal Sans weirdness. In fact, this weirdness has been going on for a while. A month or so, at the very least. Very puzzling indeed.

Thankfully, if there are two things the Great Papyrus loves, they are his brother and solving puzzles.
Finding a solution will have to wait for a later night, though. First he needs clues, and to find those clues, he needs to talk more with Sans. Sans, surprisingly enough, is already in bed, which isn’t the most useful for insightful conversations, unless you were to count snoring as useful, which it isn’t.

Well, actually, his brother being in bed isn’t very surprising. Sans has always required a lot of sleep, even with his lazybones ways using less energy to begin with. But, after their talk tonight? Papyrus was expecting him to decide that he needed a drink to cope.

Then again, that would likely mean going to Grillby’s. And that would mean that Sans couldn’t just avoid the problem and pretend it doesn’t exist, which would be a rather un-Sans-like thing to do.

*Sigh.*

Getting to Grillby’s from their house takes considerably longer than it did back when they lived in Snowdin. Most of the time, Papyrus uses that distance to justify driving his fantastically cool car. Most of the time. Sometimes, though, running across town seems like a better choice.

Today is one of those times.

A block away from his destination, Papyrus braces himself for the imminent smell of grease. The heavy, lingering scent isn’t as bad as it used to be, but that might just be because he has become used to it. Between Grillby and Sans, Angel knows he has had plenty of opportunities. That, however, does not mean he has to enjoy it. Not at all. All it means is that he will sit through it until closing, perhaps with a grilled chicken salad to help him feel like he isn’t drowning in oil. Skeletons aren’t very buoyant, after all.

The normal scene greets him when he enters Grillby’s. Papyrus makes his way to the bar, well aware that the only available seat just so happens to be his brother’s favourite spot. Before sitting down, he scans the area for any hidden whoopie cushions, conveniently stashing them away in his inventory to properly dispose of at a later time. And if he needs help incinerating them to ensure that Sans will never find them… well, Papyrus knows who to call.

Speaking of, Grillby glides over, gently tilting his head. "... your usual?"

"YES, PLEASE. EXCEPT REPLACE THE MILKSHAKE WITH MY OTHER USUAL." Unlike Sans, he doesn’t feel the need to drink as an unhealthy coping mechanism. Not at all. But, he is an adult, damn it, and sometimes he appreciates getting to act like one for once. Is that too much to ask?

Oddly enough, the regulars leave early tonight, not a single one pushing Grillby’s closing time to its limit. In fact, by the time Papyrus offers to help wipe down tables, nearly everyone has filed out. The many smiles sent his way seem pretty knowing, though, and seriously? You had a point, earlier — how on earth had Sans never noticed anything being up between him and Grillby with everyone acting like this around them? These are his pals, made on his endless ‘legally required breaks’. How can it be possible that not a single one has slipped up and mentioned something before now, drunk or sober?

“See you tomorrow,” the one rabbit lady hiccups over her shoulder to Grillby, swaying slightly as Papyrus walks her out. “You’re a lucky guy, you know? Found a nice, hot guy.” She squeezes tightly on his arm. “Take my advice; don’t let go.”

“T’M SURE HE WILL TAKE THAT INTO CONSIDERATION. GOODNIGHT.”
And with her safely out, joined by her sister to return home, Papyrus locks the door, flips the sign to closed and melts down to the floor, back propped up against the entrance.

“... long day?” Grillby inquires, sliding down to sit beside him. His bow tie undone and vest unbuttoned, he is beginning to look a bit more comfortable and less like he is still hard at work.

“YOU HAVE NO IDEA.” Leaning against his Soulmate’s side, Papyrus allows himself to relax. It’s nice. Here, he doesn’t have to worry about trying to be the Great Papyrus; Grillby thinks he is great just the way he is, no matter what.

Grillby wraps his arm around his shoulders, allowing Papyrus to snuggle even closer. “... do you want to talk?”

“BOY DO I EVER.”

First though, he wants some nice quiet time with his boyfriend.

Grillby’s ambient crackling and Papyrus’ slow, steady breathing are the only sounds in the warm pub. The calm, such a juxtaposition with the loudness only mere minutes ago when everyone was still here, is satisfying. A breath of fresh air after a hectic evening, so to say. Even if he can still smell the remains of deep fried food and alcohol. Nuzzling in closer to Grillby, their heads meet, flames rippling gently over bone.

Finally, Papyrus feels ready to break the silence. “SANS IS SUCH A FRUSTRATING LITTLE GOBLIN!”

“... and?” Grillby asks, sounding more than confused than anything by the sudden exclamation. “... what else is new?”

“TOUCHÉ,” he sighs. “TO ANSWER THE QUESTION AS TO WHAT IS NEW, SANS KNOWS NOW.”

“... knows...?”

“ABOUT US.”

“... oh.” Tenderly, he strokes Papyrus’ arm. “... I’m proud of you for telling him.”

“NORMALLY, I WOULD BE, TOO.”

“... but?”

“IT KINDA SLIPPED OUT. ACCIDENTALLY. AND THEN HE FREAKED OUT. A LOT.” He squeezes his eyes shut. “I KNOW SANS MEANS WELL, EVEN IF HE HAS CHOSEAN ESPECIALLY SMOTHERING AND IRRITATING WAY TO SHOW THAT FACT. HE— HE PROBABLY JUST NEEDS SOME MORE TIME TO PROCESS IT, AND THEN THINGS WILL BE OKAY, RIGHT? THEY HAVE TO BE. I KNOW IT. THIS IS A GOOD THING, REALLY. HONESTY IS IMPORTANT AFTER ALL.”

A warm hand carefully wipes over his cheekbones, evaporating away tears of frustration. Well, then. That is certainly something Papyrus didn't realise he was doing. How embarrassing.

“THANKS,” he sniffles, trying to hold back any more.

“... anytime,” Grillby assures him, and Papyrus knows from the bottom of his Soul that he is telling the truth. A few seconds pass before he says, “... it’s starting to get late. Is there anything else you
were wanting to do while you’re here?”

Papyrus hums, considering. “CAN WE JUST STAY HERE, A LITTLE LONGER?”

He feels Grillby nod. “... as long as you’d like.”

“THANK YOU.”

Papyrus could get used to this. Cuddling closely with his Soulmate after a rough day is a nice change from simply fighting out the frustrations with Undyne. Not that he doesn’t enjoy those spars; he really does. Exhausting himself by fighting vigorously has its perks: if he is too tired to spar, he is usually too tired to dwell on whatever is bothering him.

It’s just that, sometimes, this is better.

Besides, he is sure that Undyne appreciates the change, too. There are only so many times a person can barge into their friend’s house in the middle of the night when said friend is busy canoodling with her fiancée before it becomes an annoyance.

Not that he knows from personal experience, of course. No, and he definitely didn’t need to bleach out his entire skull because he caught them in more… amorous … activities. Nope, that never happened, he and Undyne decided. Never has, never will, and he has paid to replace their bedroom window after jumping out of it, so there is no evidence of such a thing ever occurring. And if Papyrus always knocks loud enough for the neighbours to hear as he waits for Undyne to let him in, well, that is only the courteous thing to do.

“... Papyrus?”

“MMMMHMM?”

“... I was wondering if you have any plans Thursday?”

“THURSDAY…” Now, that day sounds familiar, and not just because it follows Wednesday on a weekly basis. “WHY DO YOU ASK?”

Grillby’s temperature rises slightly. Turning his head, Papyrus notices some of his fire lightening in colour around his face. Not quite blushing, but a close cousin. “... you remember Finlay, the one fish monster who usually sits at the front of the bar?”

“IS THAT THE ONE WHO LEFT HIS PHONE NUMBER IN THE RIVER IN THE FOREST?” Papyrus asks, brow crinkled slightly in remembrance.

“... yes. He said he joined this one human dating app, Plenty of Fish or something.” Papyrus rolls his eyes; yet another victim to Sans’ sense of humour. “... in any case, he brought up this one human holiday.”

“AH, YES! VALENTINE’S DAY!” Grillby's temperature spikes again. Ahh. Smiling sweetly at his blushing boyfriend, Papyrus teases, “ARE YOU TRYING TO ASK ME SOMETHING HERE? IN REGARDS TO A HUMAN HOLIDAY DEVOTED TO LOVERS AND THEIR DEEPEST AFFECTIONS FOR EACH OTHER?”

“............ yes?”

“WELL, I’LL HAVE TO CHECK MY SCHEDULE. THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS QUITE BUSY, AFTER ALL.” Because he can, Papyrus mimics taking a book out of his back pocket, rifling
through several pages before pointing at a specific spot. “AH, THERE IT IS: FEBRUARY FOURTEENTH. IT LOOKS LIKE I HAVE ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD TO SPEND WITH YOU, GRILLBY. WE CAN PLAN A PROPER DATE NIGHT.” That is the one good thing about Sans finding out about them: there is no longer any need to hide and meet at inconvenient times.

Grillby wraps his other arm around him in an awkward hug, considering how much he has to twist to do so with his legs still draped lightly over Papyrus’. “... that sounds wonderful. Is there something specific you want to do?”

“AS LONG AS I’M SPENDING TIME WITH YOU, ANYTHING.”

Flames popping, Grillby splutters incoherent attempts at words. Another success for the Great Papyrus. Once he collects himself, Grillby asks, “... aren’t we supposed to do something romantic? Go to a fancy restaurant with candles and soft music or something?”

Yes, Papyrus supposes, that probably is the protocol for this type of thing. Even if his dating manual doesn’t cover Valentine’s Day — it was one of those rare, monster produced books, after all — human culture is filled with examples of how to celebrate this particular holiday.

However…

"WHO NEEDS AN EXPENSIVE CANDLELIGHT DINNER,” Papyrus grins, leaning in for a kiss, “WHEN I HAVE THE BEST CANDLELIGHT IN THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD AS MY SOULMATE?”

Chapter End Notes

Man, this chapter has one of the sweetest lines I’ve ever written in it. It still makes me tear up.

About 2 weeks ago, I actually drew something for this, which you can find ~here~, because I just need more Papby, darn it, and specifically because it was cute.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time for updates, to talk or to find out some of my random, mostly sleep-deprived thoughts.
Today is not your day.

It all actually started last night. For some reason, you just couldn’t fall asleep, no matter what you did. It was a Goldilocks kind of night: at first, your room was too cold, so you turned on the heat and added another blanket. Barely an hour later, you were broiling, kicking the blankets off and storming to turn off the thermostat. Once the temperature was mostly dealt with, you simply couldn’t get yourself into a comfortable sleeping position. It was awful.

Because of this, you were even more irritated than you would normally be to wake up due to an extra early alarm. And groggier than you would normally be, unfortunately; it took an embarrassing amount of glaring at your phone to remember that you, in fact, have to turn off your alarm to get it to stop making noise. Imagine that.

By the time you figured out why you had an alarm set almost an hour earlier than your regular wake-up time, you could confidently say that you were having a bad day.

It is — was — Amanda’s birthday.

Every year since you have started working at the office, you have had the same tradition on Amanda’s birthday. Marianne loves making cakes for each coworker’s birthday, but Amanda was never able to eat her own; Marianne would always forget about her having celiac disease. So that your friend could have a birthday treat that wouldn’t put her out of commission for who knows how long, you would always make a stop at the local gluten-free bakery to get her a special cupcake, complete with a sparkler.

This year, though, you won’t need to do that. Not anymore.

Now, as you drive to New New Home, you decide to make yourself a reminder to call Amanda’s mom tonight. If today has been rough on you because of this, you can only imagine how hard it must be for her today. You had been there for each other around the time of the funeral; a check-in now probably wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world.

Goodness knows you would have liked having one earlier today. It is like you were the only one at work who remembered what day it was. Unfortunately, because you probably were the only one. It
isn’t news to you that you were the closest one to Amanda in the office; she was the only person there you had the privilege of actually calling a friend, and not just a colleague.

She still is, technically.

God, you miss her so much.

The thing is, you thought you were done dealing with your grieving process until now. But it is times like this that you are reminded of how soon it still is. She has been gone for barely six months, and you can’t decide if it feels like it has been longer than that or hardly any time at all.

In short, by the time you get to the front door to ring the bell, you have had it. You are drained both emotionally and physically, and you really want to go home and go to bed.

“bone-jour~” Sans sings out loudly, swinging the door wide open.

Halfway across the house (directionally, you would guess the hallway upstairs), Papyrus shouts, “ONE OF THESE DAYS, I’M GOING TO DISOWN YOU SANS! OH, WELCOME IN MISS SOCIAL WORKER. AS ALWAYS, FEEL FREE TO IGNORE SANS’ PUNS. ASGORE KNOWS I TRY TO DO THE SAME.” This almost manages to get you to crack a smile, but not quite. Any other day, you feel as though it would be a yes, though. A few seconds later, while you are getting yourself settled inside, Papyrus thoughtfully adds, “SERIOUSLY; I HAVE DISCUSSED THIS MATTER WITH HIS MAJESTY SEVERAL TIMES SINCE REACHING THE SURFACE. HE IS FULLY IN THE LOOP ABOUT MY ATTEMPTED IGNORANCE IN REGARDS TO WORN OUT PUNS.”

"Trust me. Literally all of New New Home is in the loop," Flowey grouses from a nest of blankets on the couch. You have a feeling this is another example of Frisk’s workmanship. "With a voice like that, there are probably humans who know. On the other side of the world."

Yeesh, somebody is grouchy today. Beside him, Frisk mouths the words “Flowey needs a nap”, tilting their head to the side to rest on their hands. Out loud, they say, “But not in space! Because in space…”

“No one can hear you scream,” Flowey dutifully responds. Then, with a creepily wide smile, he turns to Sans. “Hey Smiley, wanna go to space with me?”

“never gonna happen.”

“Too bad.” Flowey picks up a game controller with a vine, nudging it towards Frisk. “Are you done with your dumb paperwork yet? I’ve been waiting all day to kick your butt at this.”

“Give me a minute,” they say, squinting down at their lap. From what little you can see, you don’t blame them. That is a lot of words. Especially for a kid Frisk’s age.

A small voice from the back of your mind reminds you that Frisk has lived longer than you think. It points out that it is entirely possible for them to have read those same papers before. Time traveling is a hell of a thing.

You try to ignore that voice; you can’t deal with Reset stuff today. You just can’t.

Papyrus leans over you to look at their papers. “WHAT HAPPENED TO THE SUMMARISED VERSION OF THE TREATY MISS TORIEL MADE FOR YOU?”

“It’s right here,” they say, gesturing to a pile to their right. “I just want to double check everything
before I sign my part.”

“EXCELLENT IDEA. CHECK TWICE AND SIGN ONCE, AS I ALWAYS SAY.”

“paps. you’ve literally never said that in your life.”

“WELL, I HAVE NOW,” Papyrus sniffs, “AND I IMAGINE THAT I WILL FIND MANY OTHER OCCASIONS TO PUT THAT SAYING INTO GOOD USE.”

“Definitely,” Frisk yawns. “Do you think I could do this later tonight? I need a break.”

“sure, kiddo. take a page out of my book. take that legally-required break.”

“Will do.” They gather all their papers, straightening them carefully into one neat pile before grabbing their phone. Before your very eyes, the papers vanish, and Frisk puts their phone back into the back pocket of their jeans like nothing happened.

“What on earth? How…? They just?”

"magic~" Sans says, with appropriate jazz hands. You ignore him, looking instead for an explanation from one of the others in the room.

“TECHNICALLY SPEAKING, MY BROTHER IS CORRECT, EVEN IF THAT IS AN EXTREMELY LACKLUSTER WAY TO DESCRIBE DIMENSIONAL BOXES, SANS.”

“But I didn’t see a box.”

Frisk takes out their phone again, holding it so you can see them press a button labelled ‘Dimensional Box A’. The screen that opens up is as plain as can be. Plain white text sits on a black background, making a simple list. They tap on a line labelled 'monster candy'. Three options appear at the bottom of the screen. Frisk selects 'use' and holds out their hand, just in time for a small candy to appear from nowhere. Bewildered, you poke the candy, just to make sure that you aren't imagining things, or that it isn't just a hologram. Frisk snickers and swiftly unwraps it, popping the small candy into their mouth before anyone can protest.

"See? Alphys installed two dimensional boxes on my phone. She said it was an example of how you can mix magic and science stuff. Wanna try?"

 Barely, you manage to restrain your enthusiasm. Barely. "Yes, please!" It isn't every day that you get to try out something like this.

"Here you go."

Frisk's phone in hand, you begin scanning through the dimensional box. "Is there a limit to the size or weight of the items, or can you just put anything in?"

"we're, uh, still workin' on that. we've never had issues underground with anything other than the number of items, a few years ago, frisk would've needed to put in each paper individually because they counted as 'separate items'. but as for actual size limits, well, most people moved their belongings to the surface using boxes, so we know it can handle fridges and king sized beds."

You nod as you click on umbrella, then select 'info'. A flash of text appears: 'Umbrella with an orange handle. Keeps you dry and protected. Increases INV by 3.' Huh. Somewhat cautiously, you choose 'use' this time.
Now, intellectually, you know you should expect an umbrella to appear in your hand. That is what happened when Frisk selected the candy, after all. Nonetheless, you can’t help but let out a startled squeal when a large umbrella, almost as long as Frisk is tall, apparates onto your palm.

“It’s like having a real life Mary Poppins purse in your phone!”

“What’s a Mary Poppins?” Papyrus asks calmly, completely missing out on the extent of your excitement.

Frisk shakes their head. “Flowey, can you add Mary Poppins to the movie list?”

“Fine,” he huffs.

“Hey, if you think boxes are cool, I’ve got something else that’ll really impress you. Wanna see it?”

Honestly, you doubt he can show you anything better than the box things right now. Your mind is still racing with the practicality of the whole thing. With something like that on your phone, you wouldn’t have to worry about forgetting certain key items, because you could always have a spare. Heck, a person could even put a small first aid kit in one, which would be ready in case an emergency situation arises.

Still, you are curious as to what Sans has in store that is worthy of comparison. “Sure?”

“Great. Frisk actually is the one who taught me this one.” He winks, and they respond with finger guns. “Here goes nothing.”

Well.

Sans was right about one thing: you are most certainly impressed. Especially considering he is a skeleton; you would doubt such a feat was even doable, considering his anatomy. Yet, there he is.

And here you are, watching, weirdly amused by this.

Now, whether or not burping a rousing, three minute long medley of All Star and What is Love is as cool as dimensional boxes… well, you aren’t going to be the judge of that.

“Really, brother?” Papyrus says, a blend between a whine and a disgusted scoff. “Why are you like this?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know.” Purposefully, he leans closer to Papyrus. Another performance of that particular talent starts, but you don’t recognise the song. Cheerful and bubbly, each burp has a crisp sound to it. Flowey’s steady complaints barely obscure the melody as he rolls to hide in the kitchen. Papyrus soon follows suit.

Needless to say, this isn’t what you were expecting going into today’s home visit. Granted, you highly doubt that anyone expects a concert of meme songs being performed by a one-monster, belching orchestra during a home visit with a giggling, preteen conductor.

All in all, it was a pretty decent end to a pretty crappy day.

…

Except for all the songs you now have stuck in your head. Damn it.

Chapter End Notes
Yes, Sans, you funky little meme goblin, you. You just keep burping away.

Can anyone guess which song he's burping when Flowey and Papyrus give up and leave? Here's a hint: it's part of the Undertale OST.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
Chapter Summary

An important conversation comes up during a home visit.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Even though you still want to avoid it like the plague, you have to ask them.

Only you, Sans, Frisk and Flowey are at the house right now. Only five minutes into your visit, Papyrus got a last minute phone call from King Asgore. Apparently, a meeting with the contractors for some kind of puzzle thing had to be moved last minute to now. Frisk gets to stay; at the moment, the park is a private monster thing to help younger monsters learn an essential part of their culture, so says Papyrus. Later, they might consider opening it to humans.

That, however, isn't what prompted you to bring it up.

Frisk and Flowey had been playing some video game. You can't place which one off the top of your head, not that you were paying much attention. As for you and Sans, well, the two of you have been simply sitting down. Today, you have nothing specific to go over, and he looks exhausted. More exhausted than usual, that is. Cup of ketchup-infused something in hand, he has been at that stage of nodding off where his eye sockets slowly shut and his head falls forward, only to jerk back up with a start. After watching that particular spectacle half a dozen times, you wordlessly take the cup away from him and put it to the side.

"sorry. thanks."

“No worries.”

A loud beeping comes from the tv, followed by some sad, dramatic music. You turn your attention to the black screen, which bears the words ‘GAME OVER’ in an alarmingly large font.

"Dang it! We forgot to save, didn't we?" Frisk asks plaintively. A twinge of memory flashes through your mind, but nothing specific. Nothing helpful. As soon as it appears, it is gone, leaving you to wonder why Frisk saying that word affected you so much.

Strange.

“Looks like it,” Flowey responds, dropping his controller and unfurling his vines, stretching them out.

Frisk sighs. “At least we didn’t get too far. We can just reset.”

Oh.

That’s why.

Before you can stop yourself, you blurt it out. “Frisk, we need to talk. About the Resets.”
Everyone’s eyes snap towards you. Frisk’s are shockingly wide and frantic. Your heart sinks into your stomach, knowing you made a huge mistake.

Around you, the room starts going fuzzy, much too fast. A slight scent of ozone carries through the air. The last thing you see is a red gleam in Frisk’s eyes, strong as can be.

The world stutters.

---

Sitting the skeleton brothers’ living room, you can’t help but feel that something is wrong.

Technically, you have had that feeling almost all week. Just this odd sensation that something is missing. It is one of those weeks where everything just feels repetitive, like you have done it already. A flicker of recollection, even when there should be nothing to recollect.

Like déjà vu…

... have you ever felt déjà vu? ... what if it was real? ... what if each time you feel like you’ve done something before, it’s because an anomaly decided to reset and go back in time, leaving you with the memory of what once was and yet also didn’t happen?

NO!

No, it can’t be. You have to be imagining it. You must be! The chances are pretty slim. Right?

Please, let this all be a figment of your imagination.

A loud beeping comes from the tv, where Frisk and Flowey have been playing a video game for the past several minutes. Followed by some sad, dramatic music, the words ‘GAME OVER’ fill the screen.

Nobody says anything, yet you can perfectly imagine the conversation between the two of them.

_Dang it! We forgot to save, didn’t we?_

_Looks like it._

_A sigh._

_At least we didn’t get too far. We can just reset._

_Reset…_

Suddenly, it all comes back to you.

“Please, don’t Reset! I just have some questions!!!”

Frisk narrows their eyes at you. Once more, you blew it. Once more, they are going to go back in time, erasing this current reality.

“Cool it, Frisky,” Flowey says, turning off the television with a simple flick of a vine. “The human already knows. Another Load won’t do anything but waste our time and increase her awareness of
future time anomalies. Besides, it didn’t do any good last time. It’s all or nothing, partner. And since she hasn’t spilled the beans yet, might as well stick to nothing. Besides,” he adds, a strange grin growing on his face, “this timeline is finally starting to get interesting.”

Beside you, Sans stretches to alertness. “hate to admit it, kiddo, but the weed’s got a point.”

Frisk pauses, considering. "Fine."

The tension that you had let build up — not that you had noticed — melts away with that one small word. "Thank you."

They give a noncommittal hum, pivoting to face you more directly. Their expression is dead serious as they say, "What do you want to know?"

Oh man, where to start?

The thing is, you never planned to bring up the Resets with Frisk. Why would you? What nearly happened today (and apparently what did happen the last time it was today? Is that how this works?) serves as proof as to why you wouldn't.

"Ummmmm… how old are you?” You shake your head, trying to scatter away the disorganisation of your thoughts; that isn't quite what you were going for. "How long have you lived, I guess? If you were to include the time spent in the 'past', I mean."

Your verbal stumbling earns a small smile. "I get it. You know, that's honestly a good question. Flowey? You got any ideas?"

"Please," he scoffs, "like I cared enough to pay attention to that. I couldn't even say how old I theoretically am, and I had the power much longer than you."

Wait: Flowey could also Reset?

Officially adding that to the list of ‘things to ask later’, you move on. You don’t have the time to unpack that right now. “So, the answer is ‘not twelve?’”

They shrug their shoulders a little bit. “I mean, kinda? Sorry; you chose a weird question. Is that it?”

“No, just give me a minute.”

“Take your time. Flowey, you ready to try to level up?”

“Sure. Who do you want me to kill?” Frisk flicks him. He scowls. “OW! Stop it!”

What even is your life right now?

Knowing that they did indeed Load, how is it that Frisk is so chill right now? You glance over to Sans for help, but he looks pretty deep in thought, brow bone somehow furrowed.

Generic beeping fills the room, filling the silence left by your uncertainty. Then…

“Why do you Reset?”

The game pauses. Flowey, however, is the first to respond. “Why wouldn’t they? Wouldn’t you, if you had the ability?”
Would you?

Sure, it could be useful, you suppose. You could fix your mistakes before they even happen. Yet, that exact thing could become your downfall. Why learn from your mistakes when you could erase them? Why face the consequences for your actions — good or bad — when you could press undo? How quickly would you lose your integrity, your sense of right and wrong?

How quickly would you lose sight of who you are?

Placing their controller to the side, Frisk stares at you. You shiver; that expression does not belong on someone so young. Even if you know they are truly not that young. “You’d be surprised what a combination of desperation, curiosity and Determination will do to a person,” they say solemnly.

You can believe that.

“How does it work, though?”

They point to the tv screen. Their characters are still frozen midair behind the pause menu. “Think of it kinda like a video game. Magic is like that a lot, actually. So, there are these Save Points I can see. When I find them, it helps me update everything, so I don’t have to go back so far. As for actually Resetting, it’s just like when you get a game over in a video game and you can choose to continue from the last time you saved your progress or you can decide to restart from scratch and throw out everything you just did. Except, you are actually dead, and instead of fun music you just see, hear and feel an awful nothingness and it’s like a weird nightmare.” A chill runs down your spine. Then, like they didn’t just say that, they brighten up and add, “Also, it’s real life and you can’t really skip dialogue without being a complete jerk. Trust me on that one.”

Internally, you are banging your head on the table. What the fuck? What the fuck? What. The. Fuck?

How are you supposed to respond to that? That isn’t okay! This kid just talked about dying. What was even happening that they died? This seems like something more than a kid falling (please say they fell, and not the other option) down Mt. Ebott and discovering that they had superpowers. Add to it all the weird sci-fi stuff that is apparently real, and… what the hell are you supposed to do?

What are you supposed to do?

“E-excuse me for a minute. I need to get some water.”

Without another word, you rush out towards the kitchen. There, you plant your hands on the counter, steadying yourself. Breathing deeply. Mentally repeating that everything will —

“hey, you okay?”

— be okay. Startled by Sans’ sudden appearance, your hands clench tighter to the counter’s edge, knuckles paling. You don’t jump, though, which is a point in your favour, so there is that.

Still, your silence seems to be answer enough for Sans. Voice gentle, just above a whisper, he reminds you, “you don’t have to keep talking about this, if you don’t want to. i’m sure the kid won’t mind.”

“I know. It’s just…” Gathering your words, you stare at a small scuff on the marble countertop near your fingers. Idly, a thought passes through your mind, wondering what it is from. Something
normal, in the midst of everything else.

“it’s just what?” Sans prompts, opening a nearby cupboard.

“How is Frisk so…?”

“laidback?” He hands you a glass. “normal?”

You accept it, shuffling over towards the sink to fill it with water. “Yeah.” You cough once, correcting yourself; Sans may not care the slightest bit, but that feels a bit too informal. “Yes.”

Sans nods understandingly. “i wish i could tell you. frisk... the whole thing is messed up. at least they’re talking about it with you. don’t think it’s good for them to keep it all bottled up, y’know?”

No. Not at all, even if they logically can’t tell anyone about it. Except for Sans, Flowey and you, apparently. Lucky you.

Stalling, you sip at the water. It is cold, almost too cold. Surprising, considering how you didn’t even turn the tap all the way over. Quietly, you set it down with a gentle clink. You stare in front of you, through the kitchen window into the backyard. Snow still covers the ground, a blanket of white trampled down by trails of footprints and snow angels. Frisk’s, most likely, based on the size.

A cool touch draws your attention to your hand. Sans has placed his hand over your own. Now, it isn’t the first time that you have touched him — you have shaken hands on multiple occasions by this point, after all — yet, the texture still surprises you. His bones aren’t porous or rough, like you had initially expected. They are almost slippery smooth, each small bone like fine china. Part of you wonders how he can grip anything. That would honestly explain why Papyrus seems to be constantly wearing gloves.

His thumb strokes the back of your hand gently, comfortingly. “are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’m fine,” you say, lying to yourself just as much as him. After a deep breath, you take your hand back.

Ready or not, you need to return to work.

“Oh look, is the social worker done flipping out yet?” Flowey says mockingly, barely waiting for you to return to the living room. He isn’t even looking in your direction; he is entirely focused upon his game, mashing at buttons. “Congratulations.”

You exhale through your nose as Frisk scolds Flowey. Rather than allowing yourself to become distracted by him as rude and annoying as he can be, you ask, “Frisk, is there anything I should be prepared for, moving forward?” You might as well take advantage of their knowledge of the future.

Frisk shrugs. “I dunno. This is a weird timeline. So, keep doing what you’re doing?”

“Wait. What do you mean it’s weird?” What does that even mean, coming from Frisk? What defines ‘weird’?

“Well, you aren’t supposed to be here. That probably counts as weird.”

“So, who is supposed to be here?”
“Miss Manda.” The ‘duh’ goes unspoken, but is heavily implied. “She, um, died earlier than she’s supposed to. Or maybe it’s because I took my own sweet time doing everything Underground this time? Something different could’ve happened up here, I guess.”

You suppose. Time would continue to pass on the Surface, with countless variables to be adjusted, choices to be made. A doctor could have given Amanda a different dose of her medications, impacting how long her body was able to push on through the cancer. She might have done something that pushed herself too far, worsening her condition. Anything could have happened.

Still, that raises a new question. “So, because of this, you have no idea what’s going to happen?”

They wobble their hand back and forth. “Some things are the same. A lot of the politics stuff is pretty close, for example. And I mean, sometimes there were slight differences in things Underground, right? Like, monsters would sometimes show up in some runs that I had never met before, or I’d get weird phone calls, but it didn’t change the ending… you might just be one of those things.” Frisk pauses, giving time for the news that your entire presence here might just be some sort of fluke in the universe to sink in.

Then, “Can I get back to my game now?”

The words leave your mouth semi-automatically. “Sure. Go for it.”

Right now, you just want to go home.

Chapter End Notes

Well. That happened.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
Chapter Summary

You try to cope with what you learned about the Resets from Frisk. Emphasis on 'try'.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It… it has been a long seven days.

Even as you drive back to Ebott, you keep on expecting to be returned to your desk, another week lost. You can’t remember what it was like to Load. Not really. Yet, you brace yourself for something to happen. For the world to ripple around you, maybe, like a cheap movie effect. For the dark nothingness that Frisk described to arrive and consume you entirely. For reality as you know it to come to an end.

You roll your shoulders, trying to shake away some of the tension that had settled there as you turn onto the driveway. If anything, it increases. Car parked and engine turned off, you remain seated inside, thoughts racing.

As though you didn’t have enough on your mind on the moment, the realisation that Ivy might not even be home suddenly dawns on you. You didn’t call or text to ask; for all you knew, she and Malcolm could have been out having date night.

Without the boost of the heater, the frosty air seeps its way past the layers of clothes, making you shiver. How long must you have been sitting there, to notice already? Five minutes? Ten?

Snap out of it!

Yes, you had just received some earth-shattering news today. Yes, you drove all the way to your friend’s house without even knowing if she was home because you need someone to talk to. But you learn awful things all the time because of your job. You learn of neglect, abuse, troubled behaviours… the list goes on and on. For your own sake, you can’t allow what Frisk told you to be any different.

Easier said than done.

Still, it is pretty ridiculous to sit there and wonder if Ivy was home when you could, you know, go and knock at her door.

“Bubbles!” Ivy exclaims, pulling you into a close hug. “I was wondering if you were actually going to get out of your car!” She pulls back to give you some space, only to frown. “Hey, are you okay?”
You try for a smile, but even you could tell that it is far too shaky to be anything near convincing. “That obvious, huh?”

“Get yourself inside instead of standing out here, freezing your ass off, and we’ll talk about it.” She ushers you in before you would even have the chance to argue if you were of the mind to, closing the door firmly behind. “There we are. You get yourself settled, and I’ll get us something to drink.”

“Thank you,” you breathe out, stripping off your coat and boots. You can hear Libbie crow out in delight from the living room, followed by some more nonsensical babbling and the rattling of whatever toy she is playing with.

“So, how bad are things? Water, tea, hot chocolate, coffee, whiskey, vodka…”

That startles a weak laugh out of you. “Tempting, but I still need to drive home. If we break out the booze, I’m not gonna be in any state to do that.”

“I could take you back,” Ivy says, dead serious. “Or Malcolm, if you feel like waiting a bit longer. It’s up to you.”

For a few moments, the idea weighs heavily in your mind. Hesitantly, you ask, “You promise to cut me off? I still need to go to work tomorrow.”

Ivy peeks her head around the doorway, braids swinging after her. “Shi—” She cuts off as her daughter’s antics become even louder. “I mean, shoot! Just give me a minute, hun.”

You allow yourself to settle in. Libbie is slowly spinning around in her sit-to-stand activity centre, chubby little legs bouncing as she decides which toy to play with next. On the television, one of those classical music for babies dvds is on full display, although the volume is so low it might as well be on mute. That probably defeats the point of the whole thing, but whatever; at least the animations are intriguing. Not much later, your friend returns, drinks held precariously in one hand along with a tray of fruit in the other.

Now, theoretically, talking with Ivy should be a great thing. Clearly, you have a lot of thoughts to vent about so that you don’t explode from all the secrets.

But that is the problem: you have a lot to say, but you can’t talk about any of it! For multiple reasons!

Looking past the actual topics at hand, there is the matter of confidentiality. There are very few people with whom you are permitted to discuss case files. Needless to say, she certainly isn’t one of them.

That is why you leave home barely an hour later, Ivy chattering away as she drove.

“So yeah, that’s how we almost kinda accidentally poisoned our neighbours last week. The more you know, huh? They didn’t notice, though. Or, at least, if they did, they sure as hell didn’t tell us,” she concludes, parking your car. “Now, if you don’t mind, I’ll wait inside for my uber to get here.”

“Uh huh,” you mumble, grabbing your keys from her. True to her word, she didn’t let you get more than slightly buzzed, something that you would certainly appreciate the next morning.

Now, though, all you can think of is Frisk, phrases from the afternoon echoing in your mind in an awful, endless loop.
You'd be surprised what a combination of desperation, curiosity and Determination will do to a person. What has happened in their small lifetime made Frisk so desperate? You have gone over their case file. Several times, in fact. Some hopelessness wouldn't have been surprising. Hell, it is to be expected from a kid in their situation. But... going back in time? Dying? Killing people? That is so much more than some simple juvenile rashness. As for curiosity, well, that you can at least understand. Frisk was is a child — they still are one, damn it, you need to keep reminding yourself of that — and it is only natural for a child to be curious about the world around them. Particularly if something so fantastical was to happen out of nowhere. And Determination... you don't want to dwell on that. Not right now.

It's just not right.

“What isn’t right?” Ivy asks, looking at you in concern. You open your mouth, ready to respond, only to freeze at the last second, shaking your head. You can’t.

Thankfully, Ivy’s ride shows up before you say something you shouldn’t. A quick hug and a reminder to text and arrange a night out later, she is gone, leaving you alone with your thoughts.

Ding!

Well, mostly alone with your thoughts, apparently.

Picking up your phone, you unlock it, not really paying attention to who sent the message. Before you can check, however, your mother’s profile picture fills the upper portion of the screen, ringtone starting up.

“Hey, Mom,” you answer, making your way to your bedroom. You should probably wash your face and stuff first; as soon as you climb into bed, you are likely not going to get back up until morning. Despite this, you don’t change your path.

“Hey sweetie. How’s work been?”

You groan tiredly. “I don’t wanna talk about it.”

She gives a sympathetic hum. “That bad, huh? Well, just thought I’d call to give you some good news.”

“Dad finally retired that one ‘dress shirt’?”

You can practically hear her shudder across the phone at the mention of what she likes to call ‘the atrocity’. “I wish. I’m still working on it. Hopefully by our next anniversary…” She trails off.

“That’s besides the point. The real news is that Cody finally proposed to Hannah!”

“Really?” You have known Hannah since she was born. The daughter of your parents’ friends, the two of you were close enough growing up that you might as well be family. As for Cody, you have known the kid since he and Hannah started hanging out in middle school. Hanging out soon turned into dating, with Hannah’s parents occasionally asking you to play chaperone. Still... “Aren’t they pretty young to be getting married? I mean, Hannah is what, nineteen?”

Amused, your mother responds, “Try twenty-three, dear. She’s young, but not that young.” Great. Now you feel old on top of all the other stuff. Thanks, Mom. “They haven’t arranged a specific date yet, but it’s looking like late fall, maybe early winter. I’ll try to keep you in the loop.”

For nearly an hour, you talk with your mother. Your dad even joins in briefly, until you have to call it quits for the night. You are exhausted. So exhausted, in fact, that you completely forget to check
the original text before passing out for the night.

 Darkness. Pitch black, yet you can somehow see the empty path in front of you. You hear nothing. You feel nothing. Yet, you keep walking.

 And walking.

 And walking.

 It never ends. Somehow, the pathway becomes narrower, claustrophobic. You can no longer breathe. All you can do is keep walking through the darkness.

 Out of nowhere, a light appears. Too bright; you shield your eyes with your arm. Gradually, your vision adjusts so that you can make out words surrounded by a glowing frame: ‘RESET’ or ‘LOAD’. You know you have to make a choice. To Load would mean to continue, which seems like the better option. Reaching ahead, you try to select it.

 But you can’t.

 Forcibly, your hand is moved to ‘RESET’. Try as you might, you cannot redirect it. The darkness spins around you, bringing you back in time. “No!” You shout, but no noise escapes your mouth. All you can do is watch, horrified and dizzy, until —

 — You wake up with a start, the barest of morning light beginning to stream through your window.

 “It was just a dream,” you whisper hoarsely to yourself. Just a weird dream playing off of your lingering discomfort about Frisk’s superpowers. No big deal. Knowing that you don’t want to go back to sleep at this rate, you check your phone. Hopefully, it isn’t too far away from the time you normally get up.

 Eh, not too bad, you guess. There is only seventeen minutes until your alarm goes off. You can deal with that. And by ‘deal with that’, you mean you can mess around on your phone for the next seventeen minutes and wish you were resting peacefully.

 Naturally, just before you can begin your idle scrolling on social media, you notice the text from last night. Whoops. You should probably deal with that.

 Sans (Frisk’s guardian): sorry for texting. thought it’d be easier than trying to call. i know this was a bit of a mind fuck, if you’ll excuse my language. you good? need to talk? lmk

 Well, then.

 Part of you considers ignoring the text. The other part, however, starts texting back immediately.

 You: Sorry for not responding last night. I’ll be fine.
You press send, only to frown at your phone contemplatively. Wasn’t your big problem last night that you had no one to talk to about this? If anyone knows what you are feeling right now, it is probably Sans. Besides, it would probably not be the worst idea in the world to have someone to check up on Frisk today.

**You:** Also, I might take you up on that offer later, if you don’t mind.

Immediately, you receive a response.

**Sans (Frisk’s guardian):** sure thing

The rest of your week can — on the most positive note — be described as bleh. Realistically, it is super bleh with a sprinkling of ‘why me?’ and ‘when will it stop?’.

Tuesday, you are stressed out beyond belief, to the point that some of your coworkers notice and give you extra space. You forget your lunch, which means you have to go out and grab something. To top things off, you receive the wrong order, not that you notice until you are already back at your desk.

Wednesday actually starts out somewhat decent. Sure, you sleep past your alarm, but only for a few minutes. However, *someone* in the office is clearly sick. All day, you can hear coughing and sneezing and sniffling. Whenever you turn around to passive aggressively offer a tissue, everything goes dead silent. You have no idea who the person is, but you are done with them.

When you wake up on Thursday, congested and miserable, you decide you are even more done with the mystery infection than you were before. You, at least, have the decency to call in sick. François is very understanding about this type of thing; you guys work with kids, after all, some of whom are very young and vulnerable to illnesses.

As for Friday through Sunday… well, you are still pretty out of commission, fighting whatever it is that you caught. Many Kleenexes are sacrificed in the battle of your steadily dripping nose, and you practically lose your voice due to the force of your coughing and sneezing. You have consumed a bathtub’s worth of soup, and at least two bathtub’s of tea. By Sunday evening, you are able to sanitise your house and move on with life, thank goodness.

And that, of course, brings you to Monday.

Time to see Frisk once more.

Chapter End Notes
So... I'm honestly not sure how I feel about this one? In my draft, I had an entirely different chapter planned, but the flow from last chapter to it didn't seem right. So I added this in, and... I just don't know.

It probably doesn't help that I've been exhausted from moving and just a whole bunch of other health factors.

On the plus side, I'm pumped for next chapter, which I can now write without it feeling awkward.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.
You learn something entertaining and something concerning during your next home visit.

Happy 4th anniversary to Undertale!

Today, Frisk is the one to let you in.

The moment you step inside, you can hear cackling coming from the living room. Flowey, most likely; the pitch doesn’t really match Sans or Papyrus. Between laughs are breathless wheezes, vaguely reminiscent of words.

What on earth did you walk into this time?

The whiteboard has made a reappearance in front of the couch, with a kitchen chair to each side. In those chairs are Sans and Papyrus, and boy, are their skulls ever brightly flushed right now. You know it is bad when you can see the blush on the back of their skulls. Manoeuvring your way around the additional furniture, you note that Sans’ face is completely masked by his hands. The taller of the brothers looks just as uncomfortable, staring straight at the wall with the quiet horror of someone who regrets every single one of their life decisions.

Not that you speak of experience, or anything. Nope, not at all. It isn’t like you have done something like ask a twelve year old questions about what it is like to go back in time and now have been super bothered by their response all week when you could have been living in blissful ignorance for a bit longer. No regrets here whatsoever.

Ugh, you really need to stop going back to that.

“Good afternoon?” Flowey is still laughing. Neither skeleton makes any sign of having heard you. You try again, louder this time. “Good afternoon.”

Though muffled by his hands, Sans makes some garbled attempt at a greeting. Hey, at least it is a response.

“GOOD—” Papyrus visibly cuts himself off, hearing how abnormally squeaky that was. He coughs, returning to his regular register. “GOOD AFTERNOON, MISS SOCIAL WORKER. IT’S NICE TO SEE YOU, AND NOT JUST BECAUSE YOUR PRESENCE IS ESSENTIAL TO MOVING PAST AN AWKWARD SITUATION! OF WHICH THERE WAS NONE, OF COURSE, BECAUSE SANS AND I AGREED THAT WE AREN’T TALKING ABOUT IT.”
“Uh…”

“ABSOLUTELY NOTHING HAPPENED, WHICH IS JUST AS IT SHOULD BE. WOULD YOU LIKE SOME TEA? I’LL GO MAKE US SOME TEA.” In a blur, Papyrus is gone.

“i’ll…” Sans stands up. “i’m gonna see if he needs any help. bye.”

That leaves you with Flowey, who is currently wiping away tears of laughter with a vine, and Frisk, who is shaking as though they are on the brink of laughing themself.

“Oh okay,” you sigh, suspecting that these two will either give you an earful or manage to be even more secretive than Sans and Papyrus, “do I get to know the context?”

Furtively, Flowey glances back and forth. Apparently, the coast is clear, because he leans forward closer to you. Voice lowered to a conspiratorial whisper, he says, “Fuck yeah.”

“LANGUAGE, FLOWEY.”

“Seriously!” Muttering his annoyance about Papyrus’ ‘swear-dar’, Flowey starts digging around in the couch cushions. He plucks out a gold coin and grins. “Victory! Now, Frisky, why don’t you tell her.”

Frisk nods, helping Flowey off the couch so he can add ‘his’ gold to the swear jar across the room.

“Well, it all started when I got home from school. The whiteboard,” they say, pointing at it, “was out and Papyrus had written ‘LEARNING TIME’ at the top with lots of colours.”

Now that you look at it, you can see the remains of the title: ‘EAR ME’. ‘LEARNING TIME’ makes a lot more sense.

“Both of them were sitting really seriously, which was when I knew something was up. Like, Sans wasn’t slouchy, which is just weird. And, Papyrus never really sits down unless it’s time to eat or you’re here.”

“Really?”

“The day Papyrus stays sitting completely still for more than ten minutes without a good reason is the day the universe implodes on itself,” Flowey explains with full confidence. And, thinking back, he is usually doing something if he is sitting down. Paperwork, art, puzzles… heck, he almost always talks with his hands gesturing energetically.

“So, yeah,” Frisk continues, “they were being sketchy. Like, really weird. Before I could even bring my backpack to my room, they asked me to sit down so we could ‘have a little talk’.” They cut their finger quotes short to help place Flowey back on the couch. “Again: sketchy. They started with some normal stuff, like asking how school was, did I learn anything cool, how many kids did Undyne bench-press… you know, all those normal things.”

Um… one of those things is not like the other. Why? Why is Undyne bench-pressing children? Actually, why is it that whenever you hear something about Undyne, it’s something weird like this?

“Then —”

“— That’s when the diagrams started!” Flowey cuts in.

“Hey,” Frisk complains halfheartedly, poking him on one of his petals, “I thought you wanted me
to tell the story.” Flowey shrugs, gesturing for them to keep going. “But, yeah. Papyrus got out the markers and Sans started talking.”

What those diagrams were, you cannot tell. All that remains are several multicoloured smears, like whatever had been there had been quickly erased by someone running their hand over the board. It is actually weirdly pretty, in an abstract sort of way.

“Flowey, you ready?”

“Sure.”

Frisk gives him two thumbs up. “Great! So, Sans started by saying…”

Flowey’s stem bends in a slouch. “well, kiddo,” he says as your jaw drops, “you’re getting older now, huh?” You force yourself to blink, your eyes starting to sting from dryness after being opened so widely; Flowey’s imitation of Sans is flawless.

It is a good thing, too, because you absolutely aren’t prepared for what comes next.

“Then, Papyrus said…”

“YOU’LL BE OUT OF STRIPES BEFORE YOU KNOW IT!”

Despite seeing Flowey’s mouth move, you find yourself looking behind you to make sure that it wasn’t actually Papyrus saying that. Somehow, Flowey is even better at copying Papyrus’ speech and mannerisms than he was when he did Sans, which is pretty hard to beat. No wonder why Frisk is having him do this; it is remarkable! He has a real talent.

The high pitched, squealing whistle of a tea kettle sounds, interrupting Frisk from continuing their story. They exchange a look with Flowey, who nods. “Okay, guess we’re gonna have to stick to the short version. Flowey?”

He takes a deep breath. “Sans and Papyrus tried to give Frisk the Talk, but they kept on getting confused with the human stuff. It was pretty sad, actually. Then Frisk owned them by interrupting with a super detailed explanation of how things actually work and finished it off by saying, ‘you guys do know I went to public school, right? Sex ed was a thing. Can I have a juice box now?’ And they walked off without saying another word while Sans and Papyrus just sat there like total idiots.”

Aforementioned monsters choose that exact moment to return. It is clear that Sans at least heard that last part, if the scowl he sends in Flowey’s direction is any indication. Regardless, you find yourself fighting back the quivering of your shoulders, the twitching of the corners of your mouth.

“Excuse me a moment.” You don’t bother waiting for an answer before you book it into the front hall.

As soon as you are out of sight, you cover your mouth with your hands, silently dying of laughter because, man, can you ever imagine how the full thing went down! Sans would have started with a pun or two, before going into the science of all that Frisk could expect as they start puberty. And you have seen Papyrus’ artwork before; whatever diagrams he drew would have been quite a sight. They would have been so prepared, only for it all to go downhill and for Frisk to be brutally honest about what all they already knew.

Also, although you don’t have firsthand experience, you know that the Talk can feel awkward for parents who have had all their lives to prepare and who have lived through it themselves. Sans and
Papyrus had the unfortunate disadvantage of having to learn how everything works for humans. Then, they had to deal with the fact that the tween they were trying to teach has a more complete knowledge than they do, by the sounds of it.

On the plus side, at least you know they are doing their job in making sure Frisk is fully informed about all that comes along with getting older.

It takes a few more minutes than it probably should, but you eventually gather your wits. By the time you return, everyone else has also settled down. True to their excuse, there is tea waiting for you on the coffee table, and the others each have their own cup in hand. Even Flowey has one, smaller than the rest. Although, you highly doubt he also has the same floral flavoured tea. The whiteboard has also been flipped around and moved against the back wall; out of sight, out of mind.

For their sakes, as well as your own — there is only so much laughter you can hold in — you decide to move onto a more banal topic.

“So, uh, how have things been at the embassy lately?”

Frisk takes a loud slurp of tea. “Well, I —”

They are suddenly cut off by… is that All Star being played by kazooos? It is. Sans takes his phone out of his pocket, silencing the tune.

“heh, sorry ‘bout that.” His smile pulls downwards as he looks at the screen. “huh. hey, anyone remember why i made an alarm?”

“DIDN’T YOU LABEL IT?”

He shrugs. “guess not.”

Papyrus tsks. “HOW UNFORTUNATE.”

“yeah. whoops.” He starts returning his phone to his pocket, only to freeze. Realisation visibly dawns on him, his eye sockets widening. “oh crap.”

You set down your tea. “What is it?”

“well, Frisk’s therapist is gonna be out of town for a while, so he had asked that we reschedule this week’s appointment.” Sans chuckles awkwardly, running a hand over his head. “thought something seemed off about mondays at the time… whoops. i guess i’ll just go give ‘im a call.”

“NONSENSE!” Papyrus stands up, clearing the coffee table. “SANS, YOU GO AND TRY TO BE A RESPONSIBLE UNCLE FIGURE AND TAKE FRISK TO THEIR APPOINTMENT, AND I’LL ENTERTAIN MISS SOCIAL WORKER. PROVIDING THAT IS ALL RIGHT WITH MISS SOCIAL WORKER, OF COURSE.”

“Go for it.” You could use some more time to talk with Papyrus. Besides, it is comforting to know that Frisk is receiving some psychological help after last week.

“you’re sure?”

“Absolutely.”

Sans stretches, but doesn’t stand up yet. “well, you heard her, kiddo. go grab your things.”
“Okay!” Frisk runs upstairs, only to stop halfway and run back down. “Here,” they exclaim, passing their teacup to Papyrus. The abrupt motion spills the liquid all over the coffee table. Once they are out of sight, Flowey hightails it to the kitchen, loudly proclaiming that he refuses to go along with Frisk again.

In only a matter of minutes, Sans and Frisk are in Ebott; teleportation really does have its advantages.

Damp cloth in hand, Papyrus works on wiping down the table. “HONESTLY,” he mutters, scrubbing at a particularly sticky spot, “YOU WOULD THINK THAT SOMEONE WITH SO MANY JOBS WOULD BE THE PINNACLE OF PRODUCTIVITY. YET, SANS ASTOUNDINGLY MANAGES TO PUT IN THE MINIMAL AMOUNT OF EFFORT! IT IS A REAL GIFT, AS FRUSTRATING AS IT IS.”

“How does his schedule work?” You ask, picking a coaster up and out of the way for him. “He always seems to have so much time.”

“AS SOON AS YOU SOLVE THAT MYSTERY, FEEL FREE TO LET ME KNOW. I’VE TRIED ASKING FOR HIS SCHEDULE, BUT IT IS SUCH A MESS! I ONLY WISH TO KNOW THE BEST TIMES TO HARASS HIM WITH MY BROTHERLY AFFECTIONS WITHOUT BEING DISRUPTIVE.” Papyrus throws his hands up in the air. “IS THAT TOO MUCH TO ASK?”

You decide not to answer. Instead, you gesture to the teacups. “Do you want some help with that?”

“Yes, please, if you don’t mind.”

The two of you gather everything up, returning it to the kitchen. When you go back to the living room, you are greeted by a squeaky bark from above. Looking up, you can barely believe your eyes.

“Toby?”

The small white dog barks back down at you, wagging his tail. Normally, you wouldn’t question such behaviour from a dog. But, considering he is sitting atop the ceiling fan, you want to question some things. Primarily, how on earth did he get up there?

Sighing, Papyrus steps up. Into mid air. How the… “YOU ARE SUCH A TROUBLESOME LITTLE MONGREL. GET DOWN FROM THERE THIS INSTANT!” Toby wags his tail harder, yipping until Papyrus climbs up enough (?!?!?!?) to grab him. The dog snuggles right into his arms.

“How?”

“How what?”

You raise your hand up and down, words escaping you as you sputter, “How? That’s… that’s not how life works? Or gravity?”

“HUH,” he says mildly, like he didn’t just do something completely mind boggling. He sits down on the couch, urging Toby to leave. “SHOO, NOW, YOU RASCAL. GO AND BOTHER SOMEONE ELSE.”

Toby refuses to be shooed. If anything, he becomes even more snuggly. Cute.
"I WOULD LIKE TO APOLOGISE FOR SANS AND MY BEHAVIOUR TODAY. WELL, YOU KNOW."

"Don’t worry about it."

Papyrus’ expression shifts pensively. “AT LEAST SANS MADE AN EFFORT THIS TIME WITH FRISK. IT’S MORE THAN HE DID WITH ME, THAT’S FOR SURE.”

“Really?”

“Oh, yes! I ended up having to go to Gerson to find out about the moldsmals and the whimsuns, which was certainly an experience.” He pauses, scratching behind Toby’s ear. You aren’t sure if he even realises he did that. “I did learn a lot about the differences between the production of textiles before and after the war, though.”

“Wait.”

You have just noticed something. Something that, as a social worker, is mildly concerning. Something that you should have noticed much sooner.

Sans was the one who was supposed to give Papyrus the Talk.

Sans was the one to document things in Papyrus’ photo album.

At Gyftmas, they had their friends over. No mentions of family whatsoever.

“What is it?”

“It’s just… do you and Sans have parents?”

“Well… you see… the thing is…” Papyrus jumps to his feet, settling Toby on the floor. Toby snores softly, undisturbed. “Would you look at the time? I should turn on the oven. Right now. It needs to preheat so I can make supper, after all. Also, someone should probably check on Flowey.” Sprinting to the kitchen, he adds, “Thank you for this wonderful conversation! Until next week!”

Briefly, you consider chasing after him. This lack of answer is even more concerning! It should be a simple yes or no question. Anything is better than stalling and changing the subject.

Just for once, you would like to leave this house less worried than when you came in.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies if there are any mistakes I didn't catch. I've been under the weather the past few days, and I didn't really feel up to doing much editing. Please feel free to let me know if you notice anything so that I can fix it later.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time for updates, to talk or to find out some of my random, mostly sleep-deprived thoughts.
The Cold Circumstance

Chapter Summary

You get to meet another member of Frisk's monster family.

Chapter Notes

Well, this update marks two fun landmarks for me:
1. The 1 year anniversary of this fic
2. Reaching over 100k words

Plus, this chapter in particular is something I've been looking forward to for ages (even though I hardcore procrastinated and wrote 90% of this last night and first thing this morning), so here we go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“OH. IT’S YOU.”

Papyrus’ less than warm welcome brings you pause. Below his eye sockets, there are deep, dark circles, which is strange; usually, Sans is the one sporting that particular feature. Combine that with his slightly hollow tone, and you are beginning to feel worried.

You walk inside, however; you can ask about that within the house, which has central heating and a lack of wind and rain falling on the slushy remains of the winter’s snow.

As soon as the door closes behind you, Sans teleports into the hallway. Voice harried, he asks. “is tori here yet?” You wave a hand past where Papyrus is standing, still shrugging out of your coat. “oh.”

Geez. You don’t expect anyone to look forward to your visits, but Sans and Papyrus at least normally don’t sound this disappointed to see you.

“What’s going on? You guys seem, well, worn down to the bone.”

“Really, Miss Social Worker?” Papyrus says tiredly, his voice abnormally quiet and lacking in his typical enthusiasm. “I Thought You Were Better Than That.”

Huh? What did you…? Oh, right. Worn down to the bone. “Sorry, Papyrus. I didn’t mean to —”

An immense sneeze, followed by a miserable groan from the living room cuts you off.

“that’s what’s going on,” Sans says. “paps, it’s your turn.”

“YES. OF COURSE.” He walks — actually walks, a slow movement without any pep in his step whatsoever, which is so very unPapyrusy — away, looking like a man condemned to the gallows.
Sans rubs the back of his neck. “sorry ‘bout all this. we were planning on calling you if they were still sick today so you wouldn’t have to come and all, but dealing with frisk has just got us busy and bone weary. guess we forgot.”

“Don’t worry about it,” you say, waving your hand midair. “How long have they been under the weather?”

“since friday,” he exhales, making it sound like an eternity. Then again, dealing with a sick kid for several days, with most of those days being the weekend? It likely felt like it. “you can go home if you want. frisk is probably still contagious and all that.”

“I’ll be fine for a bit,” you decide. Naturally, you won’t stay long, nor will you get too close to Frisk; the last thing you need to do is contaminate yourself. But staying for a few minutes, seeing how Sans and Papyrus have a hold on the situation… you can risk it.

“if you say so.”

Sans stretches and shoves his hands back into his pockets. All in all, he sure looks like his normal self. Yes, the circles under his eyes are a little deeper, and if you look carefully, there is a hint of strain to that constant smile of his. However, this all seems minimal compared to how Papyrus is faring.

Taking a chance, you lower your voice and ask, “Is Papyrus okay?”

Sans blinks at you. “why?”

“He just seems…” You gesture vaguely.

“ah,” Sans chuckles. “well, let’s just say i don’t think he was really ready to play nurse for frisk. they aren’t exactly the best patient.”

All right, that seems perfectly valid. Knowing Papyrus, he has probably been running himself ragged, trying to be the perfect caretaker for a human despite their biological differences. That does beg the question, though…

“How are you doing so well?”

Another short chuckle. “i’ve been taking care of pap when he’s been sick for years. this? this is nothing.”

Again; valid. Because, face it: Papyrus would make a terrible patient.

As though he can hear your inner monologue, Sans fondly mutters under his breath, “the sheer amount of blue magic it takes to make him stay in bed and nap for once in his life.”

Just as you had been expecting, Frisk is bundled up under several layers of blankets on the couch, a growing pile of tissues in a small garbage bin within arms reach. Nose red with congestion, their voice is abnormally nasal as they greet you.

“Please tell me the nickname isn’t because you blew a really big snot bubble.”

You can’t help but smile. Trust this kid to be determined enough to continue with the tradition of asking even when they are sick. “Well, I guess this is the one time you can be glad you were
wrong. That’s definitely not why my friend calls me Bubbles. I’m guessing that happened?”

“Ugh,” they groan, turning onto their side. You feel safe to assume that that would be a yes, then.

Just as loudly as Frisk’s groan, Flowey makes a noise of disgust from where he is colouring on the floor in front of the couch. “Why are human illnesses always so nasty?” he complains with a sneer.

“Watch it,” Frisk says grumpily. “I’ll sneeze on you.”

Glowering, Flowey picks up his paper and crayons with his vines, wheeling himself further away. You don’t have the heart to inform him that the blast radius of the average sneeze travels much farther than that.

“THERE, THERE,” Papyrus announces, scurrying in frantically with no less than three full boxes of Kleenex, “I HAVE ACQUIRED MORE DISPOSABLE SLIME SHIELDS FROM THE BATHROOM.”

“Ewwwww,” Flowey gags. “That’s it; I’m leaving you sickos.”

Absently as he picks up a thermometer from the coffee table, Sans says, “nice one.”

“Shut up, Smiley!”

Oh boy. This is certainly going to be an interesting afternoon.

With Papyrus busy disinfecting every surface in the living room, Sans taking Frisk’s temperature, Frisk having their temperature taken and Flowey gone to wherever Floweys retreat when annoyed with the others in the house, there is nothing for you to do but sit down and watch. Besides, technically speaking, you are here to observe, so you might as well do it.

The thermometer beeps. Almost immediately, Frisk opens their mouth, allowing Sans to take it. As they wait for the results, they grab a cup of juice with a swirly straw and take several sips.

“good new, kiddo. fever’s going down.”

“Yay.” Frisk’s voice lacks completely in enthusiasm as they flop their head back down onto their pillow.

Two firm raps at the front door catches everyone’s attention, a small burst of energy spreading through the room. “Knock, knock!”

Sans drops the thermometer with a relieved smile. “who’s there?” he asks, making his way to get the door. You decide to get up and follow him.

“Goliath,” the voice, which can only be described as motherly and warm, calls back.

“goliath who?”

Sans opens the door, revealing a tall goatlike monster in a long skirt holding a large tote. She smiles, delivering the punchline. “Goliath down, you look-eth tired!”

Sans laughs, albeit a bit shakily. “oh, you’ve got no idea. thanks again for coming over and doing this, tori. we really appreciate it.”

“Any time, Sans. It does an old lady good to get out every once and awhile. Although, I suppose I’m certainly doing better than I used to.” She steps inside, handing her bag to him. As soon as she
removes her coat, she holds out a furry white paw to you. It is soft, almost ticklish. “Hello, my
dear. It’s nice to meet you. My name is Toriel.”

You bite back the response of saying that you already knew that and instead give her your name.
Even if you hadn’t been told by Sans that she was coming, Toriel’s identity is quite obvious. Then
again, you have been required to follow monster politics more closely than the average person, so
perhaps it is safe to assume that most wouldn’t know the former queen of Monsterkind by sight.

By the time the three of you get to the living room, Frisk has wiggled up to a seated position, back
propped up against their pillows. “Mom!” they exclaim, grabbing another tissue to loudly blow
their nose. The trumpeting result is impressively loud.

Moving forward, she wraps them into what can only be a warm hug. “I am sorry that I am so late,
my child. I had to meet with some teachers after classes were complete for the day before I could
come here.”

“Did you bring the butts pie?”

Thrown off, you cut in, “Excuse me?”

“WORRY NOT, MISS SOCIAL WORKER! BUTTS PIE IS MERELY THE WORLD’S WORST
ABBREVIATION FOR MISS TORIEL’S BUTTERSCOTCH CINNAMON PIE.”

“Thank you, Papyrus.” Ruffling Frisk’s hair, Toriel continues, “Of course I did, my child. It is
good for HP, after all.”

“Yes!”

“But,” she says, reaching into her tote, “only after you’ve had something healthier to eat.”

Frisk pouts, but Toriel remains unaffected. She takes out a Tupperware container of soup, saying
that Chara used to love it when they were sick. You are about to ask who Chara is (was?), but the
note of sadness in her voice — combined with the overall sombreness that the name brings to the
room — stops you.

It isn’t crucial for you to know.

Along with the food, Toriel has brought over schoolwork from Frisk’s teachers, catching them up
on what they have missed. After a few minutes of this, it becomes apparent that Frisk is zoning out
too much to be worthwhile. She lets them finish their soup in peace, although Sans steps in with the
dreaded bottle of artificial “grape” flavoured cold medicine. That is hastily washed down by more
juice and soup, something for which you definitely don’t blame them. As much as children’s
medicine promises a more palatable flavour, there is always that medicinal aftertaste which just
can’t be covered.

By the time the pie is brought out, you can say with certainty that Papyrus isn’t alone in feeling
sick (damn it, now they have got you going) of Sans and Toriel’s puns. Particularly the illness
related ones. Frisk was done with them about two flu jokes in. Granted, they seem to be done with
a lot of stuff right now; the kid is at that stage of sickness where grumpiness is just as much of a
symptom as sneezing and coughing.

“Oh!” Toriel pauses in slicing the pie to dish up. “Let me warm this up for you.”

Instead of going to the kitchen, as one would assume, she backs up to stand in the middle of the
living room, distancing herself from everyone else. Your eyes widen as a baseball sized flame pops
into existence above her right hand, the pie tin held a few inches higher by her left hand. After a few seconds, the flame extinguishes and she examines her handiwork, humming to herself.

“There. That’s better.”

Slices are distributed to Frisk and the skeleton brothers, with a really tiny one put to the side for Flowey to eat later. Just before she cuts another slice for herself, she turns to look to you. “Would you like any, my dear?”

“Yes, please,” you say with a nod. After all, why not? At this point, you have already accepted so much food from Sans and Papyrus, so it isn’t like you can blur that line anymore.

Besides, she isn’t Frisk’s guardian — although you still wonder why. Ignoring your concerns that Frisk living with her could result in unintended stress because of her unofficial role as a monarch, Toriel seems more than capable of raising a child. Which, of course, isn’t to say that Sans and Papyrus aren’t. It is only that from what little you know of her, she is a natural mother figure who already seems to know a thing or two about humans. Frisk still calls her Mom, and King Asgore had asked you to consider her as a guardian if the worst was to happen.

The point is, you are curious to see what this pie is like, considering it was able to make Frisk perk up so much.

…

And okay, fine. You can admit it. There is a childish part of you that, even knowing what it truly is, is curious to know just what butts pie tastes like. Plus, monster food is just fun in general.

At this point in your life, you can’t even pretend to be surprised when Sans pulls a bottle from midair — which probably means it is from one of those weird dimensional box doohickeys — and slathers his slice in ketchup. Nope. Instead, you barely even blink before taking the first bite of your own slice.

You now fully understand Frisk’s reaction.

Butts pie is fantastic!

“So, what has you here in New New Home today?”

Frisk answers before you can do so much as let the sweet magic dessert dissolve in your mouth. “She’s my social worker, Mom.”

Toriel frowns, losing all warmth. “Oh. I see.” Almost immediately, she turns to face Sans and Papyrus. Dismissing you.

Frisk sits up straighter. “Can I talk to you for a minute? Alone?”

“My child, I’m not sure that is the best —”

“hey, tori,” Sans interrupts, catching Frisk’s gaze. “paps was wondering about some of your soup-er techniques for making some good homemade chicken noodle. weren’t you, bro?”

A wily smile makes its way onto Papyrus’ face. “IGNORING THAT HORRENDOUS ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR, YES THAT IS MOST TRUE! MISS TORIEL, WHY DON’T YOU JOIN ME IN THE KITCHEN, AND YOU CAN SHOW ME SOME OF YOUR STEW-PENDOUS COOKING TECHNIQUES.”
“But —”

“nice one, bro,” Sans says, holding out a fist.

Papyrus completes the fistbump. “NYEH HEH HEH! THANK YOU. NOW LET’S GET GOING, MISS TORIEL. AFTER ALL, AS AN EDUCATOR, YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT THE BEST TIME TO LEARN IS NOW!”

Before she can make any more (frankly suspicious) protests, Papyrus effortlessly redirects her to the kitchen, Sans following at the rear. This leaves you and Frisk alone to talk, just as they wanted. As soon as the others are out of earshot, Frisk says. “Mom’s not trying to be mean or anything.”

“Then what is she trying?” you prompt, curious to see how they are reading the situation. Because, you agree with them on the most part; Toriel isn’t trying to be mean. In your opinion, that would require something more active than shunning you because of your presence here and trying to keep you from being alone with Frisk. Her obvious distrust of you, however, is another matter.

“Can you keep a secret?” Frisk asks.

“Frisk…”

“Nevermind.” Something in their expression changes, making them look years older than they are.

“I know you can.”

A shiver runs up your spine. The implications of that sentence are all too clear to you. Needless to say, you still aren’t okay with the Resets. Not at all.

“Mom…” Frisk’s voice trails off. “Don’t tell her I told you this. She still isn’t really over it. But she used to be a real mom. One… she used to have a kid named Chara. A human kid.”

Oh.

That. That would explain some things. Like why Sans trusted her to know human food and why she came over to help today.

And why everyone’s mood was dampened when this Chara was mentioned.

“What happened to them?”

Somehow, Frisk gets even more solemn. “It’s… a long story. A sad one.”

And coming from the kid who has casually mentioned dying around you… you aren’t sure you want to find out what they define as being sad.

“The thing is, Chara didn’t really have the best life up here before Mom and Dad adopted them. I don’t really know the details — she never really talks about it — but I don’t think Chara had a you or a Miss Manda to help them, you know? Even if they did have a caseworker.”

Weakly, you say, “I understand.” Even if it sheds some even darker implications on the whole situation.

“Good. So yeah, it’s probably not you she has issues with, but your job.” They blow their nose again. Then, they smile up at you. “But don’t worry. She’ll like you once she gets to know you. I’m sure of it.”
“I’m glad you think so.”

From the kitchen, you can hear Papyrus eagerly working on a new recipe, along with the odd burst of laughter which is always followed by an exaggerated groan. On the couch, Frisk’s eyelids are getting heavier and heavier, sleep clearly looming near.

With this new information, you decide to take your leave for the day and let Frisk recuperate in peace.

Chapter End Notes

We finally got to meet Goat Mom!

It only took, what, 43 chapters and 100k words... yikes. I definitely wasn't expecting that when I started this. Back then, I thought this would happen relatively close to the beginning. Granted, I also spent several weeks debating whether or not I could justify adding the slow burn tag to this baby, so there's that.

My Tumblr and my Pillowfort! Feel free to visit at any time.

End Notes

Fanart:
Rimina_Buchanan drew a picture based on my end notes on Chapter 36.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!