Hey There, Angel Fins

by docemoon145

Summary

Mermaids are the social butterflies of the sea, living in sunny, shallow water together with the rest of their school. On the other end of the spectrum, meroctopuses are violent, antisocial fucks who like the cold and the dark, and who basically kill any competing predator they see.

But they aren’t stupid.

Red is proof of that, using his traps to hunt for food and saving his energy to ward off predators. So, how does he react when he finds the laziest creature in the ocean stealing his catch?

Bribe him with more food in exchange for peaceful company, of course! The ocean is fucking lonely for giant predatory mer!
(Loosely inspired... in that Sans is a mermaid and Red is a meroctopus. I wanted more of that action.)

I refuse to promise any kind of release schedule. I’m writing this for my own enjoyment, and chapters will come when they come.

(This author adores comments~)

- Inspired by 'Fin'ally some Tentacle Porn by comic4244, gaylie
Chapter Summary

*In which a socially awkward meroctopus meets a pretty little food thief.

Chapter Notes

So, uh, I went with octopuses. “Octopus” has its origins in Greek, and it’s an English word, so “octopedes” and “octopuses” are both correct plural forms. “Octopi” would imply a Latin word origin, but it doesn’t come from a Latin word, so that’s literally the only one that’s wrong.

There’s your linguistic fact of the day.

There was no such thing as lazy in the ocean. That was what Red believed. It was too cutthroat and dangerous for any creature to last long without giving it their all.

That being said, the occasional workaround was a good way to save energy for more important things. Few creatures in the ocean were near intelligent enough to even consider the idea, but Red was a mer, so he had the blessing and curse of brains on his side.

In fact, as a meroctopus, he had more than enough smarts to build a simple trap or two. He’d been using them for a few weeks now to catch fish and bottom-feeders for easy food. Not having to spend much energy hunting meant he had some left over to ward off predators. It made his life safer.

And that was important, because meroctopus lived alone. He didn’t have anybody to rely on if he got hurt fighting over territory with another predator.

But, because of his use of traps, Red discovered that there was such a thing as a lazy ocean creature. It was another mer; this one, a mermaid.

It was odd to see for several reasons. First, it was half skeleton. Red could count the number of times he’d seen a creature that shared that trait with him on his fingers. Second, it was just lying on top of his trap net in the sunny water, picking out the crabs caught in it to munch on.

The sight of his food being stolen made Red mad.

“Um, excuse you,” he growled, his shadow casting over the little blue mer. It turned around, and the lights in its eye sockets shrank. A placating smile stretched across its skull. Red could see that it was intimidated, but he thought it could have been more afraid. After all, Red was large even among meroctopus, and this one was small even for a mermaid. The size difference was approaching four times. If Red got a hold of this thing, it didn’t stand a chance.

“That ain’t your trap, pal.”
“Sorry. Was it yours?” The little mer took enough distance that at least it wasn’t laying on the net anymore. “I thought it was one humans had abandoned. My bad.”

Red grunted. He wanted to be irritated that the tiny blue fish wasn’t trying harder to apologize when he was *clearly* the superior predator, but the damn thing had an annoyingly soothing voice, and it calmed him down.

“Well, can’t do a thing about it now. Ya already ate ‘em.”

The skeleton mermaid seemed to realize it’d been forgiven, but it gave an apologetic chuckle anyway.

“Thanks for not throwing up a big fuss. My name’s Sans, by the way.”

Red grunted again in acknowledgment and went to work setting the trap up again for another use. The mermaid swam a little closer to watch and made a throat-clearing noise. “Uh, what about your name?”

“Huh? Oh. Red.”

Sans gave him an approving smile, but Red found it irritating. Fine, meroctopuses had better mechanical smarts than social smarts, unlike mermaids. The fuck was Sans rubbing it in for?


“Same,” he muttered, finished with the trap.

It appeared his antisocial nature was starting to cause Sans a little trouble with coming up with something else to say. Unfortunately, Red had something on *his* mind.

“You go around stealing from other people’s traps often?”

“Well, when I find one,” he shrugged. “Hunting things myself is, eh, effort. I’d rather not.”

Red snorted. “Yeah, I can tell.”

This midget mermaid was really an unusual sight. Like other skeleton mer, he had a layer of echo-flesh starting at the bottom of his rib cage and stretching out into his tail. The brilliant cyan color was really beautiful to look at (even Red thought so), but you could see Sans’s lazy habits by the way the concentrated magic was bloated a little where his abdomen would be.

Blubber in ocean mammals existed to keep them warm in cooler waters, but Sans was just chubby from eating too much and not swimming enough. Never in his life had Red seen an ocean creature with enough leisure to put on excess mass.

Without thinking too hard about it, he reached out and poked Sans’s belly. The ecto-flesh squished softly under his phalanges. “Maybe you oughta lay off a little. Something’s gonna make a nice snack outa ya.”

Sans blushed and chuckled a little. “I’m faster than I look. M’not too worried.”

Was that why he didn’t run when Red showed up? He had confidence in escaping? Finally something Red could respect. Just being pretty wasn’t quite enough to survive down here.

“What about you?” Sans asked. “Isn’t it a little dangerous for you to be in water this shallow?”
He wasn’t talking about the environment. He was talking about other mer. Meroctopuses were territorial, solitary, and often aggressive. There was a good chance a school of mermaids would decide to just wipe him out if they saw him. But, at the thought, Red just grinned.

“I’m stronger than I look,” he said in a cocky tone. “M’not worried.”

Sans chuckled and relented when his words were thrown back at him.

“Hey, as an apology for stealing your food, how about I show you a good place to catch fish?”

Red raised an eyebrow curiously. He was confident this little guppy couldn’t do anything to hurt him, so he gave a nod. “Sure. Is it far?”

“’Bout a thirty minute swim.”

“Alright. Lead the way.”

Sans wasn’t lying about being a fast swimmer. Even as big as red was and with his impressive burst speed, he had trouble keeping up. He didn’t doubt that Sans could escape him if he really wanted to.

The place Sans led him to was an old ship wreck turned coral reef. As expected, there were tons of tiny fish flitting about, and it would be easy to trap them in closed spaces. Red gave an appreciative nod.

“Not bad.”

Sans grinned and waved over his shoulder. “There’s a real good spot in the middle where they all pass through. I think it’d be the perfect spot for a trap.”

The pudgy mermaid flitted through a metal door to the inside of the ship, and Red curiously followed. Or, he attempted to. The human-made vessel was a little... space efficient? His rib cage was about the same width as the door, and it was a really tight squeeze.

Sans noticed he wasn’t being followed and doubled back. “And you told me to lay off the snacks,” he teased. “I thought octopuses were good at fitting into tight spaces?”

Red growled in response and pulled harder. Sans’s face morphed from amusement to shock as the rusted metal began to slowly warp. Once his ribs were past, his massive ecto-tentacles slid through easily. The hallway was cramped enough that nothing else would be able to swim past him, but Red had a natural fondness for places that were almost too small.

“You were sayin’?”

Sans laughed in surprise. “You... are really damn strong. Fuck.”

“Well, I don’t just sit on my tail all day getting fat off other people’s food,” he grinned back maliciously.

Sans shrugged. “Fair point. I am glad you managed to get in. The trip wouldn’t have been worth as much otherwise.”

Sans led Red through the narrow halls. Occasionally, their progress was slowed by a narrow doorway that needed to be taught a lesson. Red was getting just a little bit sick of it.

“This’d better be good, Sans.”
“It is, I promise.”

And it was. All the colorful little fish flitting about, careless in their supposed safety, looked like a veritable buffet to Red. He drooled a little.

“If you get a good catch, share it with me, huh buddy?”

Red scoffed. “Make your own damn traps. S’not that hard.”

“I mean, if you’re making them anyway, might as well share, right?”

Another scoff. They had just met. Why did this dumb little fish think he was entitled to Red’s catch?

“You kiddin’? Look at the size of me, pal. I ain’t got much room to share food.”

“That just means one or two little fish won’t make a difference, right?”

Red wanted to argue back, but the little blue mer made a good point. He was really damn convincing.

“Maybe I’ll think about it.”

Sans’s eyelights grew brighter at that. “Seriously? Wow, that never works.”

Red shrugged. “I don’t get to socialize much, and you’re decent company. ‘Sides, you’re right. One or two little fish ain’t much to me.”

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The next day, Red had set up a new trap in the old shipwreck. He started seeing Sans around more and more, usually catching him raiding his traps. Occasionally, though, the grinning mer would approach him directly to strike up a conversation. Some days, Red was feeling social and would banter back. Other days, he mostly just listened. Sans seemed content to just lay in a sunny spot nearby and nap when their conversations died.

“You really think it’s safe to just let your guard down like that?”

Sans peeked one eye socket open and smirked. “I don’t think anyone’s gonna bother me with someone as big and scary as you around.” Red grunted in displeasure, and the little mer looked confused. “Uh, does it bother you if I nap?”

“No,” he barked gruffly.

“Then,” Sans obviously saw that his mood was off, “did what I said offend you?”

The question had Red thrown a little off. It... it did bother him. But why? He’d never really considered his own looks, though he had seen his reflection before. His red eyelights and sharp, triangular teeth were pretty scary, and the scrapes and cracks on his bones gave him an aggressive aura. His size definitely added to that effect. He sometimes made use of those to warn off more intelligent ocean creatures, securing territory and privacy.
But it somehow bothered him that his only chatting buddy thought he was scary.

“A bit,” he huffed.

Sans rolled onto his belly in the sand and looked up at Red with sincere eyes. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it like that.”

Red perked up a bit. “Really? You, uh,” he hesitated, “you don’t think I’m scary?”


A soft, red, magical blush settled on his cheekbones, and he felt happy, but externally, he huffed. “You just think that ‘cause I feed you.”

Sans shrugged. “It helps.”

Red pondered something. “Hey, if you’re really so lazy, why don’t you just get a mate? Have ‘em take care of you, hunt for you, all that?” Mermaids did that shit, right? Mate for life? Take care of each other?

Sans looked more tired than usual at that question. “There aren’t any other skeleton mer in my school. I get some protection and food from them, but no potential mates.” He chuckled. “Nobody’s gonna put up with my lazy tail and do all that for me if I’m not gonna carry their kids.”

Red paused. They were both skeleton mer (though different kinds), and Red was feeding and indirectly protecting Sans.

“Hold on, am I your fucking mate?! Are these chat-nap sessions some mermaid mating ritual?”

“What?” Sans looked thoroughly amused. “Do you think a mermaid and a meroctopus can produce offspring? You’ve got no reason to put up with me either, Red.”

Red was relieved he wasn’t being mated without realizing it. He was also slightly disappointed. Sans was tiny, but he was very pretty, and he made good company. Social, but not overbearing, with a nice voice and good sense of humor.

“Eh. I don’t wanna have kids anyway,” he found himself saying. Sans looked outright shocked by that.

“Uh, heheh, am I your mate? Considering the context, that sounded like a come-on.”

Red flushed, well, red, and stuttered. “T-that’s not—I didn’t mean it l-like that! Just meant that other meroctopuses are violent fuckin’ assholes.”

Sans shrugged, “Then I don’t blame you.”

A few more weeks went by like this, and Sans apparently couldn’t hold back his curiosity.

“Hey, Red, not that I don’t appreciate it, but why are we still doing this?”

The question confused Red. “What do you mean?”

“I figured you’d be tired of my mooching by now. Why are you still putting up with me?”

Red thought about it, and he was silent for several minutes, letting the sun wash over his bright red
tentacles resting on the sand. “I guess I like your company?”

“Aren’t meroctopuses supposed to be asocial?”

Red chuckled. “Do I seem social to you?”

Sans thought back to all the times he’d tried to have a conversation with Red only for the big octopus just sit there and stare at him. He considered all the times the idiot couldn’t figure out how to respond and the conversation just died. All the times Sans just napped while Red sat beside him quietly.

“No. You fucking suck at it, actually.”

Red let out a short growl, offended by the remark, though unable to deny it. He didn’t say anything, and Sans realized it was up to him to continue things again.

“So if you don’t socialize, why do you like my company?”

Red thought long and hard before opening his mouth. “Dunno. I just like hearing you talk ‘n watching you sleep on the sand. You don’t expect me to be social all the time, and we can just chill together. ‘S nice. ‘S my speed.”

Red looked down and saw that Sans was blushing. He put his chin on his fist and tilted his skull slightly in confusion. “Sans? What's wrong? Did I say something weird?”

Sans snapped out of it and shook his head. “Um, n-no. You didn’t.” The small mer wrung his skeletal hands and stammered out a question. “H-hey, Red? Can I ask you something?”

Red furrowed his brow. “‘Course.”

“Would,” Sans hesitated. Red had never seen him this nervous and awkward before. “Would it annoy you if I spent more time with you?”

“Nah. You never get in my way when I’m doing stuff. If you’re bored, I don’t mind you tagging along with me wherever.”

Sans was blushing brightly again, and Red couldn’t understand why for the life of him.

“Wherever, huh? Even if I followed you back to your den?”

“‘S long as you don’t trash the place, that’s fine with me.”

Sans was silent after that. His face was flushed blue and he buried it in the sand. He didn’t move for so long that Red figured he was taking another nap. He stared openly. Staring was something he did even without thinking about it, but thankfully Sans didn’t seem to mind. Which was good, because Red liked looking at him. His blue scales and faintly glowing ecto-flesh were so pretty, and his white bones were so smooth and delicate-looking. Red even thought the extra weight looked cute on him; a badge he got from being the lazy food-thief Red loved.

Wait... loved? Nah, wrong word. Red didn’t know what love was, but this was something else. Friendship? He’d never had a friend. That was probably it. The idea that Red could fall in love with anyone was just silly, so he thoughtlessly brushed it off.

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Sans didn’t follow Red to his den like he’d implied he would. Not that night, anyway. But a few days later, he did. He followed Red around all afternoon and perked up in nervous excitement when his eyelights settled on the deep, dark crevasse they were swimming toward.

“Hey, Red, is your den down there?”

Red grunted in affirmation. “You still gonna follow me?”

Sans’s pace slowed down slightly, and he looked a little sad. “Can I?”

“’Course,” Red shrugged carelessly. He actually wanted him to. Sans was always the one sleeping when they were together, but Red wanted to try sleeping with him nearby—somewhere safe, not out in the open.

Sans eagerly followed Red down into the crevasse, little ecto-tail flicking. As they went deeper, though, his quick movements started to slow, and his rib cage heaved. The lights in his sockets swelled big and bright, but his expression was falling into panic.

“R-red?” he called in a choked voice.

“Hm?” Red looked over his shoulder and saw Sans floating in place, gasping for oxygen. “Holy shit! Sans, are you okay?”

“Yeah,” he lied. “You still there? I can’t see anything. It’s too dark.”

Shit. Red had forgotten mermaids were built mainly for shallow water.

“I’m here,” he said, brushing a skeletal hand against Sans’s shoulder to prove it. Sans pressed into his touch, and Red gently curled his fingers. With both hands, he would be able to completely wrap around the other’s rib cage. He was so damn tiny.

“You really don’t look so good.”

“I’m fine, Red,” he insisted. “The water’s just a little heavy is all.”

“Maybe you should go home then. My den’s still a ways down.”

“But I want to see it,” he whined cutely. “I’ll admit, it’s hard to breathe here, but I’ll be fine if you carry me down.”

Red raised an eyebrow, though he knew Sans couldn’t see it. “You sure you ain’t just lazy?” Sans laughed and Red looked at him seriously. He intentionally made his eyelights brighter so the mermaid could see his face. “You sure you want me to bring you? S’not like you’ll be able to see much in the dark anyway.”

“I want to go, Red.”

Red shrugged and pulled the chubby little mer into a cradled hold, making sure his descent was slow and smooth. He kept a close eye out for predators and any negative changes in Sans’s appearance. Surprisingly, he did last to Red’s den, though he had a hard time catching his breath. Red continued to carry him so the poor blue fishy wouldn’t pass out from overexerting himself.

His den was just a cave in the cliff. The entrance was barely big enough for him, but the inside was more spacious. He’d carved it bigger over time, so there was room for spare food and a bed. Red
Sans let out a faint chuckle. “It’s... kinda cold down here... huh?”

“Colder than the shallows, yeah. Are you too cold?”

“I could use some warmth,” He admitted.

“I can take you back up.”

“No,” Sans protested. “Just... hold me. Keep me... warm.”

Red hesitated, but wrapped a tentacle around Sans gently. He curled the appendage all around his tiny frame, and Sans sighed at the warmth. Red settled down onto the kelp bed and rested Sans on top of his rib cage. He was wrapped loosely enough that he wouldn’t have any additional trouble breathing.

“Red?” Sans’s voice came quietly.

“Yeah? You need to go back?”

“Nah. I was wondering if you could make your eyelights bright again.”

“Why?”

“I liked it.”

Red blushed and complied. Sans seemed to relax further upon being able to see again.

“You’re so gentle, Red,” Sans sighed. “I really like that about you.”

“M’not gentle all the time,” he muttered, thinking of his hunting, territory fights, and less-successful social interactions. “Just with you, really.”

Sans’s face lit up blue again, a happy grin on his face. He sighed. “I need to go back. I’ll pass out soon, and I don’t think sleeping here would be good for me.”

“Okay.” Red shifted and started carrying Sans back up. He felt disappointed, suddenly, but he couldn’t pinpoint why.

When they reached the shallows, Sans started to swim on his own again. Before leaving, he turned back around and blushed.

“That was nice, Red. You should come to my den next time.”

Red could feel himself nervously sweating, but the saltwater washed it away as soon as it formed. “You live with a school, right? I don’t think they’d appreciate someone like me showin’ up.”

“I would talk it over with them first to make sure you’d be safe.” He wrung his hands. “But, if you don’t want to see it in the first place, I guess I understand.”

Normally, Red would see no fucking point in visiting another monster’s den. It was dangerous, and he just didn’t care. But he found he was curious to see how Sans lived when he wasn’t following Red around.

“Talk to them first... then maybe.”
Sans’s face brightened, and he gave a bell-like laugh that warmed Red’s soul and cheekbones. He was gone a moment later—the little fish’s speed really was impressive—and Red returned to his den for the night.
Red was beyond nervous, crawling over the endless white sand. Sans in front of him was chittering excitedly, telling him all about the others in his school and how everyone was really nice, but Red was just fucking terrified.

Red was going to visit Sans’s den today. Other mermaids would be there. He wasn’t afraid for his safety (even though mermaids had been known to hunt more aggressive mer like him); he was confident in his strength. But the thought of being surrounded by people and being expected to respond to what they said and hold a conversation was terrifying.

Red’s tentacles started to slow their pace, and he felt himself sweating again.

“Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea.”

“What?” Sans turned around quickly and gave Red’s arm an excited tug. He couldn’t move the larger mer, but his enthusiasm was noted. “No, Red, this is a great idea! You’re going to love my school, I promise!”

“I don’t think I can handle it,” he said shakily. “I get nervous around people. I can’t handle crowds.”

Sans frowned. “There’s only seven of them. I told you that, Red.”

“Sans,” Red’s grin was strained, and he was sweating heavily enough now that the little fish could probably see it, “seven is a lot of people. That’s a huge amount of people!” He held his head in his hands and shook it slowly. “This was a bad idea.”

He disappeared into his own little world for a minute, but came back when he felt boney fingers on his cheek. Red’s eyelights came back and he saw Sans smiling at him in gentle encouragement.

“I really think you’ll like them, Red. They’re all good people. But, if you’re not comfortable, I understand. I won’t force you to do this.”

He wanted to say no. Oh, stars, how he wanted to just turn around and isolate himself in his den for the day! But the look on Sans’s face was just so… Red didn’t want to leave him. He didn’t want to disappoint his friend.

He took a deep breath and blew it out. “I’ll try,” he said. “But if I need to leave, I’m gonna bolt,
okay?” He wrung his hands. “It doesn’t mean I hate you or them if I do that, alright? Just means I need to be alone for a bit.”

Sans beamed. “I completely understand. Come on, it’s just a bit further!”

Sans’s school shared a strange community of dens; a maze built into the coral reefs, with some rooms for community things and others as private places. Sans enthusiastically brought Red to his room, pulling him along by the arm. When they arrived, he flitted inside and cozied up on a bed of sponges.

“What do you think?”

It was almost empty. Very plain and boring with no decorations to speak of. It was small, too. Red could already tell the doorway was going to give him a hard time.

He loved it.

“It’s perfect, Sans,” he grinned. Red liked to keep things simple, and it looked like Sans had the same tastes. The only thing that looked like it had effort put into it was the bed, and it looked real cozy.

“Can I come in?”

“Uh,” Sans faltered, then smiled brightly, “sure! If, uh, if you can. Please don’t break my door too much.”

Red hesitated outside and wrung his hands. “‘S it okay if I break it a little?”

Sans gave in and nodded. Red did try to be careful, but some chunks of coral couldn’t stand up to the abuse and broke off as he forced his rib cage through. His tentacles were far more malleable, and slid in with no trouble. All of him at once filled the room quite thoroughly, and he felt something weakly prodding underneath one of his red limbs. Red lifted it and saw Sans trapped underneath.

“Shit! Sorry,” he quickly apologized, pulling the tiny mer into his arms. “I didn’t hurt’cha, did I?”

“I’m fine,” Sans smiled, his confidence returning now that he wasn’t being crushed under a mass of ecto-flesh. “Sorry. My room’s a little small for the both of us.”

Red quickly shook his head. “Don’t be sorry. I like tight places.” He looked down at Sans and hugged him a little tighter. “You feeling okay, Sans? You’ve been blushing a lot lately.”

At the vocal notice, Sans’s blush intensified, and he quickly shook his head. “I’m fine, Red!” Then he ducked his chin, “You, uh, probably wouldn’t understand.”

Red frowned and hugged tighter again, but he was careful not to hurt the little fish. “‘S that ‘cause it’s a mermaid thing,” his frown deepened, “or ‘cause my skull’s too thick?”

The fact that Sans didn’t answer immediately revealed which of the two it was, and that made Red huff in frustration.

“You know you gotta tell me if I’m doin’ something wrong, Sans. I’ll stop if I know what it is.”

This time, Sans frowned, and the blush faded. “You’re not doing anything wrong, Red. I’m happy.”

So it was a happy blush? Well that was a relief. Still, Red didn’t know what could have made Sans
“When we’re done here, will you come meet my friends?” Sans asked delicately. “I warned them not to overwhelm you or anything.”

Oh, he could not express how much he didn’t want to meet them, but what came out of his mouth was a weak, “Okay.”

So he cradled Sans in the small room for a few dozen more minutes, just enjoying each other’s quiet company. When Sans started to wriggle, Red knew his stalling was at an end.

“I’ll go tell them to gather in the main room, then I’ll come get you, okay?”

Red nodded and watched Sans swim off. He was glad for the small room giving him a sense of safety while he waited. He honestly flinched when Sans reappeared in the doorway, and the little mer gave him a sympathetic smile.

“I’m gonna be right beside you, okay?”

Red gave another tight nod and reached out to accept the hand Sans was offering. He forced himself through the narrow door, breaking off a few more coral husk scraps. He desperately wanted to wring his hands, but one of them was occupied, so he just curled and uncurled his phalanges instead.

The main room was spacious with wide entrances that would provide Red no trouble, but the stress kept him from entering. He saw seven mermaids gathered in the room, reasonably far from the entrance. There were three that were half goat, two that were half human, one that was half dinosaur, and one that was all fish.

Red was never around this many people. If anything, encountering a group this large meant he was under attack. That would have been easier. If he could kill them and flee, he wouldn’t have to agonize over his social anxiety for another second.

Sans kept eagerly swimming forward, but was suddenly jerked to a stop. Red wasn’t following past the doorway, and the little mer couldn’t pull him along. He looked over his shoulder and gave a worried but encouraging smile. Red didn’t have the leeway to acknowledge him while he was fighting back a panic attack.

“Oh, how about I introduce everyone from here,” he said shyly. “Everyone, this is Red. He’s a little shy, but he’s a nice guy. Red, these are…”

He didn’t hear all the names. Or, maybe he did? Red wasn’t sure; he couldn’t focus.

Just like Sans, the other mermaids in his school were small compared to Red. The biggest one was a goat mermaid named Asgore, but even he barely reached Red’s chin if you compared their torsos. Red’s eyelight kept flashing back to his long horns and hoping the guy would fight him so he could kill them all and leave. The fish mermaid also looked ready to fight at any moment, while the yellow lizard clung to her arm and shook.

“Red? Hey, Red? Are you okay?”

He thought he could hear Sans’s voice calling out in worry, but it was too far away. A patting on his face drew him back, though. Red focused his eyelight to see a human mermaid (one of three children in the school), smiling at him with slanted eyes. The kid was smaller than Sans and had a very disarming aura. They were quiet, too. Red felt himself focusing on them as he came back to
himself.

Frisk. Their name was Frisk, and they used neutral pronouns.

Red looked around the room and saw the rest of the school looking at him in concerned relief.

“You back, buddy?” Sans asked, squeezing his hand with his tiny digits. “Had me worried there.”

“We did not intend to frighten you,” the second largest mermaid said softly. She was… Toriel. Right…

“I-if seven is too many people, I-I-I can wait outside,” the yellow lizard stuttered. Alphys; she was Alphys. “I-I’m n-not really g-g-great with crowds or strangers e-either.”

Red found himself much calmer now, but it wouldn’t take much to push him over the edge again.

“Hey, why don’t you say something, punk! You okay or what?” The fish mer—no, Undyne—shouted at him, and Red broke out into a cold sweat.

Sans and Frisk shot her a look, and she cleared her throat. “Sorry. You don’t gotta talk if it’s too hard.”

They knew he was pathetic. They didn’t have any expectations of him, socially. Thank the stars.

Red released a shuddering sigh and visibly relaxed, he felt a small pressure at his rib cage and saw Sans trying in vain to wrap his arms around him in a hug.

“You’re doing great, Red.”

Frisk smiled too and gave him a reassuring pat on the head, and Red gently wrapped his arms around his little blue mer. He looked up at the rest of the school and swallowed nervously.

“U-um… hi.”

Stars, was it pathetic, but everybody beamed at him when he said it. Toriel risked coming closer, but she still gave Red plenty of room.

“I have heard from Sans how you have been keeping him company and taking care of him. It is very nice to finally meet you, Red. You are welcome here whenever you like.”

“Absolutely,” Asgore beamed, wrapping an arm around Toriel’s waist. “Any friend of Sans is a friend of ours.”

“The little punk likes to get into trouble, but he should be safe with a big guy like you around, right?” Undyne let out a barking laughter.

Sans’s school had several loud people in it, but several quiet people, too. Alphys and Asriel were even shy. But all of them were friendly. Red didn’t mind watching them all talk, but he got nervous whenever they looked to him for a response. Sans would set his hand on Red’s and wink, answering for him when he knew the answer, and Red would sigh in relief.

The sun started to set, and Red fidgeted. “I should go home,” he said softly.

“You can stay here if you want,” Sans offered hopefully.

“Maybe later,” Red whispered. “I really need to be alone for a bit.”
Sans smiled, but even Red could see the sadness in it. “Will you come back? Maybe tomorrow?”

Red pondered it. “How about the day after?” He should have calmed down by then.

Sans agreed, and Red didn't see him the next day. Presumably, he was giving him some alone time to recover from yesterday’s excitement. He spent his time repairing traps and setting up new ones, and basked in the sun for a while just because it was becoming a habit.

The next day, Sans met Red immediately at the exit of his crevasse. They spent some time checking Red’s traps, and Sans got plenty to fill his belly. When the little mer was full, he took a nap on the sunny sand, and Red watched over him protectively.

He had missed Sans yesterday more than he’d known. Having him nearby again made his soul feel warm. Friendship felt this good, huh? To think he might never have known.

When Sans woke up, they visited one more trap just to make sure Red had enough to eat, and then they made their way to his school’s den.

Before he could see it in the distance, Red knew something was wrong, and his body went stiff.

“I smell blood,” he said darkly. Sans looked at him, worry settling on his expression. The little fishy took off at what must have been his top speed, and Red discovered that he truly couldn’t keep up. When Red did arrive, his soul caught in his throat, and his survival instincts drowned out the logical side of his brain.

There was a big shark. Undyne and Asgore were fighting it back, and Sans and Toriel were leaning over Asriel and Chara who both had prominent bite marks.

The smell of blood on the water must have sent the shark into a frenzy. Even with Undyne and Asgore together, it was overpowering them.

In a burst of motion, Red lunged at the shark and wrapped it tightly in his tentacles. It wrestled with him and tried to get at an angle where it could bite, but Red was stronger and smarter. He repeatedly stabbed the creature with his beak, forcing poison into its body that made its movements sluggish. Undyne and Asgore saw he was doing well and gratefully took a break from fighting.

In less than a minute, the shark had lost the strength to move, and Red wrapped a tentacle around its neck, squeezing until it snapped. His breathing started to return from its frenzied state, and he thought to look at the state of the children. They were alive, thank the stars. Toriel and Sans had used healing magic to seal the wounds before they got too bad.

Sans wasn’t hurt. The important thing was that Sans wasn’t hurt.

When Sans saw that the shark was dead, he appeared in front of Red faster than the meroctopus could process it. Hugging him and crying into his chest. Red was caught completely off guard, and gave him a timid pat on the back.

“U-uh… It’s dead. You’re… okay, right?” Comforting another was so far out of his comfort zone.


Red relaxed a little and held Sans with a bit more confidence. “‘Course.” He pulled the sobbing mer off of him so that they could meet eyes. “I’m gonna stay out here and keep watch. The smell of blood might attract predators. You go inside and check up on everybody.”
Sans nodded and, suddenly, delivered a skeleton kiss to Red’s teeth. He was in the den before Red had time to wrap his head around it. When he realized it had been a kiss, he blushed bright red. His soul felt bright and happy despite the situation, and he wondered if guarding Sans’s school well would earn him another one.

More sharks did come. Two, in fact. Red used magic to slow their movements so he could fight them both at once, and snapped their necks so as to minimize the blood left in the water. He piled the three sharks together and took a bite out of a smaller one. Sharks weren’t very tasty, but fighting and using magic made him hungry.

After maybe an hour, Sans came out of the den.

“Everyone is going to be fine,” he said, smiling weakly while the ocean carried off a stray tear. Sans noticed the pile of sharks and gasped. “Stars, Red! Are you okay?!?”

“M’fine,” he said, cradling Sans in his arms without thinking about it. Seeing the lazy mermaid safe filled Red with pride and satisfaction. He’d protected Sans; protected his den and school. He was strong, and his friend was safe.

A surprised whimper alerted Red to the fact that he’d pulled Sans up to his face and started nuzzling him affectionately, low, rumbling purrs rolling out of his chest. The purrs died in his rib cage and Red’s eye sockets went wide. He immediately released Sans from his grip and started sweating.

“Fuck, s-sorry! I d-didn’t—” before he could finish, Sans planted another kiss on his teeth.

“You did really good, Red,” he praised, and the meroctopus started purring again with satisfaction.

Soon, though, his instincts directed him toward panic as he was crowded by four other mer.

“Dude, you’re wicked strong! You took down three sharks on your own! Hell, man! Nice going!”

“Truly, thank you for protecting us and the children,” Toriel said earnestly.

“We might not have managed on our own, I cannot thank you enough for jumping in when you did,” Asgore smiled in shame.

Frisk planted little kisses all over his skull as a thanks for saving their siblings.

Sans saw Red’s eyelights flicker out and quickly called out to the others. “Whoa, whoa, give him some space, guys!”

The others startled and backed up, and Sans put his hands on either side of Red’s skull, guiding the meroctopus to look at him. His warmly glowing eyelights pulled Red out of his panic, and his breathing settled to a normal pace.


Red swallowed and nodded, looking around at the others who looked thoroughly ashamed of themselves.

“M’glad you’re safe,” he muttered.

“Thanks to you,” Toriel smiled. “We’re very sorry for crowding you like that. It was unacceptable behavior.”
Frisk lowered their head and churned up some sand with their tail. Red offered them a shaky smile. “Don’t worry about it, kid.”

One by one, everyone apologized, thanked him again, and went back into the den. Red happily let them have the two sharks he hadn’t eaten from yet. Hunting would be hard for them while they were still tending to the injured, and shark didn’t taste great anyway.

The last one was his, though. He took a few more bites out of hunger, and Sans wrung his hands. What, did he want to steal food again? He could just help himself. He should know Red would share his food with him by now.

Red tore a piece of flesh off the creature and held it out to Sans, who smiled shyly.

“Actually, I wanted to ask if you could stay here tonight.”

Red pulled the meat back and put it in his mouth. “You wan’ me to keep wash?” He swallowed the raw magic left after chewing. “Sure.”

Sans wrung his hands again and dared to draw closer, wrapping his fingers around one of Red’s ribs. Red jumped, but the touch felt nice. He felt another purr rumbling in his chest.

“Actually, I was hoping you’d stay in my room with me tonight.”

Red figured Sans was scared after having a predator attack his den, and wanted his company for reassurance.

“Okay,” he nodded.

Red brought the partially eaten shark into the den with him. Sans let him squeeze into the room first, dragging the shark behind him, and then found a place for himself. There wasn’t any way for the mermaid to get to his bed when the whole room was filled with Red’s tentacles, but he made himself comfortable on those instead. If his relaxed sigh was any indication, it wasn’t a bad place to sleep.

Red continued to tear little pieces off the shark and force them down, unwilling to be hungry if he had to fight again in the next several hours. Eventually, Sans held out his hands and made a grasping motion. Red tore off a chunk, expecting him to eat it, but he bathed it in green-colored magic instead and handed it back.

Red looked at the meat curiously. It was more translucent than before, and he chewed it curiously. It was delicious. He’d never eaten shark so good.

“What the hell? Teach me how to do that!”

Sans chuckled and explained the magic, and Red threw his all into emulating it. It was a technique Toriel often used, apparently. Sans didn’t bother with it much because most of what he ate was tasty on its own, and he didn’t like using magic when it wasn’t necessary.

As soon as Red got a hang of the technique, he treated every hunk of shark he tore off, eating much more enthusiastically. Sans seemed to be willing to eat if Red was doing all the work, so one in every ten pieces went to him. Soon, the shark was gone, bones and all, and they both laid there completely full.

Red had been using magic to treat the shark the whole time, so a fair amount of what he took in got
spent right away, but Sans looked ready to pass out from the mass of magical energy swimming in
his stomach. Red looked down at the little fish tenderly and gave his ecto-belly a loving stroke. His
touch drew a half-pained half-pleasured whimper from the mermaid, and Red felt his cheeks light
up with his red-colored magic.

Today had been worrying for Sans’s school, but it had been a wonderful day for Red. He had
protected Sans, fed him, he was keeping him comfortable on his warm ecto-tentacles. The softness
Red felt below his phalanges wasn’t a sign of Sans’s school’s care anymore; it was a sign of Red’s
care. Sans was safe, and full, and happy, and Red was being a wonderful mate.

Red stopped stroking Sans’s ecto-flesh, surprised by his own thoughts. How long had he been
thinking of Sans that way? He couldn’t remember, but he realized that he really did feel like that.
He was treating Sans like his mate, and… he didn’t want to stop.

But did Sans feel the same way? Red wondered if that was what his kiss before had meant, or if he
was just grateful to Red for protecting his school.

That was another thing: Sans lived in a school. If Red mated with Sans, would he have to become
part of the school too? He couldn’t imagine tearing Sans away from his friends. The others were
nice, just like Sans said, but it was a lot of people to constantly be around, and Red needed to be
alone sometimes.

… Red didn’t trust himself to make these kinds of decisions on his own. He would talk to Sans
about it later.
Morning came, and thankfully there were no more attacks. Red woke up at the first rays of sunlight and watched Sans sleep fondly, his beautiful, bright blue tail curled up so he was tucked in a little ball.

Red found himself reaching down and petting the tiny mermaid’s tail, purring happily at the softness, particularly just below the front of his rib cage.

His invasive touches soon woke the other skeleton mer up, and he looked up at Red with a pronounced blue blush on his face. “M-morning?”

Some part of Red told him he should stop feeling all over Sans now that he was awake, but he ignored it in favor of satisfying his instincts.

“Mornin’,” he purred, pulling the little fish into his arms and continuing to stroke with his free hand. Sans’s blush continued to spread until most of his skull was blue.

“Uh, are you feeling okay, Red?”

Red paused his strokes, worried that Sans didn’t like his petting, or that mermaids didn’t show affection like this. Was he being weird? Was he making Sans uncomfortable?

“I feel good. Didja want me to stop?”

Sans blushed and hesitated, but he shook his head in the end. Red purred happily and resumed stroking the length of Sans’s tail. A few minutes passed by peacefully like that, then Sans forced himself to speak.

“Hey, uh, Red?” The meroctopus hummed that he was listening. “I don’t know if you know this, but mermaids usually don’t touch each other like this.”


“No,” Sans shook his head quickly. “It’s just usually something reserved for mates.”

Red lifted Sans up and nuzzled their faces together.
“I want to be your mate,” he purred.

Sans froze stiff and stared at the giant mer in shock. Red noticed the change and pulled him away to make eye contact. Sans could tell from his searching eyelights that Red was starting to panic and shut down socially.  

“W-why do you want to?” Sans managed a slightly garbled sentence. “I really don’t think I can have children for you, if that’s what you want.”

Red pouted. “I don’t care. I like taking care of you.” He brought Sans close to nuzzle him again, and the smaller skeleton’s thoughts were racing. He wanted to be Red’s mate if he could, but he doubted someone like Red knew all that that meant.

“Red,” Sans said gently, prompting the bigger mer to stop cuddling again for a minute. “I want to be your mate too.”

Red’s eyelights swelled bigger and turned into hearts, but Sans held his arms out to keep him from cuddling again.

“Hold on a second! I need to make sure you know what mating means for a mermaid. And I want you to tell me what it means for a meroctopus too.”

“Okay.” Red gently set Sans down on his tentacles so they could talk.

Sans took a deep breath. “First, mermaids mate for life. You can’t change your mind about this later. Get it?” Red nodded. “Second, you’ll become a member of my school. You’ll live here, share food with everyone, protect everyone… are you okay with that?” Red hesitated, but he nodded.

“Would, uh... would it be fine if I had a place to be alone when I need it?”

Sans nodded. “Yeah, we could work something out.”

“Someplace dark, okay?”

Sans gave the nearest ecto-tentacle a reassuring pat. “Yeah, okay, Red.” He let out a relieved breath and looked up at his (hopefully) soon-to-be mate. “What about you, Red?”

He saw clear uncertainty in the other’s eyes. “Uh, we don’t really teach each other stuff, y’know? So, I dunno if what my instincts tell me applies to others like me.”

“Just tell me what your instincts are telling you, then,” Sans smiled.

“I want to stay with you, and keep you safe, and hunt for you. If we can have kids, I wanna help you take care of them. Even if we can’t, I still really, really want to touch you as if we could.”

Sans’s soul tightened, and he threw himself into a hug. That was more than he’d hoped to hear from a typically asocial creature.

“Great!” he sobbed a little from joy. “That’s great, Red. Please let me be your mate.”

Sans hadn’t anticipated just how intensely he would react when he finally had a mate. He had wanted one for so long, but the ocean was so vast, and other mer seemed so far away. Meeting Red was a wonderful stroke of fortune—even if he had thought he’d be killed the first time he saw the giant mer.

Red purred happily. All he wanted now was to pet and shower loving touches down on his new
mate, but Sans dragged him out to announce the news to the rest of the school. It basically amounted to Red standing there awkwardly while Sans did all the talking for them both. Red had never seen him this energetic before.

The others were happy for them both. They apparently had no problem with accepting a meroctopus into their school—not when Sans loved him, and certainly not after he’d fought off three sharks for their sake.

Alphys and Red worked together to make a new room where he could have some alone time. It was a little separate from the rest of the den, but not so far that he couldn’t help if something attacked. It was built without any windows or gaps to let the light in, and with two individual rooms inside. One room was larger, so he could spread out, store food, or have guests. The other room was barely big enough for him to fit. Dark, tight spaces made him feel safe, so they made sure his safe space had one.

Alphys was a little concerned that they’d made the second room too small and that Red would get stuck inside, but he refused to let her “ruin it” by making it bigger.

Sans came over to see Red’s new room for the first time, only to realize it was too dark inside for him to actually see anything.

“Hey, Red, would you make your tentacles glow so I can see?” he asked.

“Huh? Make ‘em glow?”

“Yeah. Just like how you make your eyes glow.”

Red attempted it and found that he could. The thick red ecto-tentacles lit up brightly and cast the whole room into soft light.

“How’d you know I could do that?”

“I just figured, since I can make my tail glow.”

Red raised an eyebrow. “You’re just too lazy to do it yourself, huh?”

“Yep,” Sans chuckled.

Red wrapped him in a brightly glowing tentacle and held him up. “I wanna see.”

Sans shrugged and lit his tail for a few seconds. It glowed bright cyan, with some pretty yellow spots down the sides that weren’t usually visible. Red breathed in sharply.

“You’re beautiful,” he praised, making Sans’s face light up with his tail.

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Red helped hunt for the school, and he was definitely a big contributor. Usually he caught larger fish and brought them back for Toriel to prepare for the others, then he and Sans would take their meals from Red’s traps. Red was a doting and overprotective mate, and he always made sure Sans was fed before tending to himself. If the traps didn’t have much in them, he just hunted something for himself later.
He also treated everything Sans ate with that special green magic, insisting on not just feeding his mate, but feeding him good food. He occasionally hunted down more special foods like oysters and salmon when he was feeling particularly love-struck.

Red still couldn’t handle being around more than three people at a time, but he was friends with everyone else in the school. It was an unspoken rule that nobody approached him if he was already with that many. Even still, sometimes he forgot how to talk or what to say, or worse, said something badly. Sans would bail him out when that happened. The little mer’s social adeptness was more than enough for both of them.

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Sans sighed, the warm sand on his front felt good, and the sun on his back felt even better. He could be perfectly relaxed with Red sitting nearby, warding off predators.

He had drained the heat from the sand, so he rolled over onto his back, starting the warming cycle all over again. The sound of contented purring nearby made him peek an eye socket open.

Red had his eyes fixed on him, like he always did when Sans was sunbathing. Sans didn’t know what had his mate so excited, but he delivered a playful wink and a chuckle.

“What’s up, big guy? Like what you see?”

Red’s purring grew louder, and Sans’s soul warmed alongside his sun-struck scales. He loved the way his mate looked at him, never hiding the desire in his eyes; always looking proud and satisfied.

Sans grinned when his mate gave up resisting and reached down to pet him. He was always so gentle; his touches felt so nice and relaxing. Sans closed his eyes again to drift off, but startled a little when he felt an unexpected squeeze. He opened his eye sockets and peeked down at Red’s long fingers prodding his belly.

Sans suspected it had gotten a little bigger since Red intensified his caregiving, but it wasn’t enough that he particularly noticed. Judging by the proud grin on Red’s face, though, he thought he had noticed a change.

Sans chuckled. “Yes, Red, I’m not starving. You’re doing a good job keeping me fed.”

Red whisked Sans off the floor and held him against his rib cage, where he could feel Red’s purring in his bones. The giant octopus mer laid back in the sand so Sans could still get sun, and enthusiastically petted his mate. Sans laughed when Red accidentally tickled him, and tickled Red back. It soon turned into a tickle match, not that Sans could hope to win against someone with ten limbs.

Too soon, though, something interrupted their fun: the sounds of distant voices approaching closer.

They noticed at the same time and sat up to look. In the distance, they saw a group of five or so mermaids approaching, armed with magic weapons for hunting. Sans thought they would swim right past and continue looking for some medium sized fish to hunt, but they stopped a short distance from Sans and Red.
“Damned savage! Let that innocent mermaid go this instant!”


Another voice shouted far louder than the one in Red’s head.

“*Excuse me?*” Sans got up and swam a bit closer to the hunting party, scowling harsher than Red had ever seen him. “That is my *fucking mate*, thank you!”

The rabbit mermaid at the front looked momentarily shocked, then understanding, but quickly disdain spread across his face. “Why the hell would you mate with a bottom-feeding predator like that?”

“Better than a jackass like you!” The little blue mer spat.

Red watched the rabbit mer’s fist clench with rage around the body of his trident and immediately put himself between Sans and the hunting party.

“Don’t you dare threaten him,” he growled.

The rabbit mer flinched but covered it with a scoff. Still, he loosened his hold on his weapon. Sans swam around in front of Red again, and the larger mer held him protectively.

“He’s my mate and a member of my school. Go find an actual savage to hunt. Like a shark or something.”

The hunting party left, and Sans sighed in relief, glad it didn’t devolve into violence. He didn’t want to see Red killing other mer right in front of him. (Never did he consider that *Red* would get hurt. He was much too strong.)

Once Red felt they were safe again, he brought Sans up to his face to nuzzle. He was happy to see his mate earnestly defend him, and happier that he was still safe and healthy.

“I love you too, Red,” Sans laughed, patting his skull. “Let’s go cuddle at home where we can have some privacy, okay?”

Red agreed, but he didn’t let go, insisting on swimming Sans back to the den himself and occasionally nuzzling his head. For his part, Sans had no problem with doing less work, so he relaxed in Red’s arms and enjoyed the ride.

They went to Red’s private room, and the giant octopus curled up in his tight space. His tentacles wrapped all the way up the walls and ceiling in order to fit, but it left a pocket in the middle big enough for Sans to sit on Red’s chest. Red made his tentacles glow so they were surrounded by soft red light.

Sans gave in to the possessive coddling and stretched out his limbs, getting comfortable on Red’s rib cage for a nap. Red purred and stroked the length of Sans’s body, which only made it easier to konk out.

Sans didn’t know how much time had passed when he woke up, but it was clear Red had been staring at him intently the whole time. He hadn’t stopped petting, either.

“Hey, Red,” Sans yawned, “I think I’m gonna stretch my tail a bit. Can you let me out?”
The big goof nodded and twisted his way out of the little room, unfurling himself so Sans was free to move. Outside, the sun was close to setting.

“Oh. So that’s why I’m hungry,” Sans chuckled. “It’s almost dinner—” Red zipped out of the room faster than he’d moved all day, “—time.”

Sans laughed, figuring the dope went to get him something to eat. While he waited for his mate’s return, Sans had some fun chats with the other mer in his school and caught up with them. In about an hour, Red returned with a swordfish for the school and clams and salmon for Sans. The little mer chuckled.

*That explains it. He’s in one of those moods today. I thought he was being clingier than usual.*

There were three main signs that Red was in one of his lovey-dovey moods: he would get quieter, more touchy-feely, and he would go out of his way to get nice food for his mate.

Sans had tried to share some of his nice food with the school once, and Red had been heartbroken, so now Red usually brought one or two extras for the others to divvy up.

They went to a corner of the community room, where Red sat down and Sans made himself comfortable on the many springy tentacles. He watched in patient amusement as Red prepared all the clams for him to eat and skinned the salmon to boot. Red ate all the skins, shells, and bones, ‘cause he was a fucking garbage disposal, then supplemented his dinner with whatever prey he’d brought in earlier that week and was soon to go bad (because he always over-hunted for their small school). It had to be emphasized, the meat was half-rotted. Even if it was treated with magic, Sans would rather avoid eating it, but Red was a *fucking garbage disposal*.

Even Toriel, who hated when they wasted food, wasn’t entirely happy with Red doing stuff like that. She had suggested he maybe hunt less, but his caretaker instincts wouldn’t let him allow his school to simply “get by”.

In the end, the sub-par food didn’t seem to hurt him, so they gave up on that issue.

“Hey, Red,” Sans waved his mate over. Red approached with eager curiosity, and Sans held up a piece of tender clam meat he hadn’t eaten yet. He patted his soft ecto-belly and smiled. “I’m stuffed. You can have this last one, okay?”

“Oh.” Red was easily convinced as soon as Sans mentioned that he had eaten plenty, so he ate the flavorful meat and grinned, probably proud that this was what his mate was tasting.

After dinner, Red’s plan was more cuddling with and petting his full and happy mate. The fact that he was doing this in one of the community rooms was already a sign of huge improvement for him.

Chara, one of the mermaid children, a human mer with brilliant red eyes, swam up and held out an empty shell to Red. “Thanks for the clams!” they grinned. “You can have the shell, since I’ve seen you eat them.”

While Red crushed the clam shell between his sharp teeth, Sans looked around the room. Asriel was licking the inside of an empty clam shell, and Alphys and Undyne were splitting a salmon. The losers of this lovey-dovey day were Toriel, Asgore, and Frisk (who was moping rather obviously in the corner). As far as Sans saw, they typically played games together, and the winners would get dibs on the next good catch Red brought in.

Asriel brought his shell over next, and Red munched on that too. “Can’t you bring enough for
everybody?” He asked timidly. “I feel bad when the others don’t get any.”

Chara laughed. “Yeah, Sans, share more. You’re getting fat anyway.”

“That’s not what I meant, Chara!” Asriel whined, appalled.

“I’m just kidding, jeez.” They rolled their eyes. “I actually like playing games to decide it. Winner gets the best food!”

Red didn’t say anything. Sans doubted he *could* say anything. He was probably working too hard trying to keep up with the banter and had no idea when or how he was supposed to respond. Not to mention, he was always quieter on days like this.

“Children,” Toriel called from across the room, “Would you mind? I have something I’d like to talk with Red about.”

The rule about no more than three people with Red at a time was still in place, so the kids politely scampered off and the large goat mer approached.

“Red, dear, I was thinking about making a special meal for Frisk’s birthday. It requires a significant number of snails, and I was hoping you would keep an eye out for them?”

“A special dinner for Frisk?” he pondered. “Okay.”

“Well, it’s closer to a dessert than a dinner. Everyone will get to try it.” Toriel smiled happily, and Red’s eyes lit up brighter.

If everyone was getting some, that included Sans. Red was always willing to try harder if it benefitted Sans. Toriel would have those snails by tomorrow evening at the latest.

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The next evening, the school was getting their first taste of snail pie in months. Toriel only made them for the children’s birthdays, and they certainly were a treat.

Everyone gave Frisk some sort of present. Shells, pretty rocks, nice corals… Red got them an oyster, and Sans carved Frisk’s name into it. He cared, even if he was astonishingly lazy.

After all the presents were handed out, it was time for the fabled pie, which Red would be trying for the first time. His eyelights sparkled when the concoction touched his magical tongue.

“Do you like it, Red?” Toriel smiled.

He nodded rapidly, quickly taking a second bite. Sans chuckled and gleefully ate his share, leaning into one of Red’s tentacles after to relax. Something entered Sans’s line of sight, and he blinked at it in confusion. It was Red’s piece of pie with two bites missing.

“R-red,” Alphys chastised him, “th-that’s your piece! Y-you should eat it.”

“Yeah, Red. That’s for you,” Sans said, gently pushing the offering away.

Red grunted in displeasure. “It’s my piece, I can do what I want with it.”
Toriel raised a paw to her mouth and chuckled. “That’s very sweet of you, Red. You’re a very caring mate.” A wide smile bloomed across his sharp teeth, but Toriel giggled again. “However, I do not think Sans needs to be eating any more pie.”

Sans’s eye sockets opened wide and he rested a hand on his ecto-belly, staring at the goat mer in shock. “Tori, you too?” He gave Red a mock look of exasperation. “Well, I guess that’s that. I’m going on a diet. No more nice clams, or oysters, or salmon, or—”

“Wait, wait, now hold on a second!” Chara shot out of their seat, wide-eyed. “I never said anything about you putting on weight, Sans! There’s no need to go that far!”

He raised an eyebrow at them. “You did, actually.”

“But I was only kidding!”

Sans chuckled, but stopped when he heard a high-pitched whine beside him. Red was still holding the piece of pie out to him, wearing an utterly hurt look.

“J-jeez, Red, what’s wrong? We were only kidding around, you know? Tori was just teasing me and I was teasing back.” The whining stopped, and Red’s face relaxed a bit. “I still think you should eat your piece of pie, though. It’ll be a long time before the next one.”

And Red was frowning again.

“Red, come on. I know you liked it. You took two bites!” Sans could see that his attempts at persuasion weren’t working, so he gave in and used his strongest technique. “I’m full anyway.”

“You mean it?” Red demanded.

“Couldn’t eat another bite,” Sans lied.

Red gave in and ate the rest of his slice then, clearly savoring the uniquely rich taste.

***

Sans woke up the next morning to find himself submerged in a mass of bright red tentacles. He stirred awake, and an opening formed for him to slip out of. Red eagerly caught him on the way up and nuzzled his head almost aggressively.

“Morning Red,” Sans smiled. “I’m surprised you weren’t watching me sleep.”

“You looked cold,” he stated, and Sans noticed that they were approaching the winter months.

“Really? Well, I guess it is chillier than usual.” Sans stretched and his stomach grumbled.

Red dashed out of the room as soon as he heard that sound, obviously off to get something for breakfast. Sans went to spend time with the others while he waited, and Red came back with armfuls of clams and oysters, and a few small, sweet crabs, too. He handed out enough of the catch to the others so that everybody could have one and there would be no complaints, then he cradled Sans with his front tentacles and prepared the food with his hands.

“It’s one of those days again, huh?” Sans chuckled. “Alright, I don’t mind being pampered a bit.”
Red smiled brightly and lifted Sans up to give him a kiss on the forehead. “That’s good, ‘cause I really wanna pamper you today.”

Sans let Red feed him tasty bottom-feeders, comfortably warm in the large mer’s tentacles. He’d brought so many that Sans genuinely got full before he could finish them all, so Red set aside the rest.

“C’mon, Red, you should eat those.”

“They’re for dinner,” he insisted. “If they’re still leftover after that, then I’ll eat ‘em.”

Sans relented to that and submitted himself to a day of petting. Red took him outside for several hours to bask in the sun and stretch his fins a bit, but it was mostly a lazy day full of petting and eating. Red stuffed Sans on good food again for lunch and dinner, but he did keep his promise of eating the leftovers after that.

Red really was in a mood, and Sans wondered if he’d be going into heat soon. He couldn’t think of another reason to explain this kind of behavior.

Whatever the cause was, though, Sans really did love being cared for so attentively, and he was fine with however Red wanted to dote on him.

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Sans woke up and stretched his limbs in the cool, early winter air. His lower half was entirely wrapped up in Red’s tentacles. Red, surprisingly enough, was still asleep. He must have worn himself out hunting so much over the past couple of days. Sans patted his soft exto-belly and noted that, if nothing else, it was keeping him a little warmer in these cooler months.

It was pretty obvious how much Red had been “pampering” him lately. He’d been teased by everyone in the school besides Alphys at least once about it. A little friendly teasing didn’t bother him any. Besides, he was a mer, not some mammal or fish. Any extra weight was just excess magic, ready to be used. If he wanted, he could go waste some magic attacks on the seafloor and slim down, but Sans actually liked having plenty of extra magic in case of an emergency. For example, if one of the kids got hurt again and Toriel didn’t have enough magic to heal them, he could step in for her. That sort of thing.

The joy Red expressed when he saw how well his mate was eating wasn’t exactly encouragement to lose weight, either, so Sans continued being lazy and content.

“Hey, Red,” Sans hummed, swimming up to his mate’s face and kissing his cheek. “It’s morning. Wake up, sleepy bones.”

Red lazily peeked an eye socket open and grumbled. “Mornin’.”

He yawned and stretched his arms, then pulled Sans into a hug, pressing the smaller mer against his rib cage while he nuzzled his chin to the top of his head. Red freed one of his hands and sluggishly stroked his mate. He lingered a bit on Sans’s ecto-belly and gave it a gentle pinch, making a satisfied hum in the base of his throat.

Red yawned again and stretched a few of his tentacles out into the hall. “Is the sun up?”
“Yep.”

“Are you hungry?”

“I can wait. You seem tired today.”

Red groaned, but he didn’t deny it.

“Did you not sleep well or something? You’re not getting sick, are you?”

“I’m not sick. I just,” he ran his hand over his face and sighed. “I’m just tired. I think I need a me day.”

“Really? You lasted a lot longer than I thought you would.”

“Yeah, me too.”

“Well, I’ll tell the others not to bother you. Just make sure to check in with me in the morning if you’re gonna need more than a day. I want to know you aren’t sick or hurt.”

“Okay.”

Red hauled himself up and made his way to his private room, and Sans went to say good morning to the others.

“Where is Red?” Toriel asked. “He has usually left to hunt by now.”

“He’s hit his limit,” Sans explained. “He’s gonna hang out in his room today.”

“I guess that leaves the hunting to me and Asgore,” Undyne stated.

“Well, you won’t have to work too hard. We still have plenty of extra from Red’s...enthusiastic hunting,” Toriel smiled.

For the first time, Sans wondered if Red was intentionally gathering extra food in preparation for days like these. The thought made his soul flutter with pride.
An All-Day Activity

Chapter Summary

*In which Sans goes into heat.

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains smut.
Also, miscarriage trigger warning.
Comments always welcome! :3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It took three days for Red to come out of his room, and the first thing he did was hug Sans like they’d been apart for a year.

“I missed you too, big guy,” Sans chuckled, patting his chest.

“I’m sorry. Really fucking sorry,” he said, checking Sans all over for injuries or signs of malnutrition.

“More importantly, are you feeling better?”

“I feel so much better,” Red grinned.

The first thing they did together was go out and check all of Red’s traps, bringing the catch back to the den.

At dinner, Undyne saw fit to complain. “You’re a pretty weird guy, you know that, Red?”

He looked up from his food and shrunk back nervously. “Uh… why?”

“You’re always hunting and mothering Sans at two-hundred percent power! And then you just abandon us—even Sans—for three days to hide in your room? What’s the deal with that?”

“I… u-uh,” Red glanced at Sans, as if begging for help. One on one, Red could manage some form of conversation, but when others were watching his nerves got the best of him.

“He just needed a break, Undyne,” Sans shrugged.

“You may ask Undyne and myself to hunt for you if you’re tired, Red,” Asgore told him. “There’s no need to exhaust yourself.”

“N-no, not that. Uh, it’s um… What’s the fucking word? …Shit. Sans?”

“Red’s a meroctopus,” Sans said. “He’s not naturally inclined to live in a group. Sometimes the
pressure hits him the wrong way and he needs to be alone for a while. That’s the kind of break he needed.” He swallowed the meat of an oyster. “It’s why we built him that dark room in the back. Remember?”

“Seriously?” Undyne blinked her yellow eyes. “He never needed it all this time. I kinda thought he was over that.”

Sans smiled and nudged one of Red’s tentacles. “Yeah, he’s been doing a really great job adjusting.”

Red looked down at Sans and grinned in shy joy.

***

Throughout the cold months, Red continued to be just the cuddliest mer in the ocean. Sans would admit he liked it. He didn’t know if Red was just naturally warmer than he expected a skeleton mer to be, or if he was using magic to keep his temperature up, but his massive tentacles were the perfect place to keep warm.

In fact, although it shocked Sans and the others in the school, when the two human mer kids started shivering, he offered to let them join. He held them more distantly than he did Sans, but it was still prolonged physical contact. Sans was proud of his mate.

As the water warmed, though, Red’s cuddling changed natures slightly. There was more kissing and nuzzling than holding and hugging. Several times, Red whined at even the suggestion of putting Sans down. It was starting to drive the little mer crazy because his body was getting ready to mate for the spring and this teasing was too much.

Finally, one morning, Sans pushed Red’s face away from him right after waking up and jabbed a phalange at his face.

“Red, I swear, if you don’t quit teasing and mate with me already, I’m going to go nuts!”

Red’s eyes widened, as even he could understand what Sans meant.

“You’re in heat?”

Sans blushed and tried to keep his breathing even. “Yeah. Is yours coming soon or what? The wait is killing me.”

Red shook his head, “We don’t get heats. I’m ready to go whenever.”

Sans’s eyes went wide and he grinned. “Seriously! Thank the stars! Let’s go already!”

The little mer pressed himself up against Red’s chest and purred for the first time since they’d been together, full of need and ready to satisfy it, but Red pulled him back by the shoulders.

“Slow down.” Sans could taste Red’s magic thick in the water. He was sweating a lot. “Shouldn’t we eat first? I don’t know how it is for mermaids, but once I start, I’m gonna need at least four hours to finish.”

Sans drew in a sharp breath and stared at his mate incredulously. “Four hours?! Why the hell does
it take so long?"

Red winced and wrung his hands, looking guilty. “For us, it’s a size thing. I’m big, so it takes a while.”

Sans took a breath to steady himself. The fact that sex was an all-day activity was a shock, but it wasn’t something Red could help. It was best to just accept it. Stars, his nerves were going to be mush by the end of this, weren’t they?

“If that’s the case, you’re right. We should definitely eat first.”

They swam out to gather the trapped prey and delivered them to the den. While Red was preparing Sans’s food, Sans caught Undyne’s attention.

“Hey, Undyne, lunch is gonna be on you and Asgore today.”

“Yeah?” She glanced at Red. “The big guy looks fine. You just need a break, Red?”

“Gonna be busy,” he murmured.

“I’m in heat, so Red’s gonna take care of me,” Sans explained, feeling his soul flutter in anticipation.

“Until lunch?” Undyne asked. “Damn, Sans. I know you’ve been waiting for a while, but I didn’t think you had that much stamina.”

Sans laughed out loud. “You think I can do anything but sleep for that long? Nah, Red says it’s gonna take him at least four hours. I’m gonna leave all the hard stuff to him and just enjoy it.”

Undyne blinked, looked at Red who shrunk under her gaze, and looked back at Sans. “I’m sorry. Did you say four hours?”

Red’s face turned his namesake, and he nodded, and Undyne let out a low whistle. “Sans, you damn lucky son of a bitch.” A shark-like grin split her face. “Alphys is gonna flip when she hears this.”

“When I h-hear what?” the lizard mermaid stuttered.

“Red’s about to go fuck Sans for at least four hours!” Undyne told her.

“O-oh! Is Sans in heat already?”

“Alphys, didn’t you hear what I said? Four hours! Isn’t that nuts?”

“W-well, n-no. N-not really. Red is a-a meroctopus, a-after all. The amount of time it takes for them to mate i-is entirely dependent on th-the l-length of the h-h-hectocotylus. Red i-is r-rather large, s-so I assumed it would take him a w-while.”

Red’s eyebrows shot up. “How the fuck do you know all that?”

“U-um, research. I-I’ve studied most o-of the mer species that c-can be found around here.”

It seemed pretty clear that Undyne would tell everyone where Sans and Red were, so they retreated to Red’s private room where they wouldn’t be interrupted.
The first thing Red did was light up his ecto-flesh so Sans could see, then Sans went in for a kiss. It was excited and breathless, and they were both breathing harder when he pulled back.

“I don’t really know how to do this with you,” Red admitted.

Sans smiled sympathetically. “Yeah, me neither. I can choose how I present, but can you, Red?”

“What, you mean like rod or hole? Yeah, I can pick. But, uh, if somehow this does take, know that I’d lay a lot of eggs, and they’re a handful.”

“I was planning to be on the receiving end anyway,” Sans chuckled. “No idea how I’d last four hours otherwise.”

Red nodded and pulled his third back tentacle to the front. Sans noticed the few inches at the tip without suckers were firming up.

“In that case, this is what I’ll be using.” He looked his mate over uncertainly. “Where should I put it?”

Since Red was ready, Sans told his own magic to start and formed his opening. Red spotted it almost immediately and let out a deep purr. “It fine if I hold you n’ stuff?”

“Yes, please touch me and talk to me during this,” Sans blushed. “That’ll make it so much better.”

Red nodded and started sweating slightly. “I feel,” he said unsurely, “like I’m gonna wanna get kinda rough. I might bite and shit—but I promise not to hurt you.”

“As long as you’re gentle. I’ll tell you if I want more.”

So, Red picked Sans up in his tentacles and started stroking in and around his rib cage, planting kisses on his face and neck. Sans felt his entrance readying itself for use. It didn’t take too long before something firm and warm pressed up against its edges. There was absolutely no hurry for Red, so he teased the outside for a while longer, until Sans was whining and begging for more. Finally, he pushed the very tip inside, then slowly slid in more.

Sans arched his spine and gasped. It felt so much better than he’d imagined! Red pushed in more and Sans cried out in glee. How had he passed so many heats without this? He’d used his fingers or some smooth rocks to get through this in the past, but this felt so much better!

Red pushed more of his length into Sans, and the little mer moaned. He felt so full, so complete. Red was still stroking him and teasing him with his suckers, and Sans’s insides were full, and maybe four hours of this wouldn’t be enough.

But then Red tried to insert himself more, and Sans gasped in pain. “Ah! Red! You can’t! I’m full already! That hurts!”

Red carefully retracted himself and Sans gasped for oxygen. He was still filled with pleasure, and the lingering tingles of pain accented it. Red’s loving strokes made his bones slick with sweat.

“You okay?” Red purred, his voice low and gravelly.

“That much is perfect,” he gasped.

“Is it too big?” he checked.

“No, not too big.”
“I can make it bigger.”

Sans felt his mouth go numb and he barely managed to reply. “Oh, Stars. Red, please.”

And the warmth filling Sans began to swell, stretching him until it was almost too much. “Right there, Red! That’s perfect!”

Sans’s head sagged. The pleasure was already overwhelming and exhausting him, but he anxiously waited for it to intensify. After a few minutes passed, he had adjusted, though, and Red still wasn’t stroking his inside like he was the outside.

“Red? Are you gonna move that around at all or what?”

The giant mer stopped kissing Sans’s neck long enough to look puzzled. “What do you mean? Am I supposed to?”

“Yeah. It’ll feel good.”

“M’kay.”

Red started to twist and rotate. He pressed into various places on Sans’s walls and noted which ones made the little mer moan in pleasure. It only took a few minutes after that for Sans to get pushed over the edge. He cried out and the water suddenly smelled like his magic. The lazy mermaid went limp in Red’s arms and tried to catch his breath.

“Fuck. Already?” Red murmured, starting to withdraw from his mate. “I’ll finish the rest myself, I guess.”

Sans gripped Red’s ribs and kissed his collarbone. “Hold on, big guy. We don’t gotta stop yet.”

“But you came,” he pointed out.

“Yeah. I can do it more than once, you know?”

Red’s eye sockets went wide with that new piece of information. “Seriously? How many times?”

Sans smiled at him with half-lidded sockets. “I dunno. Wanna find out?”

Red gawked and gave his mate an almost worshipping stare, sheathing himself back inside. An angel; Sans was an angel. Red brought him to the edge over and over, and every time, the lazy little mer showered him with kisses and begged for more. It was ages before Sans finally expressed exhaustion.

“F-fuck, Red!” he gasped, climaxing yet again and leaning against his mate’s chest to recover. “H-how close are you?”

Red hummed and considered it. “Maybe a third of the way?”

Sans groaned. His insides felt raw with pleasure, and every involuntary twitch hurt. He had already expelled enough magic to cancel out his last few meals, but Red wasn’t even close to finishing. How many hours had it been?

“How… it at least feel good for you?” Sans panted.

Red nuzzled his head in response. “Feels great, but I’m having more fun watching you lose it.”
Sans whimpered and drew in a sudden breath when Red nipped his collarbone with his sharp teeth.

“Ya look tired. Just relax and lemme take care of ya, okay Angel?”

Sans whined pitifully in response, submitting himself to a complete overload of pleasure. He blacked out once or twice during particularly draining orgasms, and his sense of time completely failed him. He couldn’t even think; there was too much ecstasy in his head.

Hours in, Red’s movements started to get rougher. He bit at Sans and dragged his claws down his back. He controlled his strength so he didn’t leave any marks, but the little mer still flinched at the stinging sensation. It mimicked the sharp pleasure-pain of his completely raw insides.

Red dragged his claws down the nearest wall, leaving deep grooves in the rough surface. He wanted to shove all of the tip into Sans, but the knowledge that his mate couldn’t take that just barely stopped him. He was close and it was driving him mad.

“Sans? Please wake up, Sans. I’m so close. Help me out, Angel.”

Sans dragged open his exhausted eye sockets and smiled weakly at his mate. He did his best to squeeze his walls close, and Red groaned in agonized pleasure.

“Fill me up, Red,” Sans purred. “My eggs are waiting for you.”

Red moaned and grabbed one of Sans’s hands, placing it on his rib cage. “Squeeze like you did before. Hard, okay?”

Sans complied, gripping Red’s ribs tightly. He shuddered, and Sans sleepily had an idea. “Hey, mind if I bite back?”

“Go for it,” Red grunted.

Sans angled his mouth so the sharper teeth at the edges of his mouth were touching Red’s bones. He bit down gently, and Red’s whole body trembled.

He gasped. “Stars! Harder, Angel!”

Sans bit down harder, and Red cried out for more. The little mer clenched his teeth until he felt a sliver of bone break off, definitely to leave a new scar on Red’s already marred bones. He wasn’t sure he wanted to hurt him more than that, but thankfully it was enough. Sans felt the thing inside of him swell and then—Stars! He was filled with so much concentrated magic, hotter and more electric than any he’d ever felt.

Red carefully extracted himself and staggered into his tight place, curling up and holding Sans close to his chest. He conjured his tongue and lapped up any extra magic still leaking out of the little fish, while Sans completely gave in to sleep.

When the little mer woke up, his stomach told him it was dinner time.

Red crawled out of bed at Sans’s prompting, but he was clearly spent. He offered to hunt anyway, but the others took one look at the both of them and demanded they rest.


“M’fine,” Red muttered, setting himself down in a corner.
“Stars, I’m not,” Sans chuckled. “I’m not going to be able to swim for days.”

Red let out a warbling purr and licked the top of his head, delivering a tiny amount of green magic through the contact.

“I don’t get it. What happened to you guys?” The little goat mer was still confused. “You were gone all day.”

“They were just playing a little rough,” Chara smirked. Frisk looked their way and deliberately winked, while Toriel chastised both of the kids.

The next day, Sans’s heat was completely spent. The attentive care he’d been given had seen to that. There was no way to know if any of his eggs would be fertilized, but either way, he was in for several days of pampering while Red made up for completely destroying his insides.

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Sans sighed and put a hand over his ecto-belly, and Toriel put a hand on his shoulder to comfort him. He’d had twenty eggs ready to be fertilized. Fourteen had taken, but all but three had been reabsorbed into his body. Another of those three was shriveling. It seemed very likely that he would lose this entire clutch.

He and Red were both feeling a little down about it, but they weren’t expecting to be able to conceive in the first place. Being emotionally prepared made the loss easier to deal with.

In a few more days, all the eggs were lost. Red cried that night, like some kind of dam had broken, and kept pouring out apologies.

“Sorry. M’sorry. Fuck, Angel, I’m so damn sorry.”

“Hey, hey,” Sans put his hands on the sides of Red’s face, “it isn’t your fault. It’s nobody’s fault. We can’t have kids together, but I still love you, alright?”

“I know, I’m stupid. M’sorry.”

“It’s okay,” he comforted. “We’re okay.”

Summer rolled around, and they put the loss behind them. Sans got confirmation that Red’s high temperature wasn’t intentional while he watched the large mer lay around in the shade, sweating buckets.

“M’built for colder water,” he confessed, and Sans recalled how chilly it had been down in that crevasse.

Due to the heat and how terribly uncomfortable it made Red, they didn’t cuddle as close in the summer months. Instead, they held hands, or Red wrapped one of his tentacles around the base of Sans’s tail, or other stuff like that.

The natural predator still kept up with his hunting, but the others made sure he took every couple of days off to just nap and recover from his general heat exhaustion.
So, obviously, when fall returned and he wasn’t so completely spent, Red cranked up his caregiver dial to eleven. Due to playing around in the warm water and not being ceaselessly coddled for a season, Sans had slimmed down somewhat. A fact Red seemed personally offended by when he had the presence of mind to realize it. His protective touches gave Sans the distinct feeling that his current figure wouldn’t last much longer.

He wasn’t complaining about it; he’d signed up for a mate who would take care of him, and Red took very good care of him.

In fact, Red took good care of the whole school. He had firmly adopted himself into the group, and actively contributed to it. Toriel had to scold him multiple times for bringing home too much food that would only go to waste. The big guy looked so damn pitiful when he was being scolded. Red tried to eat the food that was left before it could go bad, but even he couldn’t manage all of it. Alphys and the kids would end up hauling it away as chum.

By the time it was getting cool enough that a mermaid would want some extra fur or blubber, Sans was reasonably rounder. He wasn’t the only one who’d gotten bigger, though. Sans didn’t miss the chunks of coral that chipped off of his door while Red squeezed himself inside. Nor did he fail to notice how the space left inside seemed more cramped than it used to. Red hadn’t grown a belly like he had, but he was certainly larger than he used to be.


“H-huh?” He looked down at himself as if he expected to see ink splattered on his bones. Could meroctopuses ink? “Do I look bigger?”

Sans chuckled, “Well, my poor doorway sure thinks so. You didn’t notice?”

“Wasn’t really payin’ attention.”

Sans laughed at his goober of a mate who somehow managed to be attentive and oblivious at the same time. “For real, though, how much bigger are you gonna get? You’re pretty huge already.”

“I’m an octopus,” Red shrugged, as if that explained everything. He caught the look Sans was giving him and went into a little more detail. “If I have enough food, I’ll grow. If I don’t, I’ll shrink back down. My body can’t store magic other ways, so it just stays as big as it needs to be to hold it all.”

“Well, that’s something,” Sans hummed and flicked his tail casually. “Hey, I don’t want you to starve, but try not to outgrow the den, alright? That’d make things pretty complicated.”

Red ducked his head. “Okay. Sorry about your door.”

“It’s fine,” Sans waved the thought away. “Hey, tomorrow, let’s explore a little to the north. I thought I saw something shiny over there earlier. Maybe something fell off a human ship.” Sans winked at his mate. “If it’s pretty, I’ll let you keep it.”

Red blushed and purred, bending down to hug Sans without disturbing his sleeping position. He gave the little mer a kiss on the forehead and rested a protective tentacle on top of him like a blanket.

Sans sighed at the feeling of warmth and safety. He gave his mate’s limbs a gentle pat and drifted off to sleep.
Chapter End Notes

I researched so much octopus, fish, and dolphin sex for this. =_=U
Surface Dwellers and Hosts

Chapter Summary

*In which Sans and Red visit the surface.

Chapter Notes

This is all I had prewritten. As usual, I won’t promise an update schedule, but this is quite fun so I don’t intend to stop writing it.

I eat all of your comments. They keep me fed.

“I’m sure I saw it over this way,” Sans insisted, leading Red north across the sandy plains.

“If something shiny fell, somebody else probably took it already,” Red mentioned.

Sans sighed. “I know. Let me just look for another minute, okay?”

Well, it wasn’t like the fish in Red’s traps were going anywhere.

Sans kept searching for whatever he thought he saw. They were about to give up and go back when he suddenly saw it glimmer again. Whatever it was was half-buried in the sand!

“I found it!” He called excitedly, swimming down to push the white particulates out of the way. What was revealed were a pair of shiny silver rings. And those rings were chained together and locked around a pair of skeletal wrists.

“Holy shit!” Sans exclaimed, quickly swiping away the rest of the sand with a few goes of his tail.

It was a land-dweller: his wrists and ankles were bound with shiny metal, and he was unconscious. He was skeletal, like Sans and Red, but without any ecto-biology to help him swim, he appeared to have gotten stuck at the bottom.

He must have been alive, since he wasn’t dust yet.

They didn’t debate the matter at all before dragging the land-dweller up to the surface for air. They found a small outcropping of rocks to set the person on, and Sans started healing them.

They coughed up water and gagged, rolling onto their side and slowly getting to their hands and knees.

“Ughhh,” they groaned.

“You are so damn lucky,” Red said.

“You saved my life,” the skeleton coughed, turning around to see their saviors. When they saw the
two mer (or, rather, Red’s giant, scary face), they gasped and fell back onto their rear.

“I’m Sans, and this is my mate, Red,” Sans said in a disarming tone. “We both use male pronouns. How about you?”

The stranger worked his jaw for a minute in shock, his pointed teeth gnashing. “I am the great and terrible Edge,” he said boisterously. “Male pronouns will do for me as well. Thank you, mer monsters, for rescuing me.”

“How did you end up down there in the first place?” Sans asked, nodding pointedly at the restraints the land-dweller was equipped with.

Edge huffed. “It matters little, but I work as a guard, and presumably, I was getting close to discovering somebody’s illegal activities. They requested I join them on their ship to investigate something they saw at sea, but that was a lie. All they really intended was to throw me overboard. Now, I’m left without any means of contacting help, no way to return on my own, and these ridiculous devices sealing my magic!”

Red silently reached forward and grasped the glowing mechanism between the loops of the restraints. He closed his large, sharp claws around it firmly, and it fizzled. Edge watched the scene with a dumbfounded expression, but since he didn’t protest, Red broke the set around his ankles too.

“Well, that’s one problem solved,” he grumbled, rubbing his wrists. “Thank you, mer monster… No. Thank you, Red.”

“S’fine.”

“Is your home close? Maybe we can help you swim back,” Sans offered.

“Close,” Edge chuckled dryly. “I’m afraid not. We’re almost a hundred miles from the shore.”

Red glanced at his mate. “Assuming I carry him, we can do that in two hours, yeah?”

Sans nodded. “Yeah, it’s doable. We should let the others know where we’re going, though.”

Edge openly stared at them in shock. “You’re willing to help me to that extent?”

“What would be the point in saving you if we just left you here to die?” Sans reasoned.

The land-dweller stood to his full height and pounded his fist to his sternum. “I will never forget this debt, gentle mer monsters. I shall repay it someday.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Sans grinned lazily. He patted Red’s arm and gave him a loving smile. “I’ll be right back, Red.”

The little blue mer darted off back in the direction of their den and was out of sight within a few breaths. Red felt awkward alone with the stranger and submerged half his face in the water. Edge felt just as awkward and tried not to break under the other’s gaze. The edgy skeleton dealt with shady and dangerous individuals on a regular basis, but Red had the stare of a wild predatory beast—albeit an intelligent one, whether that was better or worse.

He struggled for anything to say that would break the tension.

“Your mate seems… like a kind person,” Edge mentioned, his spine prickling with worry.
Fortunately, the compliment made Red relax a bit and release a short purr, nodding in agreement. Edge felt his confidence grow.

“How long have you been together?”

“’Bout a year,” the giant mer mumbled.

“You both seem happy.”

Red hummed.

The conversation was failing fast, but luckily Sans returned.

“Sorry for the wait. We ready to go?” The two nodded and Sans looked at the land monster. “How long can you hold your breath?”

“Without endangering myself, about four hours,” Edge replied.

“Great. Red can swim faster if he doesn’t have to stick to the surface.”

Wondering what that meant, Edge took a last deep breath and slid back into the cold water. The feeling of his skull filling with liquid was exceptionally strange. He blinked a few times to adjust his eyes. One thing he didn’t expect was that Red and Sans were different types of mer. Sans was a mermaid and red was a meroctopus. He’d had no idea the two could mate, but it did explain the extreme size difference he’d noticed. He took the information as an interesting cultural exchange.

Red carefully gathered the land monster in his arms. “Tap me if you need to go up.”

Edge automatically opened his mouth to respond, but nearly choked when the seawater mingled with his magic. He settled for nodding, and they took off.

Edge shut his eye sockets against the rushing water and covered his nasal hole with his hands. The fast-moving current pounded him unpleasantly. He didn’t know how the other skeletons could handle it.

Stars, he had to endure two hours of it. Sans made it a little more bearable by distracting him with simple conversation, but it was repetitive and boring when he couldn’t respond.

When they reached the shore, Edge gleefully took a breath of fresh air. Clambering onto the docks and seeing the lights of civilization in the distance washed him with relief.

“I cannot thank you both enough for this,” Edge said sincerely. “If there is anything I can do to return the favor, please let me know.”

Sans tapped his chin and grinned down at his mate, still half-hiding in the water. “It seems like a waste to come all the way here and just go back. I kinda wanna take a look around.”


“I meant out of the water.”

Edge and Red both looked at him like he had lost his mind.

“What? I’ve never seen a surface community before. I’m curious.”
Red furrowed his brow and looked for Edge’s input. “‘S that safe? For us, I mean.”

The land skeleton considered it carefully. “There’s no legal reason you can’t, assuming you don’t break anything, steal anything, or hurt anybody. A few people may desire to capture you to sell illegally, but that won’t be an issue with a guard like myself around. The biggest problem will likely be surface-dwellers wanting to get a good look at the first mer creatures they’ve ever laid eyes on.” He tapped his boot aggressively, arms crossed. “How long can you safely be out of water?”

“I took a nap on some rocks once while I was sunbathing,” Sans smiled encouragingly. “Drying out a little won’t hurt us; it just feels weird.”

The little mer was already reaching up to pull himself onto the dock. He kicked his tail and shot out of the water enough to get a good purchase, then rolled over into a sitting position.

“You can wait here if you don’t wanna come, Red. I don’t think I’ll be able to get very far anyway.”

Red blew bubbles under the surface and grumbled, reaching up onto the dock with his tentacles to haul himself up. The wood creaked and groaned dangerously, and Edge cringed when one of the pillars cracked. The giant octopus mer picked up his mate and cradled him in his arms.

“I’ll fuckin’ walk,” he complained softly. “Like I’d let you go to the surface alone. You don’t even got legs.”

“Thanks, Red,” Sans petted his sternum.

“I suppose I will guide you to some of the better tourism locations in town. Hosting my saviors is the least I can do.”

Edge led the way down the dock, and Red quickly figured out how to crawl in the open air.

“You know, I’m glad you’re carrying me,” Sans mused. “I hate how heavy the surface makes me feel.”

“You’re tellin’ me,” Red grunted. He was almost perfectly neutrally buoyant in the ocean, but that was certainly not the case out of the water. If his ecto-limbs weren’t so powerful, he might not have been able to even lift them to walk. However much he weighed here, it was too much.

The wooden dock planks thought so too, if their loud groaning was to be believed.

Red followed Edge off the docks and onto the road, trying to ignore the uncomfortable scratching of asphalt and concrete against his soft tentacles and instead focus on the excited and curious look in Sans’s eyes. Every now and then, something would catch the little mer’s attention, and he would thrash his tail excitedly in Red’s grip, nearly knocking himself out of his hold in the process. He would then demand they get closer to the thing in question, and Red would comply.

The area nearest the docks was all but empty, as the sailors and fishermen had yet to return for the evening, but there were people out and about the closer they got to town. There wasn’t a human or land monster who failed to point at them and say something in an excited tone. Very soon, a crowd started to form around them, and Red stopped in place, ducking his head and growling at them threateningly.

Sans patted his mate’s rib cage, trying to calm him down, and Edge took in the situation. Helpless mermaid with an overprotective mate, and a bunch of surface-dwellers crowding them. This was a
potential incident if he’d ever seen one.

“Back away from the mer creatures, people. Nobody likes to be crowded,” he ordered in his professional guard’s voice.

“Can we take pictures?” one man asked. He was holding up his phone and had a big smile plastered across his face.

Edge rightly figured that Sans and Red wouldn’t know what pictures were. “Do you mind if they preserve your likeness for later viewing?”


“You may take pictures,” Edge told the crowd. “But be sensible and turn your flash off.”

The dull clicks of many camera shutters drew up a small din. Sans looked curiously at the (mostly human) crowd, and Red continued to faintly growl.

“Hey, pose for us!” somebody shouted.

Sans smirked and rolled over in Red’s arms. He held his tail up and mimed like he was blowing a kiss. Several people cheered and the cameras clicked faster. Edge smirked and shook his head. What a charming little mermaid Sans was.

Red didn’t look the least bit comfortable with the situation, but Sans tried to rope him into it anyway. The little mer sat up and reached for his mate’s face, pulling his skull down and planting a kiss on his teeth. Red’s eyelights turned into hearts and there was cheering and whistling from the crowd.

“I hope you two know,” Edge folded his arms and smirked, “everybody on the surface will know you’re a couple by the end of the day.”

“Good,” Red purred, pulling Sans closer.

A few of the land-dwellers offered food from the nearby stalls as thanks for the pictures. Red tasted each of them first to make sure they were really safe, then gave them to Sans. Some kebabs from a stand were the first hot meal either of them had ever had.

“It might be worth coming back here again just for this,” Sans said.

The little mer wanted to play around some more, but he knew his school would worry if they took much longer. When they announced they were leaving, Edge gave them something he’d stepped away to buy just a moment ago.

“This phone will function underwater up to three hundred feet deep. My number is in the contacts. Please let me know when you intend to visit so I can properly host you.”

He gave them a quick tutorial on how to use a mobile device and gave them a solar charger to maintain its battery life. Armed with some rather interesting new technology, they returned to the den.

The children were full of questions when they heard Sans and Red had gone to the surface. Sans entertained them with descriptions of everything he’d seen and tasted, while Red sent his first text ever.
You

This is Red. We made it back safely.

It took him three tries to spell everything correctly. His phalanges were too big for the keys.

Edge

Good. Thank you for informing me.

There was no WiFi this far out in the ocean, but surprisingly they had pretty good data. Sans discovered the App Store while playing with the phone and downloaded some free mobile games. He liked to play them while the school was settling down for the night, and Red would cuddle him while watching the bright colors.

A week later, Red and Sans decided to go back for a visit. The kids, especially Frisk and Chara, wanted to come with them, but Sans said it would be better if they got more familiar with the surface settlement before taking anyone else along.

They texted Edge to let him know they were coming and committed to the long swim. Sans didn’t bother climbing onto the dock again. He just waited for Red to get out of the water and pick him up.

Lazy little angel.

“I forgot how much I hated this,” the meroctopus groaned, adjusting to his sudden lack of buoyancy.

“It’s never gonna be my preference either,” Sans chuckled.

Edge met them at the end of the dock and led them back to the town. Once again, they were swarmed by people wanting to take pictures, but Edge made sure they had plenty of space so Red wouldn’t panic.

They got more free stall food from the excited locals (who took an abundance of pictures), and Edge led them to a very nice, homey house with a white picket fence and colorful garden. It didn’t suit his edgy and rough exterior at all.

“Is this your den?” Sans asked, unable to keep the surprise out of his voice.

“Yes, but my husband won most of our arguments over how to decorate it.” His voice sounded irritated, but there was a pleased smile at the corner of his fangs.

“What’s a husband?” Red asked.
“Essentially, my mate,” Edge explained. “He’s inside and rather eager to meet you both. Let’s not keep him waiting, shall we?”

Instead of stopping at the front door, Edge led them around to the back of the house, where a sliding glass door had been preemptively taken off its track. The resulting entrance was wide enough for Red to pass through without causing property damage.

Shortly past the entrance was a kitchenette, where a cheerful skeleton was humming an upbeat tune.

“Papyrus,” Edge called, “our guests have arrived.”

The cheerful skeleton turned around and smiled brightly. He was softer-looking than Edge, lacking sharp teeth or scars and wearing brighter colors.

“Oh! Welcome, new friends! Lunch is almost ready. Please, take a seat at the table!” He had a loud and grating voice, just like Edge did, but it lacked the gravely undertones of the rougher skeleton.

While Edge strode over to help his mate finish the meal, Red stood uncertainly in the doorway. Sans patted his arm, gesturing at the chairs placed around the table. Crawling forward hesitantly, Red glanced at the setup and reached out with a couple tentacles, dragging the wooden things out of the way. The giant meroctopus positioned himself squarely in front of the table and set Sans in his lap.

Edge and Papyrus carried dishes full of steaming food over to the table, as well as glasses full of clear water.

“Well, I suppose that is one way to seat yourselves,” Papyrus smiled. “Please, help yourselves to my world-famous spaghetti! I’m sure it will be like nothing you’ve ever eaten before!”

As usual, Red sampled the food first. It was warm, which was a uniquely pleasant sensation. There was a lot of flavor in the dish, and textures unlike anything he’d eaten before, but it wasn’t bad or dangerous by any means.

Red licked the tomato sauce off his phalanges. “S’good,” he mumbled, and Sans smiled at him.

The little socialite looked at his hosts and saw how they were eating the food. He picked up a little silver instrument and copied them. It required some focus and dexterity to wield the fork, though, so he quickly gave up and used his hands just like Red was.

“Hm. Your table manners are a bit lacking,” Papyrus tapped his chin with his free hand. “Shall I teach you how to wield eating utensils? I am quite a good teacher!”

Sans chuckled. “Nah. Seems like a pain.”

The land skeleton’s gaze shifted wholly to Red, and the mer ducked back. “Uh…”

He didn’t manage to say no quickly enough, and Papyrus launched right into a demonstration. He did everything short of holding Red’s hand and pushing the fork into it.

“See? It’s rather straightforward, isn’t it?”

Red mumbled something that may have been affirmation, but could have been anything. He tried twirling some noodles onto the pronged silver stick (which was much too small in his large hands), then looked at the little bundle of food curiously. After some hesitation, he pointed the opposite
The little mer chuckled and ate the food off the end of the fork. Red’s opinion on the utensil immediately changed once he knew it could be used like this. He continued to pass convenient little bundles of food to his mate. Across the table, Edge was averting his eyes from the scene and faintly blushing, and Papyrus was watching with glittering eye sockets and an adorable grin. The giant mer ignored the both of them.

Eventually, Sans held his hands up and said he’d had enough, and the meroctopus immediately abandoned the fork. He ate the rest of the food on his plate with his hands and licked the remaining sauce off the bottom of the dish.

“Did you like it?” Papyrus asked, glowing. “There’s plenty more if you want it!”

Red hummed and nodded. Half a plate of spaghetti for a mer his size? No way was that enough. After requesting his third helping, Edge stood up before his mate could. Smirking, he dropped the entire remaining pot at Red’s tablespace and folded his arms.

“Is that more your serving size?”

Red nodded and reached his hand into the pot, and Papyrus blew a short breath from his nasal hole.

“Eating from the pot is terrible manners, but I can overlook it in this case.”

Once the pasta was gone, Red licked the remains from his fingers and reached for his full water glass… only to dump it directly onto his head. Papyrus sucked in a breath and Edge shook his head, still wryly smirking.

“Of course,” the rougher skeleton muttered. “Don’t panic, Papyrus; it was only water, and we’re not even over the carpet.”

Papyrus folded his arms and held his chin up. “I was not panicking. It was simply unexpected!” He glanced sideways at his mate. “And I’m sure if it had been tea over the carpet, you’d be the first to reach for the cleaning supplies. I won’t let you say you aren’t a neat freak.”

Edge huffed. “And you aren’t?”

“I am a homemaker!” Papyrus asserted, placing a hand dramatically over his sternum.

In the meantime, Sans, who was observing the two with a wry smile, picked up his own glass and “spilled” it over the tiles. “Whoops.” He grinned broadly when both of the land skeletons flinched.

For a moment, there was a stretch of silence where only Sans seemed to be holding in laughter, then Edge abruptly stood from his seat, muttering that he would get the paper towels. The little mer broke out into laughter then, and Red and Papyrus smiled slightly under the broken tension.

After lunch was done with, the two hosts spent some time showing the mer monsters some of the various things that could be seen on the surface. They took them out to the garden and introduced them to the many sweet-smelling flowers. Back inside, they showed them furniture, textiles, and electronics. Sans became immediately fond of their couch, and Red whined when the little mer chose to roll around there instead of in his arms.

“Don’t be like that, Red,” the mermaid chuckled, “it’s comfortable.”

“I hate it,” Red grumbled.
Sans brushed off his mate’s tantrum and played with the TV remote, pressing various buttons, including the power, and frowning when nothing happened. Papyrus had briefly shown him how it worked, but he’d been introducing so many things so quickly that they all kind of blurred together.

Red gave a low, half-hearted growl and took the remote from his mate’s hands. “Yer doin’ it wrong,” he muttered. With a few easy clicks (facing the receiver), the cable box and monitor lit up. Some kind of event was showing: many humans and monsters were marching together down a road, dragging colorful streamers and making lots of noise. Additional crowds were railed off to the sides, cheering as the procession passed.

Red ignored the odd broadcast and accessed the channel hub.

“Whaddya wanna watch?”

Sans hummed and read the various show names. “How about that one? Three down.”

Red pressed the buttons and swore when he selected the wrong channel.

“Thought you said you knew how to do it?” Sans teased, laughing.

“I do!” the giant mer growled. “Stupid buttons are too small!”

With a bit more care, he managed to select the right channel. It was playing something boring, though, so they gave up and turned the device off. Papyrus immediately noticed their availability and jumped back into host mode.

“Would you two like to see more of the town? The great Papyrus would be more than happy to show you around!”

Edge, however, snorted knowingly. “You’re going back, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, it’s getting kind of late,” Sans said. “We have a long swim back.” He rolled around some more on the couch and lazily flicked his tail. “I wish I had one of these at the den to go back to. This is great.”

Red whined again and Sans reached over to stroke his cheek. “Maybe we’ll find one your size, and you can see what I’m talking about, huh big guy?”

Red purred in response to his mate’s touch and scooped him off the couch. Edge and Papyrus saw them to the docks, keeping the amateur photographers at a safe distance.

Relief settled into every inch of Red’s body when he was back in the water. He had almost gotten used to being on the surface, and now he felt completely weightless. The swim back even sounded like fun in this state.

Sans chuckled at Red who refused to have more than half of his head out of the water, and gave a friendly wave to Edge and Papyrus.

“Thanks for having us. We’ll visit again sometime.”

“Feel free to return anytime, friends!” Papyrus beamed. “The great Papyrus is always willing to show his abundant talents as a host!”

“Do remember to give us forewarning so we can host you properly,” Edge supplemented.

The two ocean monsters returned home with a number more stories to share with the school’s
children.
Winter passed and spring returned. Red and Sans had continued visiting the surface every week or two. It was always pretty fun eating different foods, talking with Edge and Papyrus, and seeing all the neat stuff up there, but life in the ocean continued as it always did. The school’s children were a year closer to adolescence, and Sans could feel his yearly heat returning as it always did.

The knowledge was bittersweet.

Of course, he was eager to feel that skull-numbing pleasure with Red again, especially considering his mate didn’t get heats and had been waiting patiently all year for him. But knowing he would lose another clutch stirred some primal sadness in him.

Everything would be fine. The clutch wouldn’t take; he knew that, and he could prepare himself for it. But, like a good mate, Sans did talk about his worries with Red.

“Even though I’m not expecting anything, it still feels like I’m about to lose something. I don’t know. Is that dumb?”

Red pulled him into a tight hug and nuzzled the top of his head. “S’not dumb, Angel. Not at all.” Sans felt his soul tighten and curled his fingers around Red’s ribs. “If you’re worried, maybe we swap this time?”

It was an interesting proposal, but Sans had a few problems with it.

“Dunno if I’ve got the stamina for that, Red, and I don’t wanna leave you alone in the middle of it. Besides, if you lose yours too… are ya gonna be okay afterwards?”

Sans knew how overprotective and motherly Red could be. He had broken down in tears when Sans lost his clutch. If it was his own clutch instead, Sans was worried that might seriously affect him.

“If I lost my—” Red didn’t have skin, but Sans knew it would have turned white as sand in that moment. The large mer shook his head, eye sockets wide, “T… Fuck, Angel, no. I would not be okay! Are you really fine with doin’ that twice?!”
Sans sighed and cupped his mate’s cheek. “I already knew what was going to happen. It hurt, but I’m okay. I’ll be okay a second time too.”

Red locked eyes with his mate and then delivered a small kiss to his forehead. “Okay, Angel. I’ll be here for you no matter what, got that? I promise.”

Sans blushed and rested his head on Red’s sternum. He traced one of Red’s thick, scarred ribs with his delicate phalanges. “And, just between the two of us, the feeling was worth it.”

The meroctopus purred with pride.

***

Things went a little more smoothly the second time around. Red still remembered exactly how much his mate could take, and Sans didn’t have to teach him anything basic.

That being the case, there was some room in their four-hour window for experimentation. I mean, if they weren’t going to get any children out of this, it might as well be as enjoyable as possible, right?

“Ah ah ah,” Sans chided, digging his phalanges into the sides of Red’s hectocotylus. “No moving around, remember?”

Red let out a keening whine and dragged his claws down his face, watching Sans move his piece around with hurryless patience. “Fuck, Angel, faster,” he begged. “I can’t take it anymore!”

Sans hesitated. “Do you really want me to, Red?”

The meroctopus was gasping, but he tilted his head at the question. “Huh? No. I fucking love this teasing.”

“I can’t tell when you’re being serious and when you’re just saying shit.” The little mer slowly pushed Red’s piece back between his walls, forcing a moan out of the big guy. “Maybe we should have a code word for when we seriously want to stop.”

“L-like what?” Red was pouring sweat.

“Um, something you wouldn’t say when you’re pretending to beg me to stop.”

“We can’t just say stop?”

“You told me to stop half an hour ago when I was biting you, and you didn’t mean it.”

“Oh, pause then.”

Sans started sliding the thing back out and Red clenched his teeth. “Yeah, pause is good. Only say it if you really want me to stop. I won’t take anything else seriously.”

“Oh.” Red reached out down and planted a breathless kiss on Sans’s skull. “So, you mentioned biting.”

“Did you wanna switch back to that?”
“Can we do both?”

Sans pondered. “I mean, I can, but I kinda like this slow teasing stuff; my stamina can handle it.” Sans punctuated his sentence by taking out Red’s piece and slowly dragging his tongue up the tip. His mate shuddered and crushed a fistful of coral into powder.

“You really sure you want me to hurt you again?” Sans traced one of Red’s old scars with his fingertip. “You’re pretty banged up already.”

“Please, Angel? It feels so good.”

“Well, if you’re gonna beg me for it.”

Sans teased Red for literal hours. It served as an intermission, sort of; a break from the intense plowing so the little mer wouldn’t be so utterly raw at the end of things. It was kind of fun watching the big guy whine and moan and melt, but Sans’s patience was running out too after drawing it out for so long.

“Ohh-” Sans backed off from digging his soft blue tongue between Red’s neck vertebrae. “It’s your turn now, big guy.”

Red’s rib cage heaved and he hauled himself into an upright position. Stroking Sans’s chin, he murmured, “What do ya want me to do to ya, Angel?”

“Well, we did my specialty, the slow and lazy stuff,” He put his hands near his entrance and spread it wider. “How about we do your specialty now?”

Red’s specialty, huh? He positioned his tip over the soft opening and gripped his mate by the hips. “D’ya want it to hurt?”

“Nah. But I don’t wanna be able to swim after, either.”

It might have been fun to tease Sans the way he was teased, but if his mate wanted power, Red would give it to him happily.

***

They didn’t go to the surface while Sans was carrying his clutch, but the eggs barely lasted more than a week before the last one shriveled and was reabsorbed into his ecto-flesh. His belly was still round, but there was nothing inside. It was like… he wasn’t good enough to be a mother?

Thoughts like that were foolish, and Sans didn’t let them get to him, but they were still there.

Red was depressed for a similar reason. He was trying not to break down and cry again, but he came real close several times. The rest of the school was being especially delicate with him, but it was like walking on eggshells. Sans struggled to think of a way to cheer him up.

He didn’t have any original ideas, but he had a borrowed one. Sans took a page out of Red’s book and found a couple clams just for him. Finally the big idiot just gave in and cried, and Sans stayed with him, and they ate clams afterwards.

“There, that’s better, right?” Sans patted Red’s skull and kissed his cheek. “You shouldn’t bottle
things up, you big crybaby.”

Red sniffled and pushed a lump of clam meat between his fangs. “I know. But you didn’t cry, and it ain’t about me, so what the hell right do I have to bawl my eyes out?”

Sans stole a piece of meat and earned a chuckle out of his mate. “You live in a school now, Red. Everything’s about everyone. Of course you can cry if you need to.”

The meroctopus lowered his head, sharp fangs drawn into a faint smile. Sans gave him another gentle kiss on his temple.

“Tomorrow, let’s go eat some weird surface food, huh? Have some fun.”

“Okay.”

“I still love you, Red. I’m not gonna stop.”

“Okay. … Me too.”

***

Summer on the surface was simultaneously the best and the worst thing. On the one hand, it was so hot Red had burnt his tentacles on the pavement. The blazing sun had him sweating buckets, and the wind and shade weren’t nearly enough to cool him off.

They almost gave up on visiting until fall, but luckily they made it to Edge and Papyrus’s house first.

Red almost refused to go back to the water after discovering the magic (science, actually) of air conditioning. He did refuse to return to the docks until the sun had set. After Sans healed his burns, he just lied in the middle of the cool tile floor like it was the single best pastime out there.

Sans was glad to not be whined at for laying on the couch. He lazed around happily and rested his head on the armrest, peering at his mate, and they just sort of did nothing together.

“You two are,” Papyrus hesitated, “easy to host? I don’t even have to do anything! The Great Papyrus is always willing to assist if either of you decide you want to do literally anything besides laze around.”

“Nah, just let him rest,” Sans said. “He overheats a lot in the summer. Isn’t supposed to live in such shallow water.”

“And what about you?” The unimpressed look on the land skeleton’s face implied he already knew the answer.

“I really like this couch.”

Summer was a bit easier that year thanks to the blessings of the surface, but it was still a relief when the water began to cool down again.
Edge tapped the sharp tips of his phalanges on the wooden table, his other hand propping up his cheekbone. He was watching his lovey-dovey guests and calculating the passage of time in his head. It had been a full year since his life had been saved by this mer couple, and they had come for a visit every couple of weeks at the minimum.

Something wasn’t adding up, and it kept pricking at his nerves and making him irritable. Edge finally noticed he was scowling when his husband set a hand on his humerus.

“Edge, dear,” Papyrus said in an atypically soft voice, “you look… pissed. What are you puzzling over? Perhaps I, the Great Papyrus, can assist you with it?”

Edge grunted and put in a small effort to smooth over his expression. He straightened his spine and folded his arms over his chest.

“I’m just baffled by how long mermaid pregnancies last,” he asserted. “It has been a full year since I was saved from drowning. That seems unnecessarily demanding on the mother, does it not? Is it because their types are different? It simply escapes me.”

Papyrus’s jaw hung open, and Red guwaffed, laughing so hard he had to wipe magic red tears out of his eye sockets.

Papyrus moved his hand to Edge’s shoulder, and gave him a look so sympathetic it became condescending. “Edge, sweetheart, I don’t believe Sans is pregnant.”

The rough skeleton swiveled his head, eye sockets wide in shock. “What?”

Papyrus made an awkward face, and now both mer skeletons across the table were laughing. “He’s just, erm… big-boned?” the homemaker tried.

Edge blushed fiercely in embarrassment and immediately became defensive to cover it. “Well how was I supposed to know?! They’re always all over each other! And Red is always so protective!”

His complaints devolved into furious grumbling as Papyrus patted him. “I’m so sorry if what my husband said was offensive in any way,” the softer skeleton apologized.

“Nah, I don’t care,” Sans shrugged. “And, uh, Red and I can’t have kids anyway. The eggs never take.”

Papyrus tilted his head at that. “Eggs? Do mer monsters lay eggs?”

It was Sans and Red’s turn to look surprised.

“Land monsters don’t?” Red questioned.

“No,” Papyrus shook his head. “If Edge and I decided we were ready to have children, we would, erm,” he hesitated, an orange blush spreading across his cheekbones, “put our souls in contact and impregnate one of us that way.”

Sans and Red shared a look, and the pudgy mermaid put on a serious face. “Does that work even between different monster types?”

“Yes, it does,” their host nodded.
Sans felt a tremble underneath him and saw Red’s tentacles shaking. He looked up at the big guy’s face and saw fat tears rolling down his cheeks one after the other.

“Oh dear!” Papyrus scrambled to stand up and fetch a box of tissues. “Did I say something wrong? If that’s the case, I’m incredibly sorry!”

Sans shook his head and squeezed Red’s hand, prompting the other to pull him into a hug and cry into his shoulder. “He just… thought there was no way we could have kids. And maybe… it’s possible?”

Sans didn’t know if it was magic, but he swore the air around Papyrus turned pink, and flowers bloomed around him. His face spread into a wide grin.

“I see! Well, it is my absolute pleasure to be the bearer of such excellent news!”

“How does it work?” Sans continued to hold his emotions back and question the land monsters. “Do I have to be in heat? How do we pick who carries the eggs?”

Edge had finally recovered and joined back into the conversation. “There won’t be any eggs; you will have exactly one child with each conception. It is easier during a heat, but possible as long as you have enough magic to spare.” He waved his hand. “The rest is all intention, and it is mostly instinctual. You should face no real difficulties.”

Sans felt Red purring intensely and nuzzling his head. He wasn’t even attempting to hide how desperate he was to make use of this information.

“Please? Angel, please? Can we go home? Now?”

When Red nipped at Sans’s shoulder, the smaller mer jumped and finally gave in.

“Alright, already! Jeez. I wanted to lay on the couch a little after lunch, you know?”

“I swear, Angel, if this works, I will get you a waterproof couch and carry it to the den.”

He didn’t leave any room for arguing, not that Sans had any inclination to say no.

Chapter End Notes

Lookit that title. Aren’t I clever? XP
Imma just pat my own back. No need to do it for me.
Sans lets Red carry him on the way back to the den, and in the meantime, the mermaid used their phone to look up everything he could about how land monsters had children.

If mer monsters really could reproduce this way, Sans thought he understood why they had forgotten about it: it was because of the small clutch size. The ocean was a dangerous place, and many children died before they were past infancy. In order to keep their populations from dying out, it was necessary to produce many children at once. Their ecto-biology was equipped to do that, but this land monster ritual was not.

According to the internet, they would know immediately if they managed to conceive.

When they returned to the den, Red immediately went back out to gather food from his traps and started stockpiling it in his room. Meanwhile, Sans explained what was going on to the others.

“Sans! That is wonderful news!” Toriel covered her mouth with a paw and exclaimed.

“Indeed, you certainly have our well-wishes,” Asgore beamed.

Undyne and Alphys were both blushing at the revelation. The fish mermaid asked him in an unusually timid voice, “Hey, let us know if, uh, if that works, okay?” She looked down and rubbed the back of her head. “Alph and I might give it a shot later.”

Red finished his preparations and practically dragged Sans to his room, which made the other adults all chuckle. Once inside, he looked at his mate with a modicum of hesitation.

“So who’s gonna carry the kid?”

“I think it’s pretty obviously going to be me,” Sans replied. “We don’t know for sure if this will work, and I can take it if it doesn’t. Besides,” he chuckled a little more sadly than he meant to,
“after two failed clutches, I deserve a kid, right?”

Red nodded to that. “Yeah, you deserve that.” He frowned, “but I want one too, so we do me next, okay?”

“Sure, Red.”

The act itself was fairly simple. Sans and Red both took out their souls and brought them in contact. While it seemed like “wishing for Sans to get pregnant” would accomplish absolutely nothing, souls responded deeply to a person’s intentions, so a few minutes of that was all it took.

It was a simple process. Fulfilling, but not enjoyable the way regular sex was. It was just like… using a special kind of magic together: one they’d always known how to do without realizing they did. And boy was Edge right about it taking a lot of magic.

Red was clearly exhausted. He looked at his mate with dark red circles under his eye sockets, “Well? Did it…? Are you…?”

Sans glanced down at his ecto-belly. He’d definitely lost a few pounds doing that, and he felt about as tired as Red looked. Besides that, physically, there were no obvious changes, but he looked up at his mate and smiled blissfully.

“Yeah.” His soul just knew it had worked.

Red laughed with joy and held Sans up, showering kisses all over him and grinning like a cheshire. Suddenly starved for magic, they ate up all the food Red had stored away for them and fell asleep.

When they woke up, Red immediately demanded a kid of his own. Sans was pretty spent after yesterday, but he still had some extra padding around his middle. Should be enough magic for one more kid.

“Sure, big guy. Why don’t you grab some food for us first? I’m just gonna sleep in a little more.”

Red vanished and returned with a fucking bounty of oysters (celebration food for sure), and they put their souls in contact one more time

For the first time since two summers ago, Sans had a flat belly. But this time, there was something inside. And something inside of Red, too.

***

Red swam into deep, dark water. There was a massive ship down here that he had discovered in the past. Hopefully, the thing he was looking for was still there. Within the belly of the ship was a wooden chest full of gold coins. The meroctopus grabbed as many as he could carry and swam to the surface where Edge and Papyrus lived.

They were expecting him, so they met him at the docks.
The first thing Edge said when he saw the meroctopus surface was, “What the hell do you mean you want to buy a couch?”

Red replied by piling the coins up on the dock. “It means I wanna buy a couch. One that we can have underwater. For Sans.”

Edge looked shocked to see actual money in the mer monster’s possession and picked up a coin to examine.

“I’m sure they make waterproof couches,” Papyrus mused. “We’ll have to order it. It might take a week or two to arrive. Can we use that money, Edge?”

The rougher skeleton looked up and nodded. “Yes. It’s old, but gold is gold. The bank will take it. However, I believe we should purchase the couch with our own electronic currency to expedite the process, and simply deposit this.” He looked down at Red’s face poking halfway out of the water. “Would you like us to return the change?”

“You can keep it. Might want ya to buy other things for us in the future.”

With the business out of the way, Edge bent down to collect the coins into a bag, and Papyrus beamed down at Red.

“Before you left three days ago, you said you would get Sans a couch if you managed to conceive. Since you’re here buying a couch, does that mean you were successful?”

“Yeah.”

Red didn’t have a lot of words, but his sharp teeth were set in a wide grin, and his cheeks were rosy.

“That is such wonderful news! Since Sans stayed at home, I assume he’s carrying the child?”

“We’re both gonna have one.”

Edge’s head snapped up. “Twice in a row? That must have been an immense magical expenditure. Is the little one alright?”

“He’s okay, but he’s tired, and a little too skinny. Imma take care of him.”

“You’d better,” Edge snorted, then glanced at Red with narrow eye sockets. “And take care of yourself too. You’re pregnant as well, after all.”

“Mm. Yeah, but I feel fine.”

Red sunk a little further under the water. “If that’s it, I’m gonna go. Text me when I can come pick up the couch.”

***

Red was having pregnancy cravings. Unfortunately, he wanted to eat the kind of half-rotted garbage everyone hated him eating. That, and bones and skins, and sweet surface foods, for some reason.
Being pregnant hadn’t gotten in the way of his hunting at all. He was such a big guy that you couldn’t even see the baby bump if you were looking for it.

Sans found *his* baby demanding every ounce of magic he could spare, and it left him exhausted. He made good use of the couch Red got for him and took plenty of naps. Red made sure Sans got outside once each day for a little exercise and some time sleeping in the sun. He also made sure Sans had enough to eat between naps, probably more than enough, actually. The way the meroctopus was doting, you’d think Sans was the only one carrying a child.

“Red, dear, please do not push yourself so much,” Toriel tried once to get him to calm down and relax at the den.

“For the third fucking time, I feel fine!”

Apparently, there was a big difference between pregnant mermaids and meroctopuses. Mermaids lived in a school and could allow themselves to be taken care of. Red was designed to live alone and raise children alone. He felt stronger and more alert than he ever had in his life.

And he was a *lot* more irritable.

The number of people Red was allowed to be around at a time was reduced to two. He spent every night in his safe room, with or without Sans, and he ate his meals with some distance from the rest of the school. His instincts were going wild, and everything besides his mate looked like a threat to his baby. Hell—sometimes even Sans looked like a threat, but Red quickly shook himself out of it whenever he found himself thinking like that.

Meroctopus mothers had been known to kill their mates to reduce the competition for their children. He *would not* let himself become an example of that.

All in all, when he wasn’t hunting or doting on Sans, Red was safely isolating himself in his dark, lonely room.

While the two skeleton mer were out of sorts, Toriel had possession of their phone, and she regularly texted updates to Edge and Papyrus. As the land monsters who taught them how monsters could breed across types, they had a right to know how it was going.

They were very understanding when the couple didn’t come up to visit as often. Red shouldn’t be anywhere near humans while he was irritable, and Sans didn’t have the energy. Essentially the only time they stopped by was when one of them was craving surface foods, and they didn’t leave the water. Humans, locals *and* tourists, were eager to buy food for them and just throw it into the sea. As long as they could take pictures.

***

Red sat on the floor next to the couch, purring contentedly while he rubbed Sans’s belly. Two weeks ago, they had seen the infant soul inside glow for the first time. Now, you could faintly see the outline of a tiny mermaid curled up within the ecto-flesh.

Red’s baby could be seen too, but only when he made his ecto-flesh glow. They were both so small.
While he was stroking with one hand, Red’s other hand was skinning a fish and stripping off the meat for Sans to eat. The little mer looked at the food and grimaced.

“Red, I feel sick. I don’t want to eat anything.”

The meroctopus just raised an eyebrow and channeled green magic through the phalanges he was stroking with. Sans sighed at the comfortable sensation and his nausea faded, then he accepted some food.

“What ya meant to say was, “Red, darling, I feel sick. Please heal me.””

Sans chuckled. “I don’t want you to use too much magic on me. Your baby needs it too.”

Red gave Sans a little kiss on the forehead. “I’ll be fine, Angel. In case ya didn’t notice, I’m handling this really fucking well,” he coughed slightly, “physically.”

Red started skinning another fish. “Anyways, you’re sleepin’ so much ‘cause you don’t have enough energy. Ya gotta eat more, Angel.”

“I kinda doubt that’s the problem at this point, but fine.”

“Imma take you outside after this, okay?”

Sans stretched out on the couch and yawned. “Sure, okay.”

***

It had been nearly four months since Red and Sans got each other pregnant. Red had been isolated in his room for almost a week now, only coming out stealthily at night to hunt for food. Sans knew he was coming out because he would wake up each day with a pile of food waiting beside his couch.

The meroctopus wasn’t just being antisocial this time. There had been an… incident.

Undyne had been messing around in one of the community rooms, loud and enthusiastic as always, and it had grated on Red’s already frayed nerves. They had gotten into a shouting match. Naturally, Undyne didn’t want to get into a fight with an expecting mother, but Red could get really damn crass when he was pissed, and he got her just as riled up as he was.

When she stuck her finger in his face to return the favor, he fucking bit it off.

Luckily, he spat it out, and Toriel was able to reattach it with green magic, but now that he’d calmed down, he didn’t know how to face her and apologize.

Sans felt bad about it. Helping Red diffuse social situations was supposed to be his job, but he hadn’t woken up until the fighting was too far along to stop. He wanted to help Red apologize to Undyne, but the big guy was avoiding *everyone* after having hurt somebody in the school.

He probably just didn’t want to do it again.

It wasn’t like he hadn’t put in any effort in his own way. Undyne had woken up one day to a nice fat tuna netted alive and fresh outside her room, and one guess as to who may have left it.
Sans sighed and sat himself up on the couch. Taking a few days to cool off was fine, but a week was excessive. He needed to go and let Red know that nobody was holding anything against him.

He pushed off the couch and wobbled a little in the water, still feeling tired and a little weak after lazing around so much for months on end. He put a hand protectively over his baby bump and meandered toward Red’s room.

The little mer pressed his phalanges into the ecto-flesh and felt the little soul inside pulse in response. It made him smile. As much as it was draining him, his baby was strong and healthy.

Sans noted that the ecto-flesh was a little softer than it needed to be if it was just working as a womb. He chuckled and shook his head fondly.

*Even you can’t drain my magic as fast as Red can feed me, huh, kid?*

Sans reached Red’s room and called out to his mate.

“Hey, big guy, it’s me. Can I come in?”

There was a half-hearted growl from inside. “You’d better fucking not, Angel.”

Sans shrugged and leaned against the outside wall, sliding down onto the loose sand. “Alright, I’ll just rest out here then.”

A minute passed and Red’s scarred-up face peeked out. His sharp red eyelights spotted his mate and he scowled. “On the fucking floor, Sans? Are you serious? Get the fuck in here!”

Red picked Sans up off the floor and whisked him inside, making a comfortable place for him on his tentacles. Sans gave in to the loving touches and petting that automatically followed and took note of how touch-starved Red was acting.

“I came,” he let out a yawn, “to let you know Undyne’s not mad at you anymore.”

Red’s petting abruptly stopped, and he folded his arms tight across his chest. It wasn’t an aggressive stance, it just looked like he was trying to keep his himself from touching anything.

“Yeah, I don’t buy that. And you really shouldn’t be in here.”

“It’s true,” he insisted and winked. “She really liked that fish you got her.”

Red lowered his brows. “Sans, I bit her goddamn finger off. There ain’t no apologizing for that, and a fucking fish sure ain’t gonna do it.”

“Her finger is fine,” Sans waved. “Your teeth are nice and sharp, so the cut was clean. Tori stuck it back on no problem.”

“For real?” Red looked beyond relieved to hear the news.

“Yeah, and everybody knows you feel terrible about doing it, so nobody’s mad. I’ll help you apologize to Undyne in person, but it’s totally safe to come out of your room now.”

Red’s eyelights glittered hopefully, but he crushed that expression and looked away from Sans’s encouraging smile.

“Nope. I’m just gonna stay in here.”
“Red,” he pleaded.

“No, Sans! I don’t wanna fuckin’ hurt nobody else!” His eyes went wide and he hid his face in his hands. “And now I’m fuckin’ yellin’ at you. Dammit, I’m sorry, Angel.”

Sans put a hand on Red’s forearm. “Hey, it’s okay, Red. It’s not your fault if you’re a little moody lately.”

Red rubbed at his eye sockets and sighed. “It’s been pretty fucking bad these past couple of days. I seriously don’t think it’s safe for me to go out there.”

The little mer let that information sink in and moved his delicate phalanges down to Red’s abdomen. There was a baby bump there now, but he could just barely feel it under the thick ecto-flesh.

“Can I look at the baby, Red?”

“Yeah, sure.”

Red made his tentacles light up, and Sans looked at the dark outline of a tiny meroctopus. In response to Red’s glowing, it lit up its own ecto-flesh a dusty orange color. Both of them looked at that sight in awe.

“Never did that before,” Red mentioned.

Sans was shocked. “It has its own magic color already.”

“Uh, yeah? ‘S that a big deal?”

“According to what I read online, that means it’s going to be born soon. But it hasn’t been half as long as they said it would take!”

Red’s eyes went wide and he stared down at his belly in shock. Realization dawned on his face. “It’s about how long it would take for me to lay my eggs if I was havin’ any.” He looked suddenly panicked. “But they’re s’posed to grow in the eggs outside of me for another couple of months! This thing ain’t in an egg, Sans!”

“Calm down, Red! I’m sure it’s going to be fine.” Sans forced himself to calm down as well. “It already has a magic color. It can survive being born in just four months if it’s fully developed. Everything’s going to be fine.”

The fact that Red would be giving birth soon explained his worsened mood swings lately. Sans went and explained everything to the others, and they started preparing as best they knew how. However, when Red went into labor two days later, he refused to let anyone but Sans be present.

“Red, I wanna be here, but Alphys and Tori are better at deliveries than I am. They can help you more.”

“Too fuck with that,” he spat, gripping his mate’s hand until Sans almost cried out in pain. “I don’t need anybody’s fucking help. You just sit there and watch our first perfect fucking baby doll be born.”

Red legitimately did the delivery entirely on his own. Aside from the sweat pooling off of him, he
made it look goddamn easy. He never once cried out when the contractions hit him. When the baby got the hint and started to swim out, clawing at Red’s walls to find the exit, the giant mer only gritted his teeth.

The baby found its way out and started to swim aimlessly, but Red snatched it out of the water and held it close, licking off the sticky liquid magic it was covered in. When he was done cleaning it, the baby went to sleep in his hands.

Red and Sans got their first good look at their child.

It was a meroctopus like Red, with dusty orange ecto-flesh. It had a surprisingly lanky bone structure, considering its parents were both stocky, but its small eye sockets and flat teeth were *so* cute.

“It’s beautiful,” Sans grinned and chuckled. “You’re really fucking tough Red, doing that on your own.”

“That’s just how we do it,” he shrugged, stroking the side of his baby’s face with the back of one of his claws. “It’s so small n’ soft-looking. I think it takes after you, Angel.”

They admired their first child in silence for a moment, then Red spoke up again. “I got to carry it, so you should name it.”

“You sure, Red?”

“Yeah. And I’ll name the ones that come outta you.”

“Alright, well, let me think.”

While the pregnant mermaid was pondering it, the baby stretched in its sleep, its long tentacles uncurling down to their tiny tips before winding up again.

“How about Stretch?”

“Heh. Kinda dumb, but I like it.”

Chapter End Notes

And, there we have it! Their first kid is UnderSwap Papyrus! A very good, easy first child to have~
Baby Stretch

Chapter Summary

*In which Stretch does his thing and develops a personality... Also Red talks Sans into doing something for him.

Chapter Notes

Oh, look. More art~

**Sunbathing** by me

**Kustard-mer** by addicted-to-the-fic (Not necessarily fanart for this fic, but still a lovely meroctopus Red and mermaid Sans that she drew for me.)

Comments always welcome!

Toriel held up the waterproof cellphone and let her thumb hover over the screen.

“Try to keep him still, Red. I want to send a good picture.”

Red was sitting on the floor next to the couch, and Sans was leaning against the armrest beside him. Stretch refused to hold still in his mother’s arms. The presence of someone besides his parents was making him nervous; he kept trying to hide his face behind his tentacles and crawl into Red’s rib cage.

Red untangled Stretch’s limbs from his head as delicately as he could, sighing when they wound around his finger instead. “Just take the picture already. You can get a better one when he’s napping.”

Toriel chuckled and nodded. “Alright, fine. Smile, everyone.”

She pawed the button, and Sans immediately slid into a more comfortable position. “Bring it over, Tori. I wanna see.”

“Give me just a moment.” She pulled up the photos app and swam closer, taking a seat next to Sans on the couch.


“Lemme see.” Red shoved his face in to take a look and took the chance to nuzzle his mate while he was at it. “Mm, yeah, ya do. Ya look even better in person though.”

Red avoided looking at himself in the picture, since he didn’t really like what he saw, but Sans looked as soft and angelic as ever. He was too perfect. Red was the luckiest mer in the ocean to have met him.
“I think you both look dashing,” Toriel giggled brightly.

They got a reply back almost immediately.

Papyrus

That’s Stretch?! He is so tiny! I cannot imagine Red ever having been that small and cute!

Edge

It doesn’t look like his early birth did any damage. You two look terrible, though. Get some rest.

Papyrus

Edge also agrees that your baby looks adorable. He is just too shy to say so! And you look just fine for a couple of new mothers! (But do please get some rest.)

Toriel smiled, then looked a little sad. “Red, will your child stay with us long? Will he want to leave to live on his own?”

Red was startled by the question. “Um, I mean, I’m living in a school now, so it’s not impossible for a meroctopus to live like this. I think if he’s raised here, he’ll adapt to it.”

“What if he does want to leave?”

Red frowned and cradled the now-sleeping Stretch in rough claws that were bigger than his whole body. “Until he’s old enough to mate, I’m not gonna let him. I know how bad it can get out there.”

Toriel took in Red and his excessively scarred bones. Someone so big and powerful was this damaged; she wouldn’t take his words of warning lightly. There were no marks to speak of on his ecto-flesh, but Toriel knew that a meroctopus could recover even if a few of their tentacles were torn off. There was simply no telling how much damage he may or may not have sustained down there.

She noticed that Sans had fallen asleep beside her and smiled softly. “Goodness gracious. That child really is taking it out of him.”

Red looked down at his mate fondly and set their firstborn in his arms. Seeing his two most precious people napping together, his soul felt like it might tear itself in half.

“I don’t deserve them,” he whispered, feeling small red tears well up and get carried off on the current.

“Oh, my dear,” she reached up and gave the giant mer a fuzzy pat on the shoulder. “That is not true. I cannot think of anyone else who would take such good care of our little lazybones. You do realize by now how good he is at easing others into conversations? We have interacted with other schools in the past. He has met many many potential mates, but you are the only one who truly loved him back. You decided to stay with him and care for him even if you could not have children.
together. I believe you deserve every good thing that you now have.”

Red rubbed his eye sockets and wrestled his emotions back under control. He didn’t trust Stretch not to wander off while he was out hunting and Sans was sleeping, so he scooped the little guy up and dropped him past his clavicle and into his ribcage. The little guy landed on the surface of Red’s warm ecto-flesh and splayed out into the most adorable defenseless napping position ever.

“I’m going out. Be back later with food.”

Toriel’s eyes went wide and she grabbed Red’s wrist without thinking. “Red, dear, it has only been a day! You should rest more before doing such dangerous things!”

He stared down at her and blinked. “Yeah, uh, never gonna happen.”

Literally, sharks and mermaids were Red’s worst matchups, and he knew how the last few encounters had turned out. Red wasn’t exactly proud of how rough and scary he looked, but he was proud of his practical ability; the skill and strength he gained in the process of getting as beat-up as he was. What could hurt him in these shallow waters? He was the most dangerous thing up here, and there was nowhere safer for Stretch to be than curled up napping in his ribcage.

Besides, he had a very pregnant mate, a school, and a newborn baby to feed. Not to mention his own fat ass. How could he just sit around and “rest”?

“I’ll be back soon, Tori.”

***

At two weeks old, Stretch discovered his love of small spaces. The empty hole in the stone he’d found to hide in was too small for anyone in the school to swim inside and retrieve him, so it was especially hilarious watching the massive Red claw and bite at the opening.

“Stretch, baby doll, I swear, if you don’t come outta there right now, I’m gonna get angry.”

Stretch giggled and shot back a playful ‘no,’ then he opened his jaw wide and yawned.

“Oh no you don’t! Stretch, don’t you dare fall asleep in there!” Red forced one of his tentacles into the hole. They were truly pliable limbs, and he was able to fit almost all of it inside, stroking the tip of one of Stretch’s tentacles at the back, but he still couldn’t reach.

“Baby doll, I’m getting mad!” He heard the faint sound of snoring from within the hole. “You have until the count of three! One! Two!” Red glared furiously. “Three!”

Stretch startled awake as his soul was grabbed with blue magic and he was dragged out of the hole by force. He found himself in Red’s claws, looking up at the enraged face of a giant, scarred-up meroctopus. He automatically magicked up a cloud of black ink, which, of course, served no purpose other than to display his terror.

“M’not happy, Stretch.”

The tiny meroctopus curled in on himself. “M’sorry, mommy.”

“You had no idea what could have been in there! You could have gotten hurt! I was really fucking
worried when I couldn’t see you!"

Sans swam up beside his mate, one hand on his baby bump, the other on Red’s arm. “Hey, that’s enough, okay, Red? He said he was sorry. You’re just scaring him now.”

Red growled and handed their baby to Sans. “Both of you watch this, okay?”

Stretch clung to his dad and they both watched with nervous curiosity. Red climbed on top of the rock outcropping and wrapped his tentacles around it. In a fucking terrifying show of force, he crushed the whole thing into little chunks. A few eel-like creatures, crabs, starfish, and guppies fled from the remains.

“Sea snakes and crabs, huh? There’s a lost limb and some deadly fucking venom for ya.” He fished through the stone chunks and found one with some squishy lumps stuck to one side. “And these are parasite eggs. Do you know how bad getting one of these inside you hurts? I do. Y’ever lose a limb, baby doll? ‘Cause I have. How about snake bites?! Now that nearly killed me!”

Red sighed and crawled closer to a shell-shocked Sans and Stretch, and he gave his baby a gentle stroke on the cheek with the tip of his claw.

“Look, Stretch, I’m sorry I yelled at you. It’s just that I had to learn a lot of dangerous shit on my own, so when I tell you not to do something, you should listen to me. I know what I’m fucking talking about.”

The infant mer, still a little shy of being the size of one of Red’s hands, trembled and rubbed at his eye sockets.

“I jus’ wanted to go in da hole,” he sobbed.

Red brought his face down low enough to nuzzle the tiny creature. He purred in a deep rumble, and it helped the baby calm down.

“I know. I know. S’okay, I get it. You’re right, holes can be comfy, safe places, but they can be dangerous too. Until you can tell the difference, I want you to stay out of them, okay?”

Sans hummed and bounced Stretch in his arms. “How about we make you your own personal hole at home, huh, kiddo? Would that make you happy?”

Stretch looked up at his dad with sparkling eyelight and nodded.

“Alright, good.” Sans stroked his ecto-belly and felt his baby’s soul pulse strongly. He smiled up at his mate with deep shadows under his eye sockets. “I think I’ve had enough moving and excitement for today. Can we go back now?”

“Alright, Angel.” The anger and worry previously in Red’s voice was nowhere to be found now. He scooped his mate up into his arms. Sans kept a hold on Stretch, who was starting to doze. Red brought all three of them back to the den and laid his two most precious people down on the couch for a nap.

***
Stretch was one month old, and he had grown so much during that time. He was easily triple the size he was when he was born (a little bigger than Red’s hand), and he was growing more independent by the day.

Stretch still napped a lot, and he was rarely ever adventurous, so he didn’t require much effort on Sans and Red’s part. He occasionally showed antisocial qualities like Red, but it was mostly in the form of him going somewhere isolated to nap, as opposed to sharing the couch with Sans. He was far better at conversations than his mother, and nowhere near as aggressive.

Between that and the natural laziness, Red insisted that Stretch simply took after Sans. And Red loved him for that. He loved their firstborn with all his soul.

But for a creature that was expected to lay hundreds of eggs, some instinct inside of him was vehemently opposed to bearing a child singular.

He tried to suppress that feeling, but Red could tell he was getting more irritable because of it. He gave in and shook Sans out of a nap, peering at his mate with sharp crimson eyelight.

“I want another one.”


“Another kid.”

The little mer raised a brow and set his hand over his baby bump. “It’s on the way, big guy.”

“No, I want another one.”

Sans hesitated and frowned. “Are you sure? Your mood swings got pretty bad last time.”

“I swear I’ll be careful. I won’t go anywhere near anybody else when I’m pissy.”

“Can it wait until mine is born?”

“I mean, yeah, but I really want it now, Sans. My instincts are going stir crazy ‘cause there aren’t enough people who need me to take care of them! You and Stretch just sleep all day, and the others can handle themselves; I’ve got all this energy and no one to spend it on. I mean, I’m not gonna ask you to give me an entire clutch of eight hundred, but one more is fine, right?”

Sans’s child’s soul pulsed, and he stroked the soft ecto-flesh. “Well, you have a point there. And since the overflow from your “instincts” has been going to my waistline, I have enough magic to spare.” Sans sighed and hauled himself into a sitting position. “Alright, fine. I was thinking of losing a few pounds anyway.”

So they went to Red’s room and didn’t come out again until the next day.

Sans had to admit, it felt nice having a little less weight on his front. His baby was growing a lot bigger than any single egg in a clutch would, and Sans wasn’t a very large mer himself. He couldn’t accommodate much more than this.

“You’ll be satisfied after this, right?” Sans checked.

“Yeah.”

“Alphys and Undyne are going to have one during their next heat. We’ll have more children than adults in the school after that. We really can’t have any more for a while, Red.”
Stretch was only three months old, but he was already almost as big as the other children in the school. It was about fifty percent a result of his meroctopus biology, and fifty percent Red’s constant doting. What was more surprising to the mermaids in the school was how quickly he matured in a mental sense. Aside from his lazy habits, he typically acted as mature as Chara or Frisk. All four kids had become pretty good friends, actually.

“You’re really lucky, Stretch,” Chara complained. “Our mom never spoils us. I bet you could ask Red to get anything for you, even surface stuff.”

“But Chara, what about the pies mom makes on our birthdays? You love snail pie!” Asriel reminded them.

“I mean, yeah, I do, but compare that to Red, Azzy.”

“Mm, well I guess you’re right.”

Frisk asked Stretch if Red was a good mother.

“Yeah, he is;” the meroctopus smiled. “And you’re probably right. I bet I could ask him for just about anything I want, but I don’t really want anything that badly.” His expression turned dark.

“But have you ever seen my mom mad? He’s really scary.”

“Yeah, ours too,” Asriel confessed.

“He’s been like that a lot lately,” Stretch mentioned. “Dad says it’s because he’s pregnant, and he hides so much because he doesn’t want to be mean to us. I don’t really get it because dad’s pregnant too, and he isn’t mean at all.”

“They told me Red’s so mad because he’s a meroctopus,” Chara said. “You guys are different, Stretch, but they usually live all alone in the deep ocean, surrounded by huge, scary predators. In other words, you’re mom’s pissed as hell so he can beat up sharks and shit whenever he needs to to protect his kids.”

Stretch folded his arms and stared up at the den’s ceiling. “I guess I can imagine that. Mom looks like a huge, scary predator you’d find in the deep ocean.” He tilted his skull and looked at the red-eyed mermaid for answers. “How did we end up living here if we’re supposed to be down there?”

Chara smiled tauntingly. “Because Sansy made your mom fall in love with him~”

Stretch sighed out a ‘yeah,’ and changed the subject. “So you started talking about this because you wanted me to ask my mom to go get some sweets from the surface for us, right?”

“Milk chocolate or dark chocolate, if you don’t mind,” they grinned.

Stretch shrugged. “I guess I could go for some lollipops.”
“Oh, uh, I don’t really need anything,” Azriel waved his paws.

Frisk watched him and then asked Stretch to ask for a bisicle. They then winked at Azriel and mentioned that they only needed half.

Stretch smirked. “Alright, I’ll ask him.” Swimming away, he chuckled, “You guys are hilarious.”
Red had gone to the surface to pick up some food Sans was craving and sweets for Stretch and the kids. When he returned from the four-hour round trip, something felt wrong with the water. It tasted a little funny, and Red noticed some fish that were just kind of… sleeping, floating helplessly on the current.

Suddenly worried, he hurried inside. The strange taste was stronger here, and he found the members of his school unconscious. All but Asgore, who was barely holding on.

“Hey, Asgore, what the hell is going on?!” Red shook him and noticed that his own head felt the slightest bit fuzzy.

“Surface-dwellers,” Asgore struggled to make coherent words, “took Sans.”

Red’s eyelights burned with rage. “They did what?! What about everyone else? What about Stretch?!”

“Toriel... hid the children. They didn’t even look... once they had Sans.” The large goat mermaid gripped Red weakly. “Red, hurry... before you fall asleep too.”

“Where did they take Sans?!”

Asgore shook his head and fell unconscious, causing Red to shout out profanities. He fled the den before the tainted water could put him under and swam to the surface. He looked in all directions, but there was no sign of a ship. Cursing again, he dove back under and swam as fast as he could.

A little under two hours later, he found himself at the docks and hauled himself out of the water. Moving on land wasn’t the easiest thing, but Red found a way to run with the mood he was in. A few humans tried to get closer to offer him food or take his picture, but he snarled and practically ran them over. He was angry enough that he might have just killed them if he wasn’t pressed for time.
Red found Edge and Papyrus’s house and banged on the door hard enough that it cracked. He heard angry shouting from inside, but couldn’t and didn’t care to make it out. A very pissed-looking Edge threw open the door and snapped in his face.

“Who the hell do you think— Wait, Red?! How dare you—”

“They took Sans!”

“W-what? Who took Sans?”

“Humans! I dunno! When I got back, everyone was drugged asleep and Sans was gone! Help. Me. Find him. NOW!”

Edge’s face went dark and Papyrus peeked around the corner.

“Oh, Red is back so soon?”

“Honey, we’re going out. Wrap my dinner up for me.”

“O-oh. Alright. Is everything fine?”

The guardsman snorted and threw a bright red scarf around his shoulders. “Not yet, but it will be.”

Edge started trotting down the street as fast as Red could keep up with him. “Why didn’t you call me as soon as you found out?”

“I dunno! I don’t have the phone!”

“Does Sans have it?”

“Maybe? Probably. Yeah, I think he said he was gonna play with some apps while I was out. Why?”

“If he has the phone on him, we can track its location to find him.”

Edge threw open the door to the guard room and stomped inside, an assistant startled and dropped some papers, and they nearly got their hand impaled by the heels of Edge’s boots trying to pick them back up.

Even after magicking up three kids and shrinking somewhat, Red still couldn’t fit inside without damaging the door frame, but he didn’t give a fuck if it got broken. The assistant fled before they could be crushed by the furious meroctopus.

Red found Edge messing with a computer. The land skeleton let out a vicious laugh.

“Nyeh heh! The device is inactive but still moving. They must have thought it would stop transmitting if they broke it a bit. Good they didn’t throw it overboard.”

“Where is he?!”

“One hundred seventy miles southwest of here. Take this with you.” Edge handed him his own phone, which was also thoroughly waterproofed. “They will no doubt keep moving as you pursue them. I will track both of your positions and keep you updated. I would take you by ship, but you can swim faster on your own.”

Red took the phone gently, fire in his eyes. “Thank you.”
“Tell me the name of the ship when you find it. I’ll need to apprehend the crew.”

“There won’t be any left,” Red growled, turning back outside.

Edge shook his head and pinched the top of his nasal ridge. “I didn’t hear that.” He glared at the assistant cowering in the corner of the room. “Neither did you. Understand?”

“Y-yes, sir—C-captain Edge!”

When Red caught up to the ship, his fear and fury amplified tenfold. Sans was on that ship. Sans was on that ship! Sans was on that ship!

He swam as fast as he could and shot out of the water, catching the sides of the vessel with his suckers and climbing the rest of the way up.

A crewman rounded the corner to do his usual duties and spotted Red. His face immediately went pale, and he moved to call for help, but Red was faster. With his first move, he shot out a tentacle and grabbed the puny human’s neck. With his next move, he tightened his grip. The human’s feeble bones snapped like seashells. His body crumpled to the floor, and Red marched on in search of his mate.

Not on this side of the boat. Snap. Not this side either. Crunch. Where the fuck was he?!

Desperate now, Red didn’t kill the next human he saw. When he grabbed the creature’s neck, he held him close and snarled. “Where the fuck did you take my mate, human?”

The man gasped and pointed to a door leading further into the vessel. Red glanced at it, killed the fucker, and pried the locked door off its hinges. Inside, a real boss-looking sailor had Sans’s wrists bound above his head and was examining his mate—for what, Red didn’t care.

Before the human could draw his weapon, Red grabbed him and smashed his head into the steel wall, scattering his worthless fucking brains.

Unable to wipe the rage off his face, Red just made sure not to look his mate in the eyes. He was glaring at the bindings, and the floorboards, not at Sans. Never at Sans.

But fuck, he was still mad.

With a deft flick of his claws, Red broke the cloth bindings around Sans’s wrists and pulled the gag out of his mouth. Sans looked at him with eye sockets full of tears, crying for the first time since Red had met him.

“Red, oh thank stars.”

Sans reached up weakly, and Red pulled him into a gentle carry, stroking the back of his skull reassuringly.

“Please take me home,” the little mer sobbed, his delicate phalanges clutching Red’s ribs.

“Sure, Angel.” Red tried and failed to keep his voice from coming out as a growl. “I will. Just gimme a minute to clean up here first, alright?”

Red set his mate back on the bed gently and exited the room, shoving the discarded steel door back into its place in a way that warped it so it was impossible to open with a human’s strength. With
Sans safely secured, Red did his rounds, heartlessly killing every creature he came across. He let himself get worked up for a few of them, being excessively brutal about it.

He couldn’t help it. He was so fucking mad, and if he didn’t let it out on somebody, there was a chance it could come back to hurt his Angel. That couldn’t happen.

Red didn’t take long, and he was slightly calmer when he returned to Sans’s room. “Angel? It’s me. I’m comin’ in.” He politely called first before tearing away the steel door. Sans was curled up on the bed, sobbing, and he shot his mate a halfhearted glare.

“You left me in a room with a dead human.”

Red was startled by the complaint, but it was kind of gross when he thought about it. “Sorry, Angel. I shoulda gotten you a clean room to wait in.” He held out a hand. “Hey, I finished up outside. You ready to head home?”

Sans nodded and let himself be picked up. Red remembered to quickly text Edge the name of the ship, and then he jumped back into the water.

Sans continued to sob quietly most of the way back, and Red found his remaining rage slowly fading. He killed all the fuckers who took his Angel, and Sans was alive and safe.

“How did you find me?” Sans murmured.

“The drugs hadn’t knocked Asgore out yet when I got back. He’s a big guy, y’know? All he could tell me was that ya were kidnapped, so I went to the surface to get help from Edge. He had the idea to track your phone.”

“But they broke it.”

“It still worked.”

“Huh.” Sans sniffled. “No wonder it took you so long, if you did all that.”

“Did they do anything to you, Angel?”

“Not yet. I only woke up a few minutes ago, and I guess they were waiting for that.” His expression broke down, and soon he was crying into Red’s ribcage. “I was so scared! I was afraid fighting back with magic would hurt the baby, or that they would hurt the baby. They wanted it, Red! They said they saw the photos people have been posting of us online, and they wanted to sell my baby to some surface-dweller!”

Red felt his rage quickly boiling up again and he tried to channel it into his swim speed.

“Angel, look at me.” Sans sniffled and raised his chin a fraction. “You’re safe, okay? I’m never gonna let shit like this happen again. So please, keep quiet until we get home? I’m in a real bad mood, and I don’t wanna take it out on you by accident.”

Sans looked hurt, but he understood that Red wasn’t the most emotionally stable monster—especially when he was pregnant. So, even though he really needed to share his feelings and seek comfort, he kept quiet.

Red brought him home, and the water had cleared out. The others had woken up around half an hour ago and were confused and angry. Red left Sans with them for the whole group to work through their feelings together, and he swam back to his old cave. The cold, dark, and heavy water
was good for his nerves. He hated to be away from Sans right after almost losing him, but Red knew he was the biggest threat to his mate’s safety right now. He had to be able to control himself before he could be any help to anybody.

Shit, this was all his fault. If the poachers knew Sans was pregnant from photos, they should have also known Red was his mate. They had intentionally waited for him to leave the den for a while before attacking it. He should’ve taken Sans with him! Or, or something!

Red would realize once he calmed down that there was nothing he could have done differently. He couldn’t stay with Sans in the den all the time, and Sans couldn’t accompany him on dangerous hunts while he was so far along in his pregnancy. But even if it was unavoidable, Red was still beyond furious.

*If anything EVER happens to my Angel again, I’m gonna fucking be there! I’m never gonna let him be alone like that again!*

And for an instant, Red thought he felt Sans’s soul calling out to him. It sounded so sad and in-need, and his passions were still stoked, and before he could think about it—

“Red?”

Red turned his head and saw Sans sitting on his couch, staring in shock.

“Angel?” Red looked around and found himself back in the den. “How’d I get back here?”

“That’s what I wanna know.”

***

Sans woke up early in the morning due to intense abdominal pain. The baby was finally coming.

Before he could even call for help, Red was by his side, holding his hand. He apparently still didn’t know how he was doing that, but it was an issue they had shelved until after the babies were born.

“Hey, big guy, can you do me a favor? Get Toriel and Alphys for me.”

“Yeah. Just hang on, Angel.”

Red found the two best midwives in the school and they jumped into action. They started setting up some things in one of the community rooms and told Red to bring Sans there, so he swam back to his mate.

“They’re all ready to take care of ya, Angel,” Red cooed. He lifted Sans into his arms carefully and winced when his mate whimpered in pain. “You’re gonna be okay.”

He carried the little fish to the room and laid him down on a pile of fresh kelp. Toriel used a small amount of healing magic to take the edge off his pain, but she couldn’t allow his contractions to stop.

Red watched helplessly on the sidelines while the two mermaids corrected Sans’s sitting angle, showed him how to breathe, and occasionally administered green magic. It felt awful watching his mate writhe in pain and being unable to help him. But Red refused to leave his side at a time like
Sans had been spending the past couple of months trying not to think about this very moment. He’d noticed ages ago that his baby was going to be big. Normally, each child in a mermaid clutch should have been about an inch longer than Stretch when he was born, but this child was as big as Stretch at a month old.

After a particularly painful contraction, the baby rolled over in Sans’s stomach. Alphys shoved a folded kelp leaf between his teeth so he could bite down safely and muffle his scream. Gasping, he spat it out and looked at Toriel with small, terrified eyelights.

“Am I going to be okay?”

She smiled warmly and patted the back of his hand. “You will be fine, Sans. We will make sure of it.”

Sans couldn’t quite believe her, but he latched onto those words and tried to keep from hyperventilating. The baby was so big, and he was so small, and he already knew what was going to have to happen.

“W-we’re going to make a small incision as soon as the baby starts to try to swim o-out,” Alphys told him. “I-it will heal more easily if we control the situation.”

Sans whimpered and called out for red, begging to hold his hand. Of course, his mate crawled over and didn’t complain no matter how hard Sans squeezed.

The baby started to move around again, and Alphys used an extremely sharp shell fragment like a scalpel. It had already been cleaned with green magic, not that ecto-biology was very susceptible to bacterial infections. It was still better to be careful.

Because the instrument was so sharp, Sans only felt a hot sensation when she cut his opening wider. The true pain came after that, when the baby pushed and clawed and agitated the wound. Sans screamed into the piece of kelp between his teeth, and it was only Toriel and Alphys pinning him down that kept him from writhing and hurting himself more.

After a minute, though, the baby did find its way out. It darted off aimlessly in the water at a surprising speed, but Red’s tentacles were long enough to cut off its path and catch it.

Toriel and Alphys had immediately started healing Sans, filling him with enough green magic to make his head feel fuzzy. Red handed over the baby and let his slightly delirious mate hold him.

“That was terrible,” Sans chuckled. “You’re cute, but that was just the worst. I don’t think I’m built for this.” His eyelights were lazily fixed in a half-focused state, and he grinned up at his mate. “What are you gonna name him?”

Red hummed and stroked their new child’s cheek. He had been full of energy a moment ago, but was now napping peacefully in Sans’s arms. Like his parents, he had a stout bone structure. He had a pretty blue tail, like Sans’s, but the color was more electric. For Sans, it was a big baby, but it was just tiny and round and cute to Red.

“Blueberry.”

Sans tilted his skull. “You wanna name our kid after a surface food?”

“He’s blue, round like a berry, cute enough to eat,” Red shrugged. “It’s more thoughtful than
“More embarrassing too,” Sans chuckled, “but it’s your pick. He can always go by a nickname if he doesn’t like it.”

Red leaned down and gave his mate a kiss on the forehead. “I’m gonna go take care of somethin’, okay, Angel? Come to my room in a bit if you can, or I’ll come back here when I’m done.”

“M’kay.”

Sans was too worn-out to question it. He fell asleep a minute after Red left, and Toriel and Alphys took the baby from his arms to clean away any lingering fluids with bits of kelp. They returned the mer child to Sans after that and left so the new mother and child could rest.

Two hours later, Sans woke up again to Red gently shaking his shoulder.

“Mm, Red? What’s up?”

Red kissed Sans on the forehead, and as Sans woke up more, he noticed how tired his mate looked. “Did something happen?”

Red nodded and spoke as softly as his rough voice could. “Yeah. You missed it, but that’s fine. I know you’re tired after today. That was real hard on you.”

Sans was about to ask again, wondering just what had happened for Red to be acting like this, but he noticed it for himself first. In his hand, Red was cradling a tiny little meroctopus.

“Stars, Red! Did you go off and do that all on your own?!”

“Shh,” Red stroked Sans’s skull with his free hand. “S’okay. You know I can handle this stuff.”

“Red…” Sans knew his mate was tough, but he still felt bad for sleeping when Red was giving birth all alone.

“Don’t worry about it, Angel. More importantly, ya still gotta name him.”

Sans sighed and accepted that the timing was just bad and it couldn’t have been helped. “Alright. Let me see him.”

Red lowered his hand and let Sans see the tiny meroctopus. It had tentacles such a dark shade of blue that they looked almost black, and it had sharp triangular teeth like Red. Aside from that, it looked almost identical to Blueberry.

“Besides those teeth and his lower half, he and Blueberry could be twins,” Sans marveled.

“They are, ain’t they? They were born on the same day. That’s what twins are, right?”

Sans tilted his head, not quite familiar enough with the human concept to rule whether that was right or wrong. Still, the comparison gave him a great idea for a name.

“Let’s call him Blackberry.”

Red rolled his eyes. “And you were criticizin’ my naming sense. Is it really ‘cause he looks like Blueberry ‘cept with darker magic?”
“Nah, I thought about it harder than that,” Sans chuckled. “It’s cause they got the same face, but Blackberry’s is scarier.” He grinned and ran the blunted tip of his finger over Blackberry’s sharp teeth.

Red frowned at his mate and at the thought that he’d passed on his scary face to their kid. Sans noticed him sulking and smiled with concern.

“Red?”

“Sorry for having a scary face,” the giant meroctopus muttered.

“Aw, come here, big guy.” Red leaned down and Sans kissed him right on the mouth. “I never said there was anything wrong with that.”

Chapter End Notes

Edit:
Felt like I should add this note. In case it wasn’t obvious, Blueberry is Underswap!Sans. Less obvious, perhaps, BlackBerry is Swapfell!Sans. And that’s the Swapfell Red AU, specifically. I know he sometimes goes by Razzberry or King, if that rings any bells for anyone who didn’t recognize him.
After taking a week off to rest and recover from giving birth, Sans finally found that he had energy again. He had forgotten what it felt like to not be tired all the time. Add onto that that it was getting into the nicest part of summer, and he just wanted to go out and swim in the sun.

There was no way Red was going to let him go out there alone, even if his mate was now able to defend himself. So, in an effort to not die, he was hiding in the shade of an outcropping of stone. Stretch and Blackberry were about as miserable as he was in the heat, so they were being well-behaved. Blueberry kept trying to swim off after his mother, but Red was hanging onto him.

The little nuthall had only been alive for a week, and he had already tried to swim out into the open ocean three times. Red only had to let go for a second and he’d be gone. He was almost as fast as Sans, too, so it was a real pain to hunt him down after losing him.

The only nice thing about this weather was how happy Sans looked. His bright blue tail flashing in the sun was stunning to watch. Red’s eyelights tracked him contentedly.

Next to him, Stretch groaned. “How come the water’s so hot?”

“’Cause it’s summer.”

“What the hell is that?”

Red shrugged. “It’s a time, I guess? About a fourth of the year is hot like this. It’ll be over in a few months.”

“I won’t last. It's going to kill me.”

“Just be glad you’re still so tiny.”

Since meroctopuses produced their own body heat, size was actually a disadvantage when it came to regulating their temperature in the warm weather. In cold water, it would be the opposite, but…

“Blackberry is tiny,” Stretch argued, wiping away some sweat that the current hadn’t carried off yet. “I’m normal-sized.” At five months old, Stretch was already bigger than any of the other kids, and he was about the same size as Sans. That still put him on the small side—especially for his
species—but he definitely wasn’t tiny anymore.

“Shaddup. You’re tiny; a babybones.”

“Whatever,” Stretch sighed and spread himself out more in an attempt to cool off. “Could really go for some nicecream right now.”

Red groaned in agreement and finally called out to Sans. “Hey, Angel, mind turning that pretty tail to the surface?”

Sans stopped darting about aimlessly and swam over the Red and the kids. “Sorry, are you boiling?”

“Lil’ bit.”

“Well, alright. Papyrus has been begging to meet the kids anyway.”

They sent a text to the land skeletons that they would be there in about two hours.

Blackberry spent the trip safely tucked in Red’s ribcage while Stretch took a nap in his mother’s arms. Blueberry was fast enough to swim on his own, and more than eager to, so they let him do that. Of course, Sans was in charge of chasing after him anytime he strayed too far from the group.

He had enthusiasm, but he was still a baby, so Red ended up carrying him through the second half of the journey.

“Huh. So that’s what a surface den looks like,” Stretch poked his head out of the water and whistled.

Red climbed up onto the docks with the younger kids in tow, and Stretch crawled up after him. His eye sockets went wide as he experienced gravity for the first time. “This is... weird.”

“Yeah, I hate it too,” Red muttered, reaching down into the water to pull Sans up. Blueberry was in his other arm, so he managed it one-handed. Not like it was the most impressive feat he’d ever done.

“Ya need to eat more, Angel,” Red grumbled.

The little mer chuckled. “Worry about that when you can hunt without getting heatstroke. I’ll be fine without being fat for one summer.”

Red made a noise of reluctant acceptance and handed Blueberry to Sans, picking up Stretch to carry in his other arm.

“Uh, not that I want to, but I can walk, mom.”

“Nope.” The ground ahead was hot. Red wasn’t going to let his baby burn himself.

Up past the docks were crowds of humans and land monsters who seemed even more eager than usual to give food and take pictures.

“Oh my god! They had babies!”

“So cute!”

Red growled and showed off his fangs to a human who had snuck around behind him to get a
picture of Blackberry hiding in his ribcage. The little guy snarled at the camera in a high-pitched, soul-melting way, and Red felt so proud of him.

Meanwhile, Stretch, who was usually pretty sociable in the school, pressed himself up against his mother’s ribs and glared suspiciously at the crowds.

Sans was happily posing, of course, and Blueberry was copying him with a dazzling smile. He accepted a nicecream from a human woman and almost took a bite of it before he heard Red growling at him. The little mer rolled his eyelights and let his mate taste the food first. He shared it with Blueberry once they knew it was safe, and the baby mermaid’s electric blue eyelights turned into little stars. Several people in the crowd squealed and rapidly took pictures.

Red stayed as long as he could stand it for Sans to have his fun, but the people were pissing him off and the asphalt was burning his tentacles, so they moved on to the land skeletons’ house. They went around the back and found a note taped to the door.

Welcome, friends!

Edge is held up at work, and I am scheduled for some volunteer duties in town today. I am sorry we aren’t here to welcome you, but we will be back within the hour! The door is unlocked, please make yourselves at home!

- Papyrus

Red set everyone but Blackberry down in the grass and carefully removed the glass doors from their tracks, leaning them against the side of the house. When everybody was inside, he reinstalled them to keep the cold air from escaping.

Stretch splayed out in the middle of the floor. “I’m alive!”

Red could concur. He laid himself out on the kitchen tiles and sighed, and Sans dragged himself across the floor to get to work healing Red’s burns. When he was done, Red scooped him up and nuzzled his head.

“You’re an angel, Angel.”

“So I’ve been told,” he laughed.

There was a dull crashing sound as Blueberry dragged a pile of books off of a coffee table. The doting parents smiled fondly as he bounced and dragged himself across the floor to look at every little thing.

“At least we don’t have to worry about him running off up here,” Red chuckled. He felt Blackberry slowly scaling his ribs and pulled him out with blue magic, setting him loose on the floor to chase after his brother. He tripped almost immediately over his own tangled mess of legs, and the three older mer got a good laugh out of it.

In a while, Stretch and Red had cooled down enough to be pleasant company, and they heard the sound of the front door unlocking, along with two high-pitched voices whispering loudly.
“We’re home!” Papyrus called down the hallway.

“Welcome back,” Sans called back.

Red grinned, seeing Blueberry accidentally smack Blackberry with his tail, and the tiny meroctapus posturing and hissing at him. “Watch where you step. There’s kids on the floor in here.”

Papyrus peeked his head around the corner, scanning the floor and “whispering” excitedly. “Oh, I have been so looking forward to meeting them!” He spotted Stretch spread out on the floor and slapped a hand over his mouth. “Oh my goodness! Stretch?! You’ve gotten so big!”

“Uh, I don’t think we’ve met before,” the oldest child returned.

“Well, no. But I have a picture of you the day after you were born. Stars, you can already speak like an adult!”

Stretch chuckled, recognizing the overly friendly and enthusiastic way of speaking from text messages and stories. “So you must be Papyrus.”

“Indeed I am! It is so very good to finally meet you. Where are your brothers?”

“Just follow wherever mom’s staring and you’ll see ‘em,” he shrugged.

“Where’s Edge?” Sans asked. “I heard him come in with you.”

“Oh, he went upstairs to change out of his guard uniform. He’ll be down soon.”

Sans smiled wryly. “Doesn’t he, like, live in that thing? Why’s he taking it off?”

“He thought the spikes might hurt the babies.”

Papyrus went into the living room and got down on his knees to play with the baby berries. Edge stomped down the stairs a minute later, wearing a black T-shirt and skinny jeans. He was still wearing heels, but this was a different pair, less likely to impale anyone he might step on.

“Where’s your uniform, Edge?” Sans teased.

The rougher skeleton blushed and folded his arms. “It needed to be washed! Why do you care?”

Sans silently laughed, and Red nuzzled him affectionately.

“Oh yeah, you’re much more of an Edge,” Stretch chuckled.

“What does that have to do with—Stretch?!”

“Hey.”

Edge stared in shock for a moment, took a deep breath, and then pinched his nasal ridge. “Fine,” he spat. “Sure! Why not!”

“If you were hoping to play with some babies, they’re over there with your mate,” Stretch grinned and pointed.

The guard captain blushed and gritted his teeth then stomped over to the living room.
The two mer parents watched in amusement as Papyrus handed a squirming Blackberry over to a very uncertain Edge.

“Be careful how you hold him, dear. He likes to bite.”

Edge grimaced and prodded at the baby’s sharp fangs. “I’m not surprised.”

“Well, it made him laugh, so I don’t mind.”

Obviously, the tiny ocean terror tried to take a chunk out of the claw poking at him, but Edge didn’t flinch and just glared harshly at him. Slowly, Blackberry released Edge’s finger from his jaws and curled himself into a little ball of tentacles.

“Pretty smart considering he can’t even talk yet,” Edge praised flatly, raising a brow.

He set the little meroctopus on the ground, only for him to immediately flee for his mother. Red chuckled and accepted the little guy into his claws, lightly stroking his back to help him calm down.

“That’s what ya get for picking a fight with someone bigger than you. Ya don’t gotta be scared of Edge, though. He’s safe.”

Blackberry was still shivering, so Red purred for him, and he quickly relaxed. Sans also cuddled tighter against Red’s ribs and started to nod off.

In the middle of making Blueberry laugh with a game of peekaboo, Papyrus looked up and asked if they would be staying for dinner. He really needn’t have asked. Red just got into the air conditioning, he wouldn’t be willing to carry everyone back until the sun set… or if Sans asked him to.

The softer land skeleton started to get busy in the kitchen, leaving Edge to awkwardly try to keep Blueberry entertained.

“How many servings should I make? How many of the kids are still nursing?”

Sans looked up and tilted his head. “What’s nursing?”

“Oh, you know,” Papyrus waved his hand in a circle. “It’s the word for children drinking their mother’s magic until they’re old enough to break down solid foods.”

Red looked mildly horrified. “What kinda kid can’t chew their own food?”

“That’s not something we do,” Sans shook his head.

“Oh. I suppose I shouldn’t really be surprised at this point. I’ll just take a guess at the portions!”

Papyrus made a big batch of spaghetti for dinner; it was easy to cook in large quantities and easy for children to eat. Red reluctantly let Sans and Stretch sit in their own chairs so he could hold the babies and make sure they didn’t just play with the strange new food. His soul was definitely going to explode at this rate. Blueberry was grinning with a face covered in sauce, and Blackberry was concentrating hard on chewing noodles so big compared to him that he could only eat one at a time. The sight made Red’s chest positively ache.

Stretch eyed his mom and brothers while twirling noodles on his fork. Taking a bite, he pointed the empty utensil at them and raised an eyebrow at his dad. “He called me a babybones this morning.”
Can you believe it?”

Sans chuckled and nodded his head.

“At least he seems to be enjoying himself,” Edge huffed.

“You need to come up here more often,” Papyrus chided them. “I’ll be cross if they’re all grown the next time I see them!”

“Sorry about that, Papyrus. At least it’s summer now, I don’t think you’d have an easy time convincing Red to stay away.”

Sans finished his food and took Blueberry out of Red’s lap to clean him off. The giant mer made a grunt in complaint, but he needed to eat too.

“More importantly,” Sans continued, “when are you two planning on having a kid?”

Papyrus’s smile faltered slightly, and Edge stared daggers at his plate.

“In the fall,” the soft land skeleton said, “when most of the tourists have left and things have quieted down a bit. We gave up on trying to match our heat cycles with work and the weather.”

The little mer leaned in and rested his chin on his hand, grinning. “So who’s gonna be the mom?”

Edge continued to glare at his plate, and Papyrus elbowed him in the ribs. He growled, “Me, what of it?!”

“Nothin’. Just curious.”

“Just being an ass, you mean.”

“Edge, language! There are children here!”

Stretch peered lazily at the soft land skeleton, “Shit, fuck, piss, dick, tits, bastard, motherfucker, damn, cocksucker, asshole.”

Papyrus made a bewildered face of betrayal, his jaw hanging slack. He turned a glare that almost managed to look harsh at Red, who automatically met him with a much more menacing stare.

“The fuck’re you lookin’ at?”

“NYEH!”

***

Despite having been thoroughly vexed, the evening went rather well in Papyrus’s opinion. The mer monster family left once the sun had gone down. Edge cleaned the kitchen while Papyrus tidied up the living room, and soon the house was back the way they liked it.

Edge was obviously still cross about something even after they’d transitioned to reading and puzzlemaking to wind down for the night.
“You’re going to tear that page if you glare at it any harder. What’s the matter, dear?”

“They were naturals,” he grumbled. “Even with three kids at once, they made it look easy.”

The truth was, kids were a sensitive topic for the land skeletons. As kind and caring as Papyrus was, the idea of holding another life in his hands like that terrified him. He had gone for some time thinking his refusal to bear children would upset Edge and thinking they would probably just adopt a child in need someday. Edge avoided the topic like a dumpster on fire just like he did, so they never properly talked about it.

But when they saw a picture of baby Stretch for the first time, something in Edge finally snapped. That night, Papyrus found out that his mate desperately wanted to be a mother, and had for some time. It was just that too many things were standing in his way.

For one, there was his job. Edge was a career monster, and it was hard to take an extended amount of time off when nobody else was good enough to replace you. At the same time, his work was much too dangerous to do while pregnant.

And then there was also his fear that he wouldn’t be any good at it. Edge knew how he was. Gentle and motherly were not words he would use to describe himself. He couldn’t even blame his appearance for it. Hell, look at Red! If a face like that could get a baby to fall asleep in his arms, then Edge really didn’t have any excuse for terrifying Red’s baby with just a look.

Papyrus wrapped an arm around his husband and leaned into him. “You have nothing to worry about, dear. If there’s one thing you can handle better than any other monster I know, it’s responsibility.”

Edge rolled his eyelights. “I’m not particularly worried about raising the child. How hard could that be? I just don’t want them to hate me by the end of it.”

“They won’t hate you, Edge.”

“Oh, come on.” Edge held his husband’s chin and made them face each other. “We’re going to be good cop bad cop parents, and I’m always going to be the bad cop.”

Papyrus couldn’t really deny that, but, “I still think everything is going to be fine!”

Edge sighed and released his hold. “You’re too pure sometimes, but thank you for your optimism. All we can do is wish for the best, I suppose.”
Chapter Summary

*In which (deep breath) Stretch learns some survival skills, Red overhunts and gets scolded then takes a vacation, Asgore gets a hobby and babysits, the Skeletons go shopping, and Edge becomes a babysitter. (Phew)*

Chapter Notes

I wrote this all kinds of out-of-order. I still have more written, in fact, it’s just missing the connecting bits, so I can’t post it yet.

An update on my life: passed all my classes, got an apartment, got a cat, got a job. I’m doing well.

(I love comments so much, guys! I love them! I have at least six on my shelf and I polish them every day~)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stretch swam behind Red, gazing out at the darkness with more tension than he’d ever been forced to feel. The cold, heavy water felt nice, but he just couldn’t relax. It was stressful. Stretch hated things like that.

“Mom, can we just go home? I feel like I’m being watched down here. I don’t like it.”

“You are being watched,” Red called back in a low voice. “You’re food down here, baby doll. Only reason nothin’s comin’ after ya is ‘cause I’m here.”

“Nice to have confirmation on that. Look, I’d really rather be home taking a nap right now.”

“Sorry, Stretch, but I gotta teach you some stuff; it’d be too damn irresponsible not to, but I hope you never need to know it. Swim a little closer to me.”

Stretch swam up to his mother’s side, and Red began to impart his hard-earned wisdom.

“Rule number one: unless you’re tryin’ to lure something in, don’t stop moving and don’t swim in circles. Always move forward.” Stretch hugged his chest and gave a nervous nod. “Talking is fine; a lot of things communicate with sounds, but not many track creatures by the noise they make; it echoes too much. Still, probably not a good idea to throw up a fuss. Do you remember how to make a bone attack?”

Stretch nodded and summoned a long white bone to hold in his hands. Red nodded in approval, took it, and snapped it so the end was sharp. He passed it back gently into his child’s hands.

“Until you’re a lot bigger, you’re gonna want a weapon to protect yourself. Now, do ya think I’d give a fuck if you stabbed me in the ribs or the tentacles? Would that stop me if I was tryin’ to eat
Stretch shook his head. At Red’s size, he’d just tank an attack like that, and Stretch would be dead before getting the chance to make another one.

“Right. Same goes for everything else down here. They’re all too big to be hurt by that, so always aim for the weak points. Gills and eyes for fleshy things, neck and skull for skeletons. And if you’re up against another meroctopus, stay away from their lower half.”

“Why would I have to fight another meroctopus?”

“Because life sucks and you come from a species that’s mostly assholes. You might not have to fight if you meet one, but always be ready to.” Red thought a bit. “Actually, the same goes for any mermaids you meet.”

“What, mermaids are assholes too? My life is a lie.”

“They’re not assholes,” Red grumbled. “Mermaids are all social and friendly and all that shit, but we have a real bad reputation. They might just attack you even if you didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Well, that’s just lovely.”

Red apparently arrived at wherever he wanted to be and stopped swimming. “Alright, m’gonna keep this short since too much new stuff’ll tire ya out. Next thing for today: don’t make your tentacles glow down here. Things’ll see how small you are and come up for a bite. Watch.”

Red lit up his own ecto-flesh, but he restrained the light and shape to match Stretch’s size. Before long, the glow reflected off a mouth coming up from below. It was a considerably large mouth, actually, but not big enough to swallow Red whole. He wrapped around the creature’s muzzle and stabbed it several times with his beak. With each bite, the creature slowed more and more until it couldn’t move.

Upon further examination, it was some kind of toothed whale for sure, but not any kind Red knew the name of. It had grey skin and a large body. It must have been double Red’s mass, and it was frankly terrifying that things that huge existed in this darkness.

“Last lesson: our venom is really fucking good, so use it.” He wrapped around the creature’s neck and snapped it, killing it instantly. “But it only stops things from moving, so make sure you finish the job. Let’s bring this back before something tries to steal it.”

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They returned to the den, and Toriel scolded Red for bringing too much food home again. Undyne and the mer kids were freaking out about the fact that he killed a literal whale on his own. Their shouting was just shouting to Red, though, and it only made him more anxious. On the bright side, his obvious discomfort prompted Toriel to cut off her lecture early.

“Just be more careful next time.”

Sans came out of the den with the babies in tow. He let them go to explore the biggest kill they’d ever seen and held Red’s hand to help him relax.
Blueberry giggled while swimming laps around the dead whale, but Blackberry returned after examining the whole thing once. He patted his mom’s tentacles and got a free ride to Red’s hands.

“Big fishy!” Blackberry pointed, his electric blue eyelights shaped like stars.

“That’s a whale,” Red told him.

“Taste good?”

“Yeah, tastes pretty good. Better than shark, at least.”

Unfortunately, though the mermaids liked fattier fish like tuna, whales still had a little too much blubber, and the skin was too thick to enjoy as well. If Red wasn’t a living garbage disposal, Toriel would have had the kids just carry all that away as chum. Instead, it meant that Red was going to be eating mostly trash again for a while. Toriel was quite cross with him, and she would have scolded him even more if he wasn’t so sensitive.

As a side note, Stretch liked to eat trash sometimes, but Blackberry refused to, so it was more about personal tastes than any racial disposition.

Red felt kind of bad for dumping a whole whale on Toriel without warning, so he helped with the prep work, cutting it into small enough chunks to bring inside. Asgore and Undyne were lending a hand with the cooking, since pregnancy was making Alphys too queasy to be up and about much.

Undyne confronted Red as soon as dinner was over.

“Hey, dude. I got a favor to ask you.”

The finger incident had thoroughly taught Undyne to watch her volume when she was chatting with Red. She was using a soft tone and giving him a good amount of space, but Red still found himself starting to sweat in the presence of one of the school members he didn’t hang out with as much.

“Uh… w-what?”

“I feel like I’m getting out of shape since you took over hunting. I was hoping maybe you and me could spar sometimes so I don’t lose my touch.”

Red tucked his chin. “What’s spar mean?”

“You, know. It’s like fighting, except we won’t actually try to hurt each other.”

What the hell did that even mean? Why would you attack someone if you didn’t want to hurt them? Red hadn’t been in a single fight that didn’t end in someone dying. It sounded bizarre.

“... I’ll think about it.”

“Yeah, sure. No rush, dude. Just let me know.”

She left the room and Sans patted his mate. “You alright, big guy?”

He nodded slowly and pulled the lazy mermaid into a hug. “Yeah.”

Red played with the babies until it got dark, then hid in his room for the rest of the night. He loved his kids and his mate, but if he never got any alone time he would seriously snap. Between sunset and sunrise, they were Sans’s kids exclusively.
Sans swam over to join Red in the shade and nudged him. The kids, minus Stretch, were playing tag on the sandy plains. It was obviously unfair since Blueberry was the fastest but barely understood the rules, and Blackberry was still too small to compete.

“I think your kid’s about ready to bite Azzy again,” Sans teased.

“Mm.”

“He bit me last night ‘cause I wouldn’t let him go sleep with you. It’s sweet that he worries about his mom, but those teeth hurt.”

“You want me to heal it?”

Sans chuckled, “Nah, I already took care of it.” He held up his pointer finger to display a faint scar around the tip. “He sure does bite a lot, though. Did you used to be like that?”

Red laughed dryly. “Thanks for phrasing it like I don’t still bite.” He shook off the memory of removing one of Undyne’s fingers and grinned wryly. “But yeah, I did. What else are you supposed to do with teeth like these?”

Sans laughed and swam up to give his mate a kiss. “I can think of one or two things.”

Red smiled and gave Sans a little peck in return, but he didn’t flirt back much or purr like Sans was expecting.

“Hey, you feeling alright? You seem a little tired.”

“Sorry.”

“You can take more alone time if you need it, you know?”

“I… don’t wanna leave the kids.”

“You’ll just use that weird magic to pop in if they need you, right?” Sans pondered his own words. “How does that work anyway?”

“I told ya, I don’t really get it. It just happens when I feel one of your souls calling for me.”

“You can’t at least describe how your magic moves?”

“Nah. It just kinda goes wherever it wants. I don’t really get a say outside of ‘yes’ or ‘no’.”

Sans hummed. “Well anyway, I’ll watch the kids, so don’t worry and just go rest. And you can take a few days, you know? We have plenty of food lately.”

Red whined uncertainly, but Sans insisted he would be fine, so Red left to take some much-needed alone time.
Asgore had picked up a hobby.

With Red in their school, he almost never needed to go out and hunt anymore, and guarding was only his job when Red was away. He was, essentially, retired. Which was suitable, considering his age. Fate had united him and Toriel late in life. It was a miracle they had one final mating season in them to have Asriel. He was such a precious child, too.

Asgore chuckled and looked back at what his hands were doing. With gentle care, he arranged chunks of stone into a neat, circular mound. They were the remains of a stone outcropping Red had crushed a while back. The stones were nice and porous. Asgore thought they might make a good garden. He could plant corals, sponges, and polyps here, and maybe the garden would attract some small fish.

The large goat mermaid hummed while he worked, occasionally looking up at the children playing. It really warmed his heart seeing them all get along. He looked back and put a few more stones where they looked nice, dusting off his hands and shaking any sand loose from his fur. This was enough for one day.

Asgore looked at the children again, swimming in the warm water and playing some kind of game. He glanced at the usual shaded spot where Red would watch them from, and was surprised that only Sans and Stretch were there. The old mermaid swam over and offered a pleasant greeting.

“Hello Sans, Stretch. It is a nice day outside, isn’t it?”

Stretch just groaned, “It’s still hot.”

Sans chuckled. “I got my fill of it earlier this morning. Kinda ready for a nap now, but I’m watching the kids.”

“I noticed. Where has Red gone? He usually never takes his eyes off your youngest.”

“He’s reaching the end of his rope. I sent him off to rest.”

“I see.” Asgore looked fondly at the children once again. They were so lively. “Do you mind if I join you?”

“You kid ding me? Have a seat.”

“Why, thank you.”

The large goat mermaid settled himself on the sand, and very soon both lazy mer were sleeping next to him. He was in charge of watching the children now, apparently. Asgore chuckled.

“Ow! Blackberry, let go!”

Asgore sighed and got up to remove a very angry baby meroctopus from his son’s finger.

“Now, what do you say, Blackberry?”

“Sorry I bited Azzy…”

“And you, Azriel?”
“I’m sorry I kept tagging you over and over. It wasn’t to be mean, you know? I just can’t catch anybody else.”

“That was very good, boys,” Asgore smiled brightly. “You may go rejoin the game now, if you’d like to.”

The large mer returned to his shaded spot in the sand, and Sans spoke up. So he had been awake after all.

“Sorry about Blackberry. Is Azzy’s finger okay?”

“Yes, it’s just fine. I’m sure your child did not intend to hurt Asriel, he just wanted him to know he was unhappy. I didn’t even have to use any healing magic.”

“That’s good. In that case, I’m gonna take a nap.”

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The mer skeletons had an errand to run on the surface. It was long overdue, and postponed even further with Red hiding himself away for half a week… Plus one more day because he was really cuddly when he finally came out again.

Their errand was to buy a few more cell phones for use underwater. Sharing one between Sans and Red was fine when they only used it to contact their friends on land, but if they wanted to check in with each other, it didn’t work out so well. Today, they planned to get four more: one for Red, one for Stretch, one for Toriel, and one for Alphys. The phone they already had would belong to Sans.

They called up Edge first to ask if Red needed to go get more gold, but the coins he’d brought the first time had sold for a lot more than their material value. Some humans apparently really liked old stuff. They had more than enough surface money to work with for a while.

Blueberry had no idea what was going on, but he insisted on coming with, and Blackberry was going through a clingy phase and didn’t like being away from Red for long. The twins coming along was unavoidable.

Stretch didn’t particularly want to come, but they were dragging him along so he could pick his own phone if there were different options. None of the others could walk on land, so he somehow got saddled with keeping track of Toriel and Alphys’s requests too.

He just sighed and accepted that he would have to work a little.

When they arrived, Papyrus and Edge were shocked by Blackberry’s ability to speak. He was still tiny, but considerably bigger than before; about the size of Red’s hand already.

“Mermonsters grow up so fast,” Papyrus said with a sad smile. He picked up a burbling Blueberry and tilted his head. “Or not?”

“It’s only Red’s species that grow that fast,” Sans said.

“Come to think of it, how old are you two?” The land skeleton asked.

“Three, right?” Sans looked to Red.
“Nah, since the timing’s different, it should be that you’re one and I’m two.”

“Maybe. Either way, we’re both parents.”

Papyrus just looked at them with boggling eye sockets, he had no idea at all what he should say to that. Even Edge was at a loss for words—for a second.

“Three years old?! You still are infants, you shouldn’t be making more!”

He yelled loud enough to make Stretch flinch back. Red practically pressed himself up against the wall, hugging Sans tightly to his chest. The smaller skeleton still had the presence of mind to hear what had been said.

“Did we say years? We don’t keep track of age that way; it’s a pain.”

That immediately threw a cold bucket of water onto Edge’s nerves. It was impressive how quickly he could switch from explosive indignation to rational thought.

“In that case… hm. You were counting by the number of children you have?”

“Something like that?” Sans shrugged. “Kids are kids, adults are people old enough to reproduce, parents are kind of ranked by how many clutches they’ve raised, and grandparents are those whose kids have had kids. In theory, the higher you are in those rankings, the more authority you have in your school.”

“He had to explain it all to me too,” Red told them.

“Really? And how do meroctopuses measure age,” Edge asked.

“Either you’re old enough to have kids, or you’re not.”

Edge snorted, in a curt show of acknowledgment. “And how old are you both in years?”

“Dunno.”

“No fuckin’ idea.”

The conversation wasn’t going anywhere, so Papyrus intervened and suggested they leave for their scheduled errand.

The local phone store had a prime location along the main road through town, and it did good business, but as was typical of phone stores, it was a very small shop. All it had was a single-wide door and a one long, narrow room with walls lined with products.

Even if Red could have gotten through the door, he probably shouldn’t. There were too many expensive things to be broken and a lot of tentacles to keep track of.

“I kinda hate surface dens,” Red mumbled, reluctantly handing Sans over to Edge. Since his arm was freed up, each of the twins got one to themselves.

“We’ll keep the door open so you can listen in,” Sans said, giving his mate a parting pat on the arm. “It won’t take too long.”

“You’re more slippery than you look,” Edge grumbled, readjusting the mermaid in his arms a few times.
Red gave him a look that said, ‘You’d better not drop him.’

Sans just chuckled and wrapped his arms around Edge’s neck to make his rapid descent less likely. “Stretch, could you get the door?”

The attendant inside had been watching their group curiously for a while and was ready to administer service when they came in.

“How can I help you today?”

“We need some new phones,” Sans said. “Four of them, all waterproof.”

“Well, you’ve got a few options. Did you have a particular brand or model in mind?”

Sans held up the phone he already had and showed it to the worker. “This one’s worked pretty well for us.”

“Alright. You can find our designs for this model along the third section there.”

They left to look at the phones. Stretch picked one made of pink metal for Alphys and the most basic design for Toriel. All she’d said was that she didn’t want anything too complicated, and Alphys had asked for something cute while blushing and hiding her face. Stretch didn’t particularly care what he got, so he just picked one that wouldn’t get mixed up with the three they already had picked out.

Sans scanned the wall looking for a phone for Red. He knew he’d found it when he saw one model that was decidedly bigger than the others.

“This should be good, since he was complaining before that the buttons were too small.” He leaned over and plucked it off the shelf, then looked down at Stretch. “Did you find everything?”

“Yep.”

“We just need more solar chargers and we can check out.”

Stretch found some little packages labeled “solar phone chargers” and grabbed four off the shelf. He couldn’t carry everything in his hands, so he held a few in his tentacles. They set everything on the counter and the human rung the items up. Edge handed Sans to Stretch for a minute so he could dig out his wallet. The father and son were about the same size, so the most Stretch could do was keep the mermaid from sitting on the floor by holding him under the arms.

There was a whine from outside, and they peeked over at Red poking his head through the doorway. It was a look that said ‘I can hold him better. Lemme hold him. I wanna hold him.’

By the time Edge finished paying and turned around, Red had stretched one of his tentacles almost to his feet trying to reach for Sans. He marveled for a minute how long they were when they weren’t curled up, but it was short by about a foot. Edge took Sans from Stretch, moved closer to the exit, and held the skeletal mermaid out.

“You’re being silly, you know? We were on our way out anyway.”

Red ignored him, took Sans back, and nuzzled the top of his head. He was like a dog they’d left tied up outside.

Once he was satisfied, Red looked down at Edge. “Is it okay if we relax at your place for a little
It was still the middle of summer. The water was too hot for Red and Stretch. (Blackberry would learn to hate it as he got bigger.)

“Fine. It’s a long travel for you. We would be bad hosts if we didn’t feed you at least once.”

They returned to the land skeletons’ house, and Sans was worried to see somewhat serious burns on Red’s tentacles. Leaving him out on the hot pavement had done more damage than he’d expected. He hadn’t complained about it once or shown any sign that it hurt, and that worried Sans.”

“It’s fine. I knew you’d heal me, Angel. That made it hurt less.”

Sans sighed and shook his head. “That’s sweet, Red, but I’d rather you didn’t get hurt in the first place.” Even though he said that, he knew Red would have moved into the shade if there was any, and he couldn’t fit into any of the nearby shops. “You were right about not letting Stretch walk on the asphalt.”

“I know.”

After Red was healed, he set Sans on the couch and they both took a nap. Papyrus and Edge were in charge of looking after the kids, but then Papyrus said he was going to start working on dinner, and Edge was left alone with two infants.

Blueberry was easy. He just crawled along the carpet and examined everything in detail. Blackberry, on the other hand, kept trying to go back to Red and interrupt his nap. Edge had never seen the giant sleep before, but he had seen the red circles under his eye sockets. He figured the guy needed some rest, so he forcefully kept the grumpy baby octopus away. The child tried to throw a temper tantrum, but Edge covered his mouth so he wouldn’t make noise and wake up his parents. When his hand was bitten in response, he only narrowed his eyes.

“Well this is familiar. Could you release my hand, child? This is pathetic.”

The baby relaxed his jaws and started crying, but Edge glared harder.

“None of that either. Your parents are trying to sleep, and you’re being inconsiderate.”

The commanding tone in Edge’s voice was one that most people naturally moved to follow, and indeed, Blackberry stopped crying. A hint of a smile touched Edge’ fangs.

“Alright, I’ve decided. I shall use you for practice.”

“Practice?” Blackberry tilted his skull.

“Yes. Practice makes perfect, after all. I will train with you before having my own child, and then I will know for certain if I have what it takes to raise one. Which, of course, I do. I simply need to unearth that talent through hard work and effort!”

“Edge, would you help me for a moment? I could use an extra pair of hands.” At the sound of Papyrus’s voice, Edge set Blackberry on the carpet, stood up, and smirked devilishly down at the tiny creature. “Your first task is this, don’t move from that spot until I come back. Understand?”

“Why?”
Because I said so, and I am your superior. You will be punished appropriately if you choose to be insubordinate."

Blackberry didn’t know what all of that meant yet, but he curled up into a little ball and stayed put until Edge came back.

“It’s good that you can obey simple orders,” he smirked. “Next, let’s try to break you of that biting habit.”

Edge continued to train Blackberry more like he would a subordinate or a dog, but those were the closest experiences he had to raising children. At dinner, Edge offered to help babysit the kids more often, if Sans or Red ever needed someone on the surface who would. It was a generous offer, especially in this season when Red couldn’t move around too much or risk overheating. So, it became the norm for Edge to look after the twins while the grownups and Stretch were enjoying the AC.

Red didn’t nap every time. He was usually too anxious to sleep outside of his den. It wasn’t like Edge was unsupervised, but Red didn’t really see anything wrong with what he was doing. It was just like Toriel, but extra, and she was considered a good child-rearer, right? Better than Red, since everyone said he doted too much, and better than Sans who was too lazy.

Papyrus chided Edge for being too harsh whenever he was around, but he backed off when Red didn’t have a problem with it. It was the parent’s decision, not his, right?

Of course, if Edge had so much as hinted at hurting his baby, Red would have unleashed hell upon him.

Sans also had a few concerns when he heard about Edge’s methods.

“I dunno. I haven’t really seen it, but he sounds pretty strict. Are you sure it’s fine, Red?”

“Yeah. I mean, my childhood was way worse, and I turned out pretty okay. He’ll be fine.”

Just to cover all of his bases, Sans asked Blackberry what he thought too. He said that he hated being scolded, but he loved it when he did well and Edge complimented him; Edge didn’t give out compliments easily, so it meant more. Apparently, his passions had been stoked and he wanted to meet Edge’s expectations.

Since the important people were all fine with it, Sans and Papyrus just kept their mouths shut.

Chapter End Notes

It’s been a while guys, and we have art! Four arts! And none of them are by me this time!

Mermaid Sans by melodyrider.
Meroctopus Red by melodyrider.
Baby Octo-Stretch by winke77e.
Meeting Angel Fins by winke77e.
Blackberry was three months old. Just like Stretch, he had matured quickly. He was nearly the size of the other children, and highly intelligent. He never inherited Sans or Stretch’s social skills, but he was still sociable. It honestly wasn’t a very good combination.

“Come on, Blackberry,” Azzy whined. “Tag one of the others for a change!”

The meroctopus kid crossed his arms and smirked with his sharp teeth. “It isn’t very fun, is it? You used to do this to me all the time, cousin. It’s only natural that your poor behavior would come back to bite you!”

“I only tagged you because I couldn’t catch anybody else! You’re fast enough to tag Frisk and Chara, so quit picking on me. I don’t like it.”

“If you don’t like it, then get bigger and stronger, practice more so that I can’t catch you. Honestly, your whining is insufferable. Better yet, since you are so awful at this, play a different game! It doesn’t have to be tag. You can’t willingly participate in a game you don’t have the ability for and then whine and moan when your performance is as abysmal as expected.”

Little tears gathered in the goat mer’s eyes, but he blinked them away. “You used to cry and whine too! You even bit me! You don’t get to tell me that it’s not okay!”

“We’re different,” Blackberry glared. “I practiced and improved. I raced with Blueberry for hours daily to get faster. You’re just a weakling who refuses to apply himself.”

Asriel actually bared his teeth, which was something the mild-tempered child never did. “Err! You’re so mean! I… I’m not going to play with you anymore! In fact, you don’t need to be my friend anymore!”

Blackberry’s electric blue eyelights flashed, and his face twisted with rage. “How dare you! You think I’m not worthy of being your friend?! Well, you just wait! I’m going to train every day, and someday I’ll be as big and strong as mom, and then I will be the best hunter in the school. I will be the best protector! And you will feel humiliated because you will be the only one who thought you
were too good to be my friend!”

Blackberry swam away from the group in a huff, leaving to race Blueberry as training. Frisk, Chara, and Stretch cautiously approached Asriel who was sniffling now, and Frisk gave him a comforting pat on the shoulder.


“Hey, sorry about my little bro, Azzy,” Stretch offered. “He’s still working on his, uh, that. Clearly it isn’t coming along so well.”

Stretch was eight months old now, and he was the biggest of the children by a head and a half.

Asriel wiped his eyes on his forearm and shook his head. “I know he doesn’t really mean it, but the way he talks just gets me so mad!” He hung his head. “I’m sorry, Stretch. I’m the older one; I should be the bigger person at times like these. I should go find him and apologize.”

“Nah. Let him blow off a little steam first. You can apologize when he comes home for dinner.”

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It had only been three months since Blueberry was born, and he wasn’t a meroctopus like his brothers. He grew at a slower pace mentally and physically, but he could still tell when his twin was in a bad mood.

The baby mermaid flicked his tail a few times to get his brother’s attention.

“What do you want?!”

Blueberry hugged Blackberry, and both of them slowed to a stop. The growling in Blackberry’s throat faded away, then he huffed. “You don’t even know why I’m mad. It could have been my fault for all you know!” Blueberry purred and kept hugging, and Blackberry finally gave in and awkwardly hugged back. “Thanks, I guess.”

Something whizzed by. Blackberry had time to move, but not much. He managed to keep his skull from getting pierced by tipping it back, but his left eye socket got scratched. Dust came out in a puff and became seafoam in the water, and the fresh wound started leaking violet magic.

Before the child could even process that he had just been attacked, Red had already teleported over to defend him. He had dragged Sans along with him, but left his side the moment he saw hostile mermaids and sensed magic attacks, instinctively putting himself between the enemy and his family.

The hunting group, understandably, was terrified to see a giant meroctopus appear out of nowhere. Several of them threw magic spears and tridents, and Red went out of his way to catch or deflect all of them so they wouldn’t land in somebody behind him. He followed up instantly by making to grab one of their skulls with his claws.

Before he could land the blow, Sans swam in front of him, arms out in a T position.

“Everybody just hold on!”
Red flared his tentacles, stopping dead in his tracks, and quickly wrapped up Sans so he wouldn’t get hit by a volley of magic weapons that hadn’t been de-summoned in time.

“You’re fuckin’ dead!” the giant meroctopus snarled.

“Red, please,” Sans gave him a pat and was released from his safety prison of writhing red limbs. “Just what is going on here?”

The sound of muffled sniffling caught Sans’s attention, and he turned around to see Blackberry crying, one eye socket closed and bleeding purple magic from a very obvious crack. Sans’s eyelights disappeared. He swam over slowly and put a hand around his baby’s shoulders, pulling the child’s head to rest on his sternum while he applied healing magic to the wound.

“It’s okay, kiddo, daddy’s here. Mommy’s here too. You’re safe. You’re both safe.”

The attacking mermaids were confused and highly hesitant at this point. They shot wary glances back and forth between Sans and the children and Red, who was growling and still very much acting as a physical barrier between the two groups.

“Wait a minute,” a voice called from one end of the hunting party. “Isn’t that Sans? Hey, Sans! What the hell is going on?”

Sans looked up slowly with empty eye sockets. He finished healing Blackberry and swam toward the hunting party while the twins swam to Red for safety. Red let Sans take point, but he was still watching very cautiously, close enough to intervene if anything happened.

“That’s funny, I was wondering the same thing. See, somebody gave my youngest baby a scar. Know anything about that?”

“That can’t be yours,” another mermaid in the group said. “It belongs to that thing over there, right?”

Red bristled, “The fuck didja call me?”

“He is mine. My mate and I have had three beautiful children together. Why did you attack him?”

“It looked like it was attacking a baby mermaid,” yet another aggressor said. This one at least sounded a little guilty. “How could we have known?”

Sans ignored them and glared, “Which one of you hurt my kid?”

A few of the mermaids pointed at another. Sans swam up to Red and whispered something to him. The meroctopus nodded and approached the hunting group, causing them to immediately go on guard.

“Angel says I ain’t allowed to kill ya,” he grinned a shark-toothed grin and summoned a sharp bone, “but he also says ‘fuck you’. He swiped up, and the attacker cried and reeled back, a new scar over their left eye.

A few mermaids in the pod moved to retaliate, but Red gave them the glare of death and they hesitated. He took the kids and his mate and started swimming towards the den.

“This can’t happen again,” Sans said softly. “I’m going to talk to Asgore and Toriel. Maybe we can call an ocean council before the season’s over.”
“The fuck’s an ocean council?”

“I guess it’s been a few years since we’ve had one.” Sans settled more into Red’s arms and petted a snuggly Blueberry. “It’s a meeting between all the schools within two days’ travel. It’s a pain, so we only have them when we need to talk about something important. There was one years ago when Asgore and Tori decided to make their own school. I think that was the most recent one. The kids were still babies back then.”

“S’awhile ago, then. Why’re we gonna call one?”

“To tell everybody about you and our kids so you won’t get attacked. This whole ‘kill-on-sight’ policy has to stop.”

Blackberry, who had been quietly staring out into the ocean since he’d stopped crying, finally spoke up. “Why is there a policy like that in the first place?”

Red’s expression froze, and he looked away, and Sans sighed and tried to think of a good way to explain it to a child. Blackberry got impatient and pressed the issue.

“They said it was because I’m a meroctopus, right? What’s wrong with that?!”

Red grunted, and Sans reached out to pet Blackberry’s skull. “There’s nothing wrong with it, kiddo.”

Blackberry pushed his hand away and folded his arms, muttering, “If there was nothing wrong, they wouldn’t have attacked in the first place.”


“Because that’s bad behavior? And because I care about him!”

Red didn’t acknowledge the slip, but he did think it was odd. Sans immediately figured out that Blackberry and Asriel must have gotten into another argument.

“What if ya thought it was normal? N’ what if ya didn’t care about who you were hurtin’?”

Blackberry frowned, and Red fixed his crimson eyelights on him.

“Most of our kind grew up in a real dangerous place, sweetheart, and they act like it. Mermaids have been attacked by people like us before, so they get scared whenever they see us. We’re stronger than them, after all. If they let us get close enough to ask if we’re gonna kill ‘em, they’re already in range to get their necks snapped.”

“But… that’s…” the little mer monster started shaking, “How dare they! Comparing us to savages?! I am a dignified meroctopus! One of the best assets our school has! I won’t stand for this kind of blatant disrespect!”

Red spared one hand to calm down the mess of writhing tentacles his child had turned into.

“Yer a damn babybones, shut up.” He sighed, “I’m lettin’ ya spend too much time with yer uncle Edge.”

They arrived back at the den, and Asriel was the first to meet them. He started apologizing to Blackberry for acting immaturely, but panicked when he saw the meroctopus child was injured.
“Blackberry! Y-you’re eye!”

He looked away and tsked. “It’s nothing.”

“Nothing?! We need to heal it right away!”

“Easy, kiddo,” Sans escaped a reluctant Red’s arms and held the goat monster’s shoulder to calm him down. “I already healed it. See? It’s not bleeding or dusting or anything.”

Asriel took a moment to collect himself. While it was true using healing magic on wounds usually left scars behind, such a deep scar implied a serious wound. Indeed, though Blackberry had managed to avoid the worst of the damage, the spear had cut completely through his bone. He was lucky he could still see with both eyes.

“So,” Sans continued, “any idea where your mom and dad are? We need to have a chat.”

***

They called an ocean council. Toriel, Sans, Red, and the skeletons’ three children were going to attend. Toriel was their slowest swimmer as long as Red carried the kids, but not by much, so it was half a day’s journey for them.

Sans had been trying to figure out how to teleport now that he’d experienced it once with Red, but it was a high-energy activity, and he couldn’t practice often. He had managed to move small distances, though—of his own volition. So, in some respects, he was already better at it than Red. Someday, he wanted to use that magic to make trips like this easier.

Red was actually kind of impressed when he saw the venu. It was a colosseum-like structure grown from coral, with actual stone supports in some places. The outside was covered in sea plants and surrounded by colorful fish, but the inside had been cleared out to make room for people to sit comfortably. There were three rows of seats for listeners and a space in the middle for speakers. Everyone in attendance apparently had an equal vote on everything the council suggested.

There were a lot of people already there. Red and Stretch couldn’t help but hesitate while the others swam ahead. Their absence was expected and quickly noticed, and the others doubled back.

“It is alright,” Toriel said in encouragement. “We will not let others get too close.”

“We’ll be in the middle most of the time,” Sans added, “with plenty of space. You won’t have to be near the crowd for long.”

The lazy mermaid took Red’s hand to gently pull him forward, and Red dragged an unwilling Stretch along with him.

The presence of three meroctopuses in the colosseum quickly drew attention, and not in a good way. Many people had their weapons summoned already, and Red felt a deep growl starting to build in his chest.

The disorder was stomped out by a loud sound. Everyone looked up to a balcony built several feet up the coral wall. A goat mermaid was hovering there. She had a golden bejeweled crown on her head and a summoned trident in her hand which she had just slammed against the stone platform
beneath her. She looked rather similar to Toriel, but that was probably because they were both feminine goat mermaids.

“Fighting in the council room is against the rules. Everyone, calm down and desummon your weapons immediately.” This person clearly had some authority, as all the mermaids in attendance obeyed her. She then fixed her eyes on Toriel.

“It is also against the rules for people outside of the schools to attend. Lady Toriel, I presume these meroctopuses are members of your school?”

“Yes, Lady Regalia, they are.”

There was some concerned muttering from the stands, but Regalia just nodded her head. “Then everything is in accordance with the rules and this council may proceed.”

All of the mermaids in attendance took their seats, and Toriel led the way to an unoccupied section. To save on space, Red kept his mate and three kids on his lap. Toriel let him have the aisle seat so there was as much room as possible between him and any strangers.

Once all the movement had settled down, Regalia hit her trident to the floor again.

“This ocean council will now commence. The issue up for discussion is meroctopus policy, raised by Lady Toriel’s school. Will the involved parties please move to the center.”

Even though they’d just sat down, they got up and moved to the center.

“Please present a brief introduction of today’s issue.”

Toriel clasped her hands in front of her tail and took a deep breath. “Due to our current kill-on-sight policy regarding meroctopuses, a child of my school was unjustly attacked and injured. We would like to avoid a repeat incident.”

Toriel met eyes with Regalia who nodded and thumped her staff again. “The discussion is now open to all in attendance.”

There was a great deal of discord and murmuring, but out of the group, one person raise their hand and spoke up loudly. “I would like to make a statement. The logistics of meroctopuses living together with mermaids concerns me. I’d like to know under what circumstances your school came to its current state.”

Regalia immediately countered him. “Your concern is noted but your inquiry is irrelevant to the current discussion. Please save it for after the council has adjourned.”

The mermaid frowned but put their hand back down and kept quiet. Another spoke over the din a beat later.

“If this is all of them, we can just remember what they look like and not attack them again.”

“No, what if one appears that looks similar and somebody approaches and gets hurt?”

“They have three already, who’s to say they won’t just get more?”

“Put a ribbon on them!”

Red, Stretch, and Blackberry all frowned at that last shout. While it would make it easier to tell them apart, it was degrading.
After a few more minutes of people bouncing ideas and concerns back and forth and several people expressing concerns about there being meroctopuses living among them, Regalia thumped her trident again and pointed out into the seats.

“You there, Shyren, you’ve had your hand up for a while. Is there something you’d like to contribute?”

All eyes turned to the diminutive mermaid, making her duck down into her seat. Very softly, she offered, “Can’t we just run when we see them, instead of fight?”

That sparked another wave of discussion. Obviously, it was still rude to Red and the other meroctopuses, but it prevented the kids from getting attacked again and alleviated many of the mermaids’ fears.

The talk still continued for a while, and eventually it was brought to a vote between three popular solutions. First, to tie ribbons to the meroctopuses that lived in schools. Second, to change the current policy from kill-on-sight to flee-on-sight. Third, to establish some secret code they could use to determine friend from foe.

Due to the consuming fear of most of those in attendance, it was decided that the first and third options were too easily replicated. If one forgot that meroctopuses were intelligent hunters, they’d be in for a bad time. If Toriel and the others could have picked, they would have preferred to have a signal, but at least Red and his kids wouldn’t be forced to wear ribbons everywhere they went.

At least the children would be safer within a two day swim of the den. That was a start, and their reason for calling this council.

“Motion two has passed with seventy percent of the total votes,” Regalia announced. “This ocean council is now adjourned, and the results are final. Please exit in an orderly fashion.”

Chapter End Notes

Regalia = Underswap Toriel

If anybody knows a more widely-accepted nickname for her, please tell me. I couldn’t find anything, so I just made one up.
Red and Stretch were visibly relieved to be leaving that room full of strangers. They let out almost synchronized sighs, and Blackberry looked at his mother strangely.

“I don’t understand. You’re far stronger than them. What’s so intimidating about a room full of weaklings?”

Red just chuckled tiredly and shrugged. “I dunno. I just can’t deal with it.”

They moved out into the open water, ready to start swimming back to the den, but a swarm of mermaids was gathered there. As soon as they were in view, their gazes snapped to Red and his kids. Red felt shivers travel up his spine, and his magic started tensing for a fight. Stretch had already panicked, snatched up Blackberry, and hidden behind Toriel at the back of the group before any words were exchanged.

“What are you doing?!” the grumpy child demanded. He went to bite at Stretch’s hand so he would be let go, but thought better of it when he saw the tense look on his brother’s face. “Stretch! Release me this instant! They don’t have any weapons conjured; you’re panicking for no reason!”

Stretch frowned and almost let Blackberry go, but his eyelights fell on his little brother’s scar, and he held him tighter instead.

“After the adults have sorted things out,” he said tightly.

Meanwhile, Sans swam in front of Red and gave the group a curious grin.

“Heya, folks. What’s going on over here?”

Rather than words, what he received were many wary stares directed at the meroctopuses in the group and Red in particular.

Red was clearly uncomfortable, which made Sans frown. Toriel went a step farther and became genuinely angry.
“If you have nothing to say, please swim aside so we can go home. We have all had a long and tiring journey, and this is not helping.”

Nobody moved, but some of the eyes did shift to Toriel.

“Someday,” one of them said softly, “that thing is totally going to kill you all.”

Blackberry’s face twisted, and Stretch risked being bitten to slap a hand over his mouth.

“That’s not a very funny joke, buddy.” Sans gave the group a sweeping look. “Every one of you who think you know what Red is, you’re wrong. You don’t know him like we do.”

“He’s a meroctopus.”

“He’s my mate, and he gave up everything to be with me. None you have any right to criticize him.”

There were gasps, wide eyes, and surprised murmurs. Several people in the group took a closer look at the kids.

“No way… we can have kids with those things?”

“If I got grabbed, I wouldn’t even be able to resist…”

“Do you think they do that? Before they eat us?”

_I’d never do that to Angel!_ That accusation was Red’s limit, and he wished he could curse them out, but his voice refused to work in front of so many people.

“It doesn’t work like that,” Sans said calmly. “It has to be consensual. Don’t go spreading weird rumors.”

Blueberry wasn’t being restrained or anything. Nobody thought he was in any danger with these people. Since Red was just getting more and more nervous, the baby swam over to comfort him.

When Red didn’t even react to that, Sans grew genuinely worried. He shot Toriel a look and she spoke up loudly.

“Alright, that is more than enough. Red has been very patient with you, but crowds bother him. Please move out of the way this instant.”

Most of the group gave up and swam away, but a few stayed behind looking sheepish.

“Um, if it’s okay, we had some actual questions.”

Sans was pleasantly surprised. “Really? Well, I guess a few minutes would be—” He was stopped when Red grabbed his shoulder.

“I… I can’t anymore. I think I’m gonna puke, Angel.”

“Go take a break. I’ll handle things here.”

Red darted off as soon as he had permission. The kids would be fine with Sans and Toriel, right? They had to be because Red couldn’t stand another second under the eyes of strangers.

How long had that council actually lasted? Red was so stressed out that his sense of time was
distorted. It felt like it could have been a few minutes or a few hours, and he would believe either. He’d felt like he was going to pass out several times during it, but he couldn’t. His instincts had been screaming threats of death at him if he dared to fall asleep in front of dozens of unfamiliar mermaids. Now, his mission was to find someplace dark and secluded—anywhere he could fit would do.

On the way, his magic turned over violently, and he threw up a cloud of red magic. He couldn’t have placed the taste before trying various surface foods, but now he knew his magic tasted like cherries. Flavor aside, though, expelling magic that way was not a pleasant experience. It had been a long time since he was stressed enough to do that. Sans usually calmed him down before it got that bad.

Using the feel of the water currents to guide him, Red found a small cavern in the rock and curled up inside. He took several deep breaths and reassured himself that he was alone and safe. It didn’t take too long for him to start to collect himself.

Red exhaled and opened his eye sockets, looking down at his hands. The strong and sharp claws were trembling, as if he needed any other signs that he needed to get away for a bit.

Sometimes he wondered why he could fight and kill without a single twitch in his soul, but just talking to another person terrified him. It had never really gotten easier after all this time.

After experiencing all of his recent anxiety and finally being able to calm down, Red ended up falling asleep.

Meanwhile, on Sans’s end, the mermaids watched Red leaving with concern.

“Is he okay?”

“He’s just not very good with people,” Sans shrugged. “Usually two or three people plus me and the kids is all he can handle at once.”

The mermaids nodded, and Sans gave them an encouraging smile.

“So, you had questions?”

“Yeah, uh, first, how did you end up living with meroctopuses?”

Sans glanced at Stretch, still hiding behind Toriel and restraining Blackberry—the little guy’s patience was running thin, not that he ever had much of it.

“It was just Red at first. Those three are our kids.”

“They really are?”

“Yeah. Monsters can mate between types if they touch their souls together and wish for it. You can only have one kid at a time though.”

Sans wouldn’t have shared that information with the rude people from earlier, but these folks seemed alright. It was revolutionary information that Sans wanted to share. It would help so many mermonsters.

“So how did Red end up living with you?”
“We met when he caught me stealing food from him.”

They stared at Sans like he was some kind of daredevil paragon, and he chuckled.

“I thought it was a human trap. I wouldn’t have knowingly stolen food from a meroctopus.”

“But he turned out to be nice?”

“Well, he didn’t kill me on the spot. I really thought I was going to die, so I tried to make it up to him by showing him some good spots to put traps. Once we were talking and stuff, he didn’t seem so bad. I asked if I could mooch off of him again sometime as a joke, and he actually said yes. I think he was lonely. So, we started hanging out together and eventually ended up mates.”

“How long have you been together?”

“Let me think… about three matings cycles?”

“What’s it like living with them? Maybe the little ones completely adopted our culture, but I think it’d be hard for that red one.”

“He was was pretty big, too. Does that ever get inconvenient?”

“Hm. Well, there are some differences. No matter what, they still aren’t mermaids. They like their alone time, so they each have their own room at our den. Stretch and Blackberry like socializing, but they don’t need it like we do. As for Red… I mean, we have some pretty big mermaid types in our school, so our den is decently sized. It hasn’t been much of a problem yet. But something to note is that they don’t ever stop growing.”

“You mean he’s going to get even bigger? That’s crazy.”

“It depends on how much they eat. If Red didn’t eat enough, he would actually start shrinking.”

“Does he help your school hunt?”

“He does all of the hunting these days,” Toriel huffed. “And he doesn’t seem to understand the concept of moderation. We have too much food.”

Sans chuckled. “Yeah, he hunts. He also protects the den when he’s home.”

“Is he as strong as the rumors say?”

“Depends on what rumors you heard.” Sans smirked. “But since I’ve known him, he’s never even gotten injured—and I’ve seen him fight three sharks back to back, a whale, and an entire ship full of humans.”

Sans never bragged about himself, but every now and then it felt nice to brag about his mate.

A mermaid’s smile twitched at his claims. “Unbeatable then? That’s pretty much what I heard.”

“He had a lot of old injuries though?”

Sans gave them a half-smile, “He got most of those when he was little. They’re, uh, on their own pretty much from the start. The deep ocean is a lot more dangerous too.”

A mermaid fidgeted. “I don’t want to be rude or anything, but I’ve gotta ask: Do they eat mermaids?”
Sans frowned. “Definitely not the kids. I haven’t asked Red about it, but he hasn’t ever since coming to live with us.”

“What’s the biggest cultural clash you’ve had?”

Now that was an interesting question. Sans had to think on it for a minute.

“Hm, let’s see. Maybe when I found out that meroctopuses don’t have heats… No, it was what came right after that.”

“After that?”

Sans blushed but otherwise kept himself together.

“Mating lasts a long time if you do it the normal way.”

“Oh…”

“There were other smaller things too. I had to explain a lot to him in the beginning.”

“So he didn’t know a lot when you first met him?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say that. If it’s about survival, Red knows more than anybody else I can think of.”

One of the mermaids shot Sans an awkward half-smile, “I only wish we could ask about this stuff directly.”

“Maybe I should check on him.” Sans said. “Make sure he found a good place and is calming down.”

Toriel said she would handle things, and Sans left. Then Blackberry immediately freed himself from Stretch. He swam in front of the mermaids and folded his arms in front of his chest, smiling in a cocky way.

“You’re in luck, miscreants, there’s a model young meroctopus right in front of you! Ask me anything.”

The mermaids looked at each other and at Toriel, and she shrugged with a smile. She would reign Blackberry in if he got out of line.

The first question he got was, “But you’re only half meroctopus, right?”

Blackberry frowned, “What do you mean?”

“Well, one of your parents is a mermaid, and you were raised with mermaids. Can we really get a meroctopus perspective from you?”

Blackberry scowled, and the mermaids were surprised how much malice a child could pack into one look.

“If I’m not sufficient for that, fine. I can still give you the perspective of a “half” meroctopus.”

The mermaids shared some uncomfortable looks, but it wasn’t like they’d run out of questions. One shrugged and took the bossy child up on his offer.
“Alright. What’s it like having a little brother who's a mermaid?”

“Little brother? I’ll have you know we’re twins, and strictly speaking, I’m two hours younger. I just develop faster because I’m magnificent.”

“What’s a twin?”

Blackberry held his chin. “If I must explain: when mates have exactly two children on the same day, those children are called twins. I suppose it’s fair you don’t know it. It is mainly a human concept.”

“You sound like you may have interacted with a human before.”

“My parents and siblings and I regularly visit the surface. My family is good friends with a couple of land monsters named Edge and Papyrus. Uncle Edge in particular is a respectable man of authority.”

“But how do you get around on land? There isn’t any water up there, right?”

Blackberry spoke slowly, pointedly, as if he didn’t expect the mermaids to understand if he was too quick or mumbly.

“I. Have. Legs.”

They looked embarrassed. It was a rather glaring oversight on their part.

“Well, what about the mermaids who go with you?”

“Mother carries them. Next question.”

Sans and Red had mated and even touched souls, so if the mermaid focused, he could locate his mate within a short distance. He followed the trail and was a little worried when he smelled some of Red’s magic on the current. He remembered Red saying something about feeling nauseous. Hopefully, the magic was from that and he hadn’t gotten himself hurt somehow. Sans found Red curled into a ball in a small cave and swam down to lay on his chest. He petted the top of Red’s head until he woke up.

For Red, seeing Sans’s face after a nap was the best way to wake up. There was no question of whether or not he was in any danger.

“Mn. Hey, Angel.” His hands started stroking Sans’s sleek blue tail automatically.

“Hey, big guy.” Sans grinned, “Did you have a nice nap?”

Red seemed to remember where he was and what he had been doing thanks to that question. Immediately, his anxiety started to return. Sweat beaded up on his skull and he fidgeted.

“F-fuck. How long was I gone?”

“Not long. I just thought I should come check on you. Toriel is handling the kids and those curious people.”
Red leaned his head back on the cave wall and let out a breath. “Okay.”

“Hey, you did a really great job today.”

“I didn’t do anything though.”

“Just having you there with us helped a lot. They couldn't ignore what we were saying. And I know just being there was really hard for you, but you did great.”

“Mm… I don’t ever want to have to do that again.”

“Hopefully you won’t have to.”

They shared a minute or two of companionable silence. Sans hadn't come to retrieve Red, just to make sure he was settling down alright. They were in no hurry.

But thanks to those people earlier, Sans had some curiosity leaking into his soul. Now, he and Red were alone. It was a good time to ask about it.

“Red? I have a question.”

“Shoot, angel.”

“Did you ever eat mermaids?”

Red gave him a shocked look. “What?”

“Some people asked about it today. It made me a little curious. If you did, it’s in the past. I wouldn’t judge you for it. But I do want to know.”

“No. I never did.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. I thought about it the first time I killed some, but something about eating someone who was just thinking a minute ago felt wrong. I’d kill ’em if they poked around in my territory or if I felt threatened, but I never hunted them for food.”

“Huh. Are all meroctopuses like that? Mermaids pretty much all think you guys eat us.”

“Like I said before, I can’t talk for anybody but me. I got no idea what the others do.”

“Huh. So I’m guessing you never ate a meroctopus either?”

“Nope. Same reason.”

“Humans and land monsters?”

“Nope.”

Sans laid his head down on Red's sternum. The council meeting had been long, and a nap sounded good. He yawned, "Too bad the council's over. That would have been a good thing to mention."

Red stroked his mate's back until the little mermaid fell asleep. He no longer felt tired himself and was content to watch Sans rest. After an appropriate amount of time had passed, Red carried his still-sleeping Angel back to Toriel and the kids, and they finally swam back to the den.
Chapter End Notes

I feel like I'm coming upon a major time skip or two or three. I have many plans, but most of them need the kids to be a little older.

There are scenes I have mostly written that I want to use... Welp, don't be surprised if that happens. Just two more chapters and we'll get some more new characters. :)
Momma Needs a New Gold Tooth

Chapter Summary

*In which Red goes to the dentist, Stretch is a big brother, and Edge is pregnant.

Chapter Notes

We had a nine-month time-skip, folks. Prepare for more.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

***Nine-Month Time-Skip***

“Hey, look here.”

Sans held Red’s cheeks between his small hands and took a close look at the shark-like teeth, specifically the one gold tooth. Red made a confused sound, but he kept still.

“I saw you picking at this earlier,” Sans said, gently pressing on the implant. It seemed a little smaller than the others around it, and it wiggled a little. Red averted his eyelights.

“It’s loose. Does it hurt?”

Red mumbled, “Not really.”

Sans frowned. A loose tooth would obviously hurt; Red was just using his high pain tolerance to pretend it didn’t. It was also a given that the false tooth would eventually fall out as Red grew bigger without it. Red more than anyone should know how important teeth were.

“Why don’t you want to get it fixed?”

Red started sweating a lot, but he kept his mouth shut. Sans raised an eyebrow. What could make his usually responsible mate act so childishly? He didn’t usually do this with Red, since he was surprisingly fragile, but Sans used his stern voice.

“Red.”

Immediately, he curled in his tentacles and whined because he knew he was in trouble.

“Don’t be mad, Angel. That bitch is crazy; I don’t wanna see her again.”

“Are you talking about whoever fixed your tooth the first time? Who is she?”

“She’s the best healer-for-hire in the deep ocean, but a total fuckin’ sadist. I’d rather lose a tooth than deal with her again.”
So that was it. Sans let out a breath.

“Why don’t we have someone else fix it then?”

Red brightened up. “Can you or Tori do it?”

“I can’t.” Sans said. “We’ll check with Tori, and maybe Alphys. If they can’t do it, people on the surface probably can.”

Red looked uncomfortable, and Sans gave him an encouraging pat.

“We’re getting it fixed either way. Which would be better for you: seeing this deep ocean healer or a surface dentist?”

Red took a shaky breath, “The surface.”

“Oh,” Sans smiled. “I’ll go have a chat with Tori and Alph, and if they can’t fix your tooth, I’ll make an appointment on the surface.”

Normally, Sans would take a nap when he was waiting around for something, but currently, his bed was trembling a little too much for him to get comfortable. The little blue mermaid gave Red encouraging pets and words, trying to help him calm down, but the big guy seemed to have a bad impression of dentists.

Edge and Papyrus were babysitting the kids so Red wouldn’t have anything else to worry about during his appointment.

A nurse stepped halfway into the waiting room and consulted his clipboard. “Red?”

At Sans’s prompting, Red crawled over to the nurse.

“Just the patient please.”

Sans shook his head. “He needs… emotional support.”

The nurse looked down at the clipboard again, then up at Red’s gold tooth.

“Oh. You’re the ones who called the other day. Okay, you can come watch.”

Sans had discussed various things with the dentist's office beforehand. He wanted to make sure he could stay with Red for reassurance, that they knew how to service skeletons, and that Red could actually get into the building. This place treated a lot of monsters, and many of them were big. All the rooms had tall double doors that Red could easily fit through. The actual room the nurse led them to was a little full once Red was inside it, but it was enough.

Once Red had awkwardly crawled on top of the little patient bed, the nurse started setting up his equipment. He took a few x-ray pictures to check for cavities, then let Red pick from a selection of toothpaste. The cleaning felt good. Red would have relaxed and enjoyed it more if he wasn’t so afraid of what was coming next.

When the dentist arrived, Red pulled a few tentacles out of the way so he could reach the little computer in the corner and look over Red’s patient details.

“So you’re my gold tooth replacement. Alright. Looks like you don't have any cavities. Nurse, go
get the numbing agent.” The nurse strolled out of the room, and the dentist wheeled his chair
closer to Red, who once again moved his many limbs out of the way.

The doctor showed Red a black cylinder with a display screen on the far end.

“We’re going to use special glue so the new tooth doesn’t wiggle around. To make sure we use
something strong enough, would you bite down on this for me? Just slowly increase the pressure,
okay?” Monsters all had very different bite strengths, and the best glue was expensive, so this
process was a necessity.

Red nodded and opened his mouth slightly. The doctor inserted the highly-specialized gadget and
nodded as the numbers gradually went up. The gizmo started flashing “ERROR,” and the doctor
shook his head.

“Alright, that’s unexpected. You’ve got some jaws on you, huh? We’ll just use the strongest glue
we have and hope that holds. If not, come back and we’ll fix it for free.”

The nurse returned with the anesthetic, which they applied directly to the bone around Red’s gold
tooth. Every now and then, they prodded the area and asked if he could feel it. After ten minutes or
so, the doctor started frowning.

“Normally we’d switch to injections now, but…”

Sans hummed and thought out loud, “Maybe because Red has his own poison that numbs and
paralyzes people, it won’t work on him?”

The doctor glanced at Sans. “What about sleeping gas. Would that work?”

“I think so, if you used enough.”

Red recalled the time Sans got kidnapped and shook his head. “No, no sleeping gas.”

“But how are we supposed to do the surgery?”

“Just go ahead. I can handle pain.”

The doctor gave his nurse a look, and he left to get a form from the office. “To do this without
numbing the pain, we’ll need your signature.”

Red nodded and carefully pinched the little pen in his claws. He had quickly learned to read after
meeting Edge in order to communicate via text, but he’d never written anything by hand before.
His writing was sloppy but legible.

The most painful part of the procedure was getting the old tooth removed. They did what they
could to loosen the bone around it, but ultimately it came down to whacking it with a tiny hammer
until it popped free.

The new tooth wasn’t solid gold, but a gold-plated implant. It was a monster-made material that
would connect with the user’s magic to grow with them. These things were usually used for
children who lost a tooth, since many monsters only got one set throughout their lives.

When everything was done, the doctor handed Red a mirror.

“Does everything feel okay? It isn’t loose or pinching anywhere?”
Red shook his head, and Sans smiled.

“It looks good, Red. You did a good job.”

Red purred because he’d been complimented.

They paid at the front desk and left to go meet up with the kids. On the way out, Red pocketed a lollipop and ignored the receptionist’s chuckle.

***

Blueberry was famous. He was only a year old, but he was the darling of the camera. Red and Sans had become a famous couple ever since they first started coming to the surface, and their kids were extremely popular on the internet. Of the five of them, Blueberry had the biggest following. He was smaller than Sans, energetic and cheerful, and just being a baby mermaid gave him a huge boost.

Not only that, but he was fraternal twins with a meroctopus. Some humans just ate that up for some reason.

Stretch was taking Blueberry for a walk on the surface. Edge was in the middle of giving Blackberry land combat training, so it was a little too tense at the house to relax.

After the first six months, the meroctopus kids’ absurd rate of growth slowed down considerably. They grew in relation to how much they ate, after all; it took a lot more food to noticeably increase their size past a certain point. Stretch was now about as big as Alphys, and Blackberry was a little bigger than Sans. Blueberry was still only an infant, so Stretch could easily carry him around places.

Stretch was now almost a year and a half old, but he was still a shy person at his core. He was better at hiding it than he was before, though, unlike his mother. The lollipop rolling between his teeth helped a lot with his anxiety. It was distracting and sweet. Too bad sugar seemed to make Red’s anxiety worse.

Blueberry was completely different from those two. His mood seemed to improve the more eyes were on him. He knew almost as many poses as he did words, and there were tourists in town who had come exclusively to take pictures with him. He even offered to pose for people who didn’t ask him to.

“You wan’ pic’ure?”

A woman knelt down and took her phone out.

“Aw~ Sure, little guy. How old are you?”

“I dunno.”

“He’s one,” Stretch said.

“Are you his big brother?”

“Yeah. You must be new. Everybody around here knows us already.”
“I just came here for the beaches,” the woman smiled. She took a picture of herself and the kids, then waved and said goodbye.

Distraction after distraction made any walk without Red an all-day activity, and Stretch was only putting up with it for one reason.

He pushed open a door, releasing a pleasant chime and a blast of cool air. The scent of fresh pastries and frosting was thick in the air.

“Ahuhu~ I was wondering if I’d see you today, dearie.”

Stretch offered a friendly smile to the woman behind the counter. She was a spider monster with six arms and purple skin. Stretch liked her, and she made great sweets.

“Hey, Miss Muffet.”

“What can I get you today, Stretch dearie?”

Stretch took his lollipop out of his mouth. “More of these, and hm… a cream puff please.”

Stretch would have gotten something for his brothers, but Blackberry had adopted Edge and Papyrus’s health nut policies, and Blueberry wasn’t allowed to have sugar. He got hyper like Red did.

“We have a new flavor for the lollipops,” Muffet hummed. “Would you like to try it?”

“Sure. What flavor is it?”

“Honey.”

Stretch shrugged. “Never had it, but I’ll give it a try.”

Stretch paid with a credit card. Edge had finally insisted on opening a separate account for Sans and Red, and Stretch had his own card for emergencies. And for visits to Muffet’s bakery. His mom said it was fine.

Muffet packaged everything extremely quickly, tied a neat little bow at the top of the box, and rang Stretch out all at the same time.

“You have a nice day, Stretch,” Muffet smiled.

Stretch nodded, “Thanks, you too.”

“Bye bye, muffin!” Blueberry beamed.

“Bye, dearie~”

Now Stretch had to get them both home for lunch. He’d eat the cream puff for dessert.

***

Edge mimed yawning as he summoned walls of red bones with perfect precision and timing.
Blackberry assaulted him with blows from summoned bones, but Edge’s guard was perfect.

“Have you been listening to a word I said all year?” Edge taunted. “It really is like fighting an infant.”

Blackberry gritted his teeth and raised a tentacle up into the air, slamming it down as hard as he could. Finally, he managed to break through a wall of bones. After that, he pulled back immediately. Hitting Edge was not part of the exercise.

In fact, there would be considerable consequences if he did accidentally hit the land skeleton, considering he was seven months pregnant.

A womb made of red ectoflesh had formed to carry the child to term. Edge didn't have any preexisting biology there to accommodate, though, so it didn't stick out at all. He was still rocking his usual crop top, tight jeans, and high heels.

Edge had taken time off from his dangerous job to safely have his baby, but he hadn’t given up on Blackberry’s training. He had taught him precision and finesse with his magic attacks, just like Edge’s own style. However, if Blackberry was going to grow up like Red (and had a mess of massive tentacles instead of legs), he wasn’t suited for Edge’s physical combat style. Especially not on land. So instead, Edge taught him to use the advantages of his species. Thus Blackberry's physical combat leaned heavily toward power and throwing his weight around.

Obviously, he should use that to break through the land skeleton’s defense; he would never out-finesse his teacher with magic attacks. It hadn't been perfect, but Edge was satisfied with his performance. The student and master wore matching smirks at the end of their mock battle.

Papyrus leaned out the sliding glass doors, “Alright, boys, that’s enough of that. It’s time for lunch.”

Perfect timing.

Edge followed his husband inside and looked around. “Where are Stretch and Blueberry?”

“They went for a walk,” Papyrus said. “Stretch promised to be back for lunch.”

Not a moment later, the front door swung open.

“We’re back,” Stretch called.

"Right on time," Papyrus smiled.

As they were finishing the dishes, Papyrus brightened up. “I got a text from your parents, kids. Red’s visit to the dentist went well. They’re ready to be picked up.”

Edge wiped his teeth and folded his napkin. “I suppose I’d better go get them then.” He went to grab the keys off the key hook, but Papyrus snatched them away. “I’ll be picking up Sans and Red. You stay home and rest, dear. Keep an eye on the kids.”

Edge flushed and frowned, “Stars’ sake, Papyrus, I can drive a car. I’m not an invalid.” He reached out to take the keys back.

Papyrus held the keys out of reach and narrowed his eye sockets. “I let you do training with
Blackberry. I think I’ve been plenty lenient today.”

Edge folded his arms and looked away. “Be careful with my truck,” he grumbled.

Papyrus smiled triumphantly, “Of course!”

Chapter End Notes

The scary deep ocean healer = Swapfell Undyne.
Muffet = Undertale Muffet.
Edge's baby = ???
Swimming With Sharks

Chapter Summary

*In which we make four new friends.

Chapter Notes

Work is hard. Life is hard. But writing chapters and reading comments is fun. I'm a happy nugget. ;p

More time skips in this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sans and the others weren’t able to be there when Edge was giving birth. He’d gone to some place called a hospital, and non-family wasn’t allowed in the room. They had to wait two days until Edge and the baby could come home.

Their baby came wrapped in a little green bundle. He was tiny—not baby meroctopus tiny, but smaller than Blueberry when he was born.

“He’s cute,” Stretch complimented, smiling when the baby skeleton grabbed his finger. Rus was sharper than Papyrus, but softer than Edge. His little fangs were adorable. “What’s his name?”

“Papyrus,” Edge said proudly.

“You named him Papyrus?” Sans tilted his head. “Won’t that get confusing?”

“We’re going to call him Rus for simplicity’s sake,” Papyrus smiled awkwardly. “Edge insisted on using that name.”

Baby Rus started fidgeting, and it looked like he was about to cry.

“He’s hungry,” Red said.

Edge fixed him with a look of shock. He knew because he was the child’s mother and their souls had been close for a very long time. To some extent, Edge could still feel the changes in Rus’s soul.

Perhaps after three children, you just developed a feel for these things.

“Indeed. I’ll be going upstairs to take care of that.”

“You gonna do that nursing thing?” Sans asked.

“Yes, and it’s private.”
“Alright,” the mermaid backed off easily. He was used to people needing private time. “It’s getting kinda late anyway. We were thinking about heading back.”

“It’s a shame we got back from the hospital so late,” Papyrus said. “I would have at least liked to serve you dinner.”

Blackberry waved down his concern. “We got to meet your child, so the trip wasn’t a waste. As a side note, I used the last of your ground beef.”

Edge’s training has branched into culinary skills on more than one occasion, so Blackberry was the best of the mer by far when it came to cooking surface foods.

Everyone but Blueberry at least knew how to use the stove, but Sans and Stretch were mediocre at best, and the fire made Red nervous.

“I’ll add it to the list,” Papyrus smiled.

The ocean monsters returned to their den, where another infant was waiting for them.

Chara and Frisk were taking turns playing with Alphys and Undyne’s child. Stretch swam over to join them while the others scattered to do other things.

“How was Edge’s baby?” the rosy-cheeked kid asked.

Stretch shrugged. “Healthy and cute.”

“Not cuter than MK, though, right?” Chara held up the armless yellow dinosaur mermaid by his round head, and he giggled. Frisk tickled his belly, and he playfully swatted at her hands.

“All babies are cute. Don’t ask me to compare them.” He opened up a new lollipop and rolled it around between his teeth, “At least his name made sense though.”

“What was his name?”

“They named him Papyrus after his dad, but they’re gonna call him Rus so it doesn’t confuse anyone.”

“Yeah, that makes sense,” Chara nodded. “At least more sense than naming your kid after some fictional cat girl’s mech suit.”

After getting her own phone, Alphys had discovered something called “anime,” and now she and Undyne were obsessed with it.

“They had good intentions, probably.” Stretch mumbled. Frisk shrugged.

Alphys had made quite a scene defending the name. “B-because when all their mech suits are coming together to form the U-ultimate Cutie X, Mew Mew’s mech, MK, becomes the torso, and its arms retract. S-s-so, it’s like MK is always ready to come together with friends! S-since he doesn’t have a-arms just like Mew Mew’s MK! See!”

The response she got had been a unanimous “if you say so” stare. Except for Undyne. She thought the name was kickass.
There were a lot of children around lately, so there was a temporary ban on having any more. They needed enough adults to be able to properly raise them, after all. These precious, previously impossible children.

Well, Red was satisfied for now; Alphys and Undyne were satisfied for now; nobody was really in a rush. Having a break was fine.

***Three-Years Later***

Stretch was content to laze around at the den or on the surface, and Blueberry often insisted on the latter. He needed someone to chauffeur him around on land and always would, but he really liked being everybody’s favorite.

Sometimes Stretch was too lazy to carry him, though, and Blueberry would swim laps around the coast to pass the time. He sometimes managed to convince Red to play tag with him. Red had gotten more control over his ability to teleport, so he and Sans were the only ones who could keep up with Blueberry now. It was just a matter of time until that kid was the fastest thing in the ocean.

Blackberry had graduated from Edge’s training at only four years old. The land skeleton had even assured him he would hire him to work as a guard if he were old enough.

The bossy little meroctopus had also been learning ocean combat and survival skills from Red. Considering his current level of competency and Red’s own ability to teleport when his family needed him, it was reasonably safe for Blackberry to go to the deep ocean on his own. And the kid was proud and insane enough to do it.

While everyone else was relaxing, having fun, etc., Blackberry had taken it upon himself to make a mental map of the deep ocean nearest to the den. He wanted to know, realistically, what kind of threats they might have to deal with. And, if possible, he wanted to make contact with a few of the other mer monster types that lived down there. Mermaids dominated the shallows in this region of the world, and meroctopuses were the only creatures that had ever come up from the deep, so Blackberry and the others were greatly surprised when Red told them there were mer types they’d never heard of down there.

Blackberry wasn’t naïve enough to expect a peaceful encounter with these creatures, but he was prepared to venture down anyway.

On that note, it was shocking just how deep the ocean went. Blackberry had been swimming down at a sharp angle for hours now. It was at the point where he was starting to feel the cold and the pressure as unpleasant. He reached an outcropping of cold black rock and considered turning around for the day. Before that, though, a short rest would be a good idea, and the stone surface seemed safe when he examined it.

When Blackberry put his weight on the rock, he thought he felt a slight shift. Before he could process what that might mean, a sharp pain compelled him to gasp and push off into the water. Seven of eight legs came with him. The last was caught like a vice in a trap made of fishing line and animal bones.

Blackberry quickly applied healing magic to his stump of a leg to stop the red magic pouring out. His soul was racing. To think there were traps around here so advanced that even he couldn’t spot
them! The rusted blades that had severed one of his limbs were clearly made for killing, too. Whoever set this up, they weren’t fooling around.

He was on guard now, and that was good because the one trap he’d triggered set off a series of others, all just as deadly. He dodged the ones he could, but he was too big to slip past most of them. The ones he couldn’t evade, he broke with magical weapons and his tentacles. All of his motions were fluid; no time or energy wasted. Edge’s training had likely saved his life today. Finally, after escaping with nothing but a few gashes and a missing tentacle, all the traps in the area were exhausted.

Blackberry sucked in a breath and, “Who is responsible for this?! Come out this instant!”

There was no response, naturally. But Edge and Red both had a fascination with traps, and they had warned him that there’s no way the owner wouldn’t notice if so many went off in a row. Chain traps like these were for protecting a den, not for catching prey, and the owner would be nearby. Just because he couldn’t see anybody didn’t mean nobody was watching him.

Using the training he’d received from both of them, Blackberry waited until the split instance when he could feel killing intent and summoned bones all around to protect his vitals. Once he felt something connect, he knew the direction of his attacker. He immediately summoned another circle to contain them.

“Your stealth skills are impressive. There wasn’t a single change in the current up until the moment you swung your weapon.”

Edge had taught him how to shape the bones into an effective cage. He did so so he could see his attacker. What he saw stopped all the words he’d been ready to say.

It was a mershark—something Blackberry had never seen before but had heard of from Red—and a skeleton just like Blackberry, with a dingy red tail. That wasn’t what was startling. He was bigger than Blackberry, with dangerous, jagged teeth and strangely brittle-looking, graying bones. One eyelight seemed to be dead, and the other was an overblown, blood-red ring. There was a massive hole in his skull.

Blackberry didn’t know how this person was alive, let alone how they could set up such a praiseworthy ambush.

The wounded mershark had on a manic grin, and it got wider when he saw Blackberry go speechless.

“What’s matter, kid? Ya look like ya seen a ghost.” Blackberry continued to stare at the hole in the stranger’s skull, and it made him let out a dry chuckle. “Wow, s’ dead t’night, huh. No life in dis crowd.”

“You’re… cracking jokes in your state?”

The stranger shrugged. “Felt like crackin’ somethin’ ‘sides my head t’night.”

“I’ve captured you! Act a little more dispirited!”

“Nah. M’ in a good mood.”

“Why?!”

“Cause ya captur’d me. Coulda killed me. Didn’t. Figure m’ good.”
Blackberry scoffed. “I won’t lower myself to killing a captured enemy, but I will bring you to justice.”

“Fer what?”

“You intended to kill me!”

The mershark smiled even wider—almost enough to split his skull.

“Welcome ta da deep ocean. Where’ve you been?”

The mershark swung his arm, and Blackberry saw that the weapon he’d been using all this time wasn’t magical. It was a chipped and rusted axe from the surface. To Blackberry’s shock, that pathetic blade smashed through his bone cage like it was dead coral, but he knew why when he felt the killing intent coming off the mershark in waves. It was strong enough that he wouldn’t need magic to compete with Blackberry. If he used magic on top of that…

Blackberry was already wounded. His pride was on the line, but so was his life.

“Mom!”

Blackberry had experienced the pain of losing a tentacle. There was no way Red hadn’t teleported to aid him. He was just hiding for some reason Black didn’t understand.

But at his baby’s call, Red revealed himself. Immediately, the mershark was pushed to the losing side of the conflict.

“Heh. S’ playtime over?”

“Figured ya noticed,” Red growled, and the mershark grinned insanely.

Now that Blackberry was a step away from the combat, he had the time to reason through a few things. Red had probably been waiting either to give Blackberry a chance to prove himself, or to follow the mershark back to his den and destroy any school he might or might not have. Blackberry could absolutely picture his mother doing that as revenge for removing one of his children’s limbs.

And the mershark thought the same thing, which is why he didn’t run back home when he had the chance.

That realization startled Blackberry. If that was the case, then there must actually be something back at this mershark’s den worth protecting.

“Don’t kill him, mother! I have questions for him.”

Red growled, but nodded, and the mershark smiled wider. “Heheh. Givin’ me hope’s pretty cruel, kid.”

It took Red a minute, which testified to the mershark’s strength, but he did manage to capture him. There was no escaping from Red’s tentacles.

“Ask yer questions, sweetheart.”

“Gladly.” Blackberry got close enough to be intimidating without being in any possible danger. “Who are you protecting?”

The mershark’s smile didn’t twitch. “Jus’ kill me already. Wha’s takin’ so long?”
Blueberry persisted. “Will they be alright without you? Can they still survive on their own after we kill you?”

The mershark’s smile started to falter, and Blackberry’s grew wider.

“Depending on what reasons you had, I may be willing to overlook this less-than-pleasant encounter.”

The mershark frowned. “Fuckin’ kill me already.”

His stubborness made Blackberry mad. “I consider myself a fair and just mer, but you’re trying my patience.”

Red decided to back his baby up a little. “Do ya think I won’t find ‘em if ya keep quiet? Ya don’t seem like the naive type.”

The mershark’s frown deepened, and he started to thrash in Red’s grip, even giving him a good and deep gash with his razor-sharp claws. He laughed dryly when the giant meroctopus didn’t even flinch.

“Heheh. Fuck.” The mershark turned his one eyelight to Blackberry. “Ya promise ta let us go if I tell ya?”

“I’m a monster of my word.”

The mershark reached up and dug his claws into his dead eye socket, grinning a manic grin. He took a minute to collect his words.

“... ‘S my bro. He’s starvin’. Can’t hunt. I can’t neither.” He released his eye socket to tap near where his skull was broken open. “Can’t go too far or I forget how ta get back. Had ta hide da place good ‘nuf dat other mersharks can’t find it. All we got’s traps. Ain’t so picky wha’ falls into ‘em.”

Blackberry’s face contorted. “You were planning to eat me?”

“Take a look around. Ya see anythin’ else we can eat?”

Blackberry looked at Red with wide eye sockets, silently asking for… something to help this situation make more sense. What he saw on his mother’s face was a combination of disgust, understanding, and pity.

Blackberry firmly reminded himself that he wasn’t in the shallows.

Out of the corner of his vision, he spotted the tentacle he’d lost to the mershark’s trap. He swam over to retrieve it and looked at it sourly.

“Well I suppose I can’t use this anymore. Giving it to you is better than letting it go to waste.”

The mershark’s already bloated eyelight swelled to nearly fill his entire socket.

“You fer real? Yer lettin’ me keep dat?”

Blackberry nodded and grimaced. “The thought of someone eating it sickens me, but yes.”

Red felt a distinct change in the mershark’s body. All the hostility had gone, so he released him slowly. The deep ocean creature swam forward carefully to accept the severed limb. When
Blackberry really did give it up freely, he smiled. It was creepy and insane like always, but softer than before.

“Yer alright. Bet Crooks’d like ya. He likes e’ryone though.”

“I’d like to make a deal.” The meroctopus kid said firmly.

The mershark held the severed tentacle close to himself and backed off. “Ya can’t have it back. S’ mine now.”

“It has nothing to do with that. I’m proposing to deliver you food in exchange for visiting your den and meeting your brother.”

Two sets of eye sockets turned to Blackberry in shock.

“Uh, sweetheart,” Red trailed off, unsure what to even say.

“Am I correct to assume you’ll stop eating people if you have enough food?” The child pressed.

“Anythin’ edible’s fine.” The mershark looked to be in a bit of a daze, but his expression hardened a moment later. “Food first, then ya can meet ‘im.”

“Then we have a deal.”

The mershark looked at the food Red was toting with him, eyelight wide and trembling.

“I killed them myself,” Blackberry said proudly, placing his hands on his hips and smirking.

The mershark’s eyelight returned to its normal bloated size, and he seemed pretty steady.

“M’ Axe,” he finally introduced himself.

“Call me Black, and this is my mother, Red.”

Red grunted.

“Dis way.”

Axe led the way to his den. It was very well hidden, but not small; Red and Axe were close to the same size, with Axe being just a little smaller.

The inside was incredibly dark. Even meroctopuses like Red and Blackberry couldn’t see more than a few feet. There were bones and scales littered around on the floor near the entrance, but it got cleaner the farther in they went. Still, there was no plant life down here, so there was nothing but hard stones wherever one looked. Maybe some sand here or there.

“Watch out,” Axe mentioned, “s’ a trap here.”

Blackberry shot him an incredulous look, “Inside your den?”

Axe chuckled but didn’t bother to explain.

The cave continued as a small labyrinth. Without Axe to guide them through it, it would have been hard to navigate. There were likely more traps scattered about as well. Finally they reached a room,
where a very long and lanky figure was sweeping some sand into a small pile.

“Hey, bro,” Axe called softly.

Another skeleton mershark turned around. Gangly would probably be a good way to describe him. He was very long and much too thin for his length. It was only in torso length, but he was the first sentient creature Blackberry had ever seen who was larger than Red.

“Oh, Axe, welcome home.” Crooks had a grating but quiet, high-pitched voice, and he spoke with a noticeable lisp. He tilted his head. “Do we have guests?”

“Yep. Made some friends.”

Crooks swam closer with his hands clasped together. “Really, brother? Oh, that’s such good news! My name is Crooks. May I know yours?”

Blackberry barely heard what Crooks was saying; he was too busy staring in shock. Now that the mershark was closer, Blackberry could see that his bones were grayish and looked extremely brittle. He looked even more gaunt up close. His eye sockets were small and sunken, and his teeth… If Blackberry thought Axe’s teeth were jagged and crooked, this was on a whole different level. Crooks’ teeth were all either much too long or much too short. Not a single one was straight, and many of them curled in strange directions. They overlapped each other, crossed, grew in front of or behind already-existing teeth… Blackberry understood why Crooks had a lisp; it was a miracle he could speak clearly at all with a mouth like that.

And what was worse, the tips of several teeth were cracked and stained with red magic, as if they’d been broken off and filed down before, just to grow back even worse. It looked extremely painful—and here was the person with that mouth, putting on his best approximation of a smile.

Crooks tilted his head, and Blackberry snapped out of his trance. “I’m Blackberry, but you may call me Black. This is my mother, Red. You’re… Crooks?”

Blackberry had the sudden and horrifying thought that this poor creature might have been named after his horrible teeth.

“Yes! It’s so good to have guests over. Nobody ever comes down here.”

Axe chuckled. “What’re ya sayin’, bro? We’ve had plenty of people fer dinner.”

Crooks shot his brother a stern look and glanced back at the meroctopuses anxiously. “Yes, well…” His small and faint eyelights landed on Blackberry’s half-regrown tentacle. “Oh dear. Did my brother…?”

Blackberry waved his hand dismissively. “Call it a donation. Speaking of which.”

Red set the fat tunas Blackberry had caught in front of him, and Crooks’ dull, blood orange tail flicked in excitement.

“Oh my! Could it be… you brought that for us?”

Blackberry nodded, and Crooks beamed, though it was quite painful to look at.

“We will gratefully accept! Will you stay for dinner, friends?”

Blackberry shook his head. “Don’t mind us. You need that food much more.”
“No, no, I insist! There is plenty to share.”

Blackberry scowled. “No there is not! You and your brother are clearly malnourished. Just obediently eat what’s given to you.”

Crooks frowned sadly and wrung his hands. “First my brother and now you. You did the work to catch it, so please let me prepare it in exchange.”

Blackberry folded his arms and huffed. “Do as you please.”

Crooks smiled again. He began butchering the fish with expert precision, though Axe lent him a hand here and there where a little more force was needed. There was absolutely no waste left over when Crooks was done.

And then he treated the meat with magic. Red was surprised to see that, considering he hadn’t learned that technique until he left the deep ocean. Something about the way Crooks did it was different though. The meat almost glittered when he was done.

“Please, help yourselves,” the gangly mer smiled.

After Axe ate a small bite, Red tried a little to make sure it was safe for Blackberry.

It was the most amazing thing he’d ever tasted.

“Holy fuck,” he muttered.

“Do… do you like it?” Crooks wrung his hands nervously, and Red could only nod.

Blackberry ate some and gasped. He could hardly believe what he’d just tasted. This malformed mershark must have been the best cook in the whole ocean.

“Outstanding. This is absolutely delicious.”

Crooks set a hand on his sternum and sighed. “Oh thank goodness. I’m glad you liked it.”

“Now you, bro,” Axe said sternly.

“Oh, don’t worry about me. I’m not even hungry—”

“Eat.”

Crooks flinched at his brother’s scolding, and Axe grinned dangerously. “If ya won’t eat, I won’t eat either.”

“It… it was worth a try.”

Blackberry had to look away. He couldn’t stand how painful Crooks’ chewing looked.

After the starving mersharks had eaten their fill, Blackberry asked the number one question on his mind.

“Why don’t you move up to shallower waters? There’s more food up there.”

Axe rolled his bloated eyelight in its socket. “Dere was a reason, but…”
“The school fell apart. Remember, brother?”

Axe tugged on his dead eye socket and shook his head.

Crooks sighed and gave the merocptuses a soft smile. “There was a major falling out in our school after a long time without finding much food. Axe protected me and got that head injury because of it.”

Blackberry glanced at Axe, but his expression made it clear he didn’t remember any of this.

Crooks continued, “Mersharks hunt in packs in case we stumble onto a powerful meroctopus, but we don’t really get along very well. Even so, without numbers on our side, life down here is a struggle. There was already a food shortage even before things fell apart.”

“Then go higher,” Blackberry said. “I’ve seen how your brother fights. Mermaids shouldn’t be difficult to deal with.”


Red noticed a series of slits along the mersharks’ tails.

“You have gills?”

Axe blinked slowly. “Yeah?”

“Can ya make more?”

Crooks templed his phalanges. “I’m afraid I don’t follow.”

“Ectobiology can change, right? Maybe ya could grow more gills if ya tried, and then ya could handle the shallow water.”

It was a long way back to the shallows; Red and Blackberry were running out of time for their visit, but they left their new acquaintances with that little idea to chew on.

Chapter End Notes

Rus = SwapFell Papyrus. Lots of people guessed this one. Congrats :)
MK = Undertale Monster Kid
Axe = Horrortale Sans
Crooks = Horrortale Papyrus

There’s gonna be a lot of angst circling these shark boys. But, knowing me, I’ll somehow write in a bunch of fluff even if I try not to.
What was supposed to be an ordinary morning at the den turned into something different when people started filtering out of their rooms. The first people to start swimming around were the kids. All the mermaid children shared a room and usually ended up sleeping in a pile, so when Blueberry decided it was time to start the day, the rest were sort of forced to wake up with him.

Giggling and ready to fit in some playtime before it was time for their chores, they swam into the biggest community room.

And then the rest of the school was woken up by the sound of children screaming.

Red arrived first, followed almost immediately by Sans and Toriel. Undyne and Asgore arrived with weapons already summoned. Alphys hung back from the action with the two meroctopus kids, although Blackberry soon pushed past her to see what was going on.

He straightened up in shock. There were two unforgettable faces in front of him.

Axe and Crooks had turned up inside of the den without a single person noticing. Their stealth skills were unbelievable.

Naturally, the sudden appearance of two mangled mersharks had people on edge. Undyne looked about ready to fight them off, and plenty of others clearly wanted to run.

Axe ignored all of them and locked eyes with Red.

“Ya were right ‘bout makin’ more gills.”

“Please pardon us for coming in unannounced,” Crooks smiled sheepishly. “You were all sleeping peacefully, and we didn’t want to wake you.”

Undyne pointed a harpoon at the intruders.

“Red, do you know these punks?”

Axe glared at the weapon. “Better quit dat, snack. I ain’t had breakfast yet.”
Undyne barred her shark-like teeth. “Oh yeah? You wanna go, punk?!”

Axe’s jagged teeth smiled wider, but Crooks interjected.

“Brother, we are guests here! We will not eat our hosts.”

“Wha’s a few more bites, really?”

“Brother, I don’t think your jokes are appreciated here.”

“A few more bites?! Is that what happened to Blackberry?!”

“Enough of this,” Black sighed. “You are antagonizing each other for no reason. I allowed them to eat my severed tentacle, Undyne. It wasn’t any use to me anymore, and the trap Axe used to take it was truly praiseworthy. We have already established that they will not eat sentient beings as long as they are satiated, so let’s have breakfast before going any further.”

And so there was a very awkward breakfast including three different mer species. Despite being starving, Axe ate slowly while keeping an eye on all the others. He stopped entirely whenever Crooks stopped eating, forcing the gangly mer to chew through the pain.

After dinner, Toriel started.

“So… I am Toriel, co-founder of this school. What were your names?”

“Oh! I’m Crooks, and this is my brother Axe. Thank you for breakfast. It was delicious.”

“Yes, well, it is a pleasure to meet you both. You seem to know Red and Blackberry.”

“Indeed we do. Blackberry fed us when we desperately needed it, and Red gave us advice that helped us leave the deep ocean. I,” he hesitated and glanced sheepishly at the two. “I would consider them friends, but I’m not sure how they feel. We just came here because we didn’t know anywhere else to go in the shallows.”

“Anywhere else dat wouldn’t attack us,” Axe added darkly.

“How did you find us?” Blackberry genuinely wanted to know.

“Followed yer smell,” Axe said.

“All the way from the deep ocean?” Red was impressed. He thought he had a good sense of smell.

“We are, in a certain sense, sharks,” Crooks smiled meekly. “Which is good, because it’s very bright up here and it’s made my eyesight even worse.”

“Do you have trouble seeing, Crooks?” Toriel asked softly.

He ducked his head and twiddled his thumbs. “I was born with… a number of defects.”

Toriel felt sympathy well up like it did anytime she saw someone troubled.

“I cannot promise anything, but I could try healing magic if you’d like.”

“Don’t bother,” Axe somehow glared even with his sockets wide open. “Crooks’s da best damn healer in da ocean.”
“I’ve tried his cooking, and I’m inclined to believe that statement,” Blackberry nodded.

“It isn’t like I doubt your abilities, Miss Toriel,” Crooks said softly, “but healing won’t work. This is my natural state; it’s what the magic would return me to.”

“Maybe a surface doctor could do something,” Sans offered.

“They have gills, Angel. I dunno if they can go to the surface.”

Sans raised his eyebrows and noted the many slits on Axe and Crooks’ tails.

“Can you two breathe air?”

“Never tried,” Axe shrugged. “Dis’s da farthest up we ever been.”

The conversation reached a natural lull, and Undyne immediately steered it back to somewhere dangerous. “So you guys eat people?”

“Well,” Crooks wrung his hands. “From time to time.”

“They were starving, Undyne.” Blackberry glared half-heartedly. “They had no choice.”

“Actually, even ’fore dat, our school ate people,” Axe threw in for no goddamn reason. “Mersharks’re naturally people-eaters.”

“Really not helping your case, pal,” the fish mermaid glared.

Axe stared back without flinching. “Da school fell apart when dey tried ta eat Crooks. Lotta people died fer dat. Da head bitch was a fish too. Ya kinda remind me of her.”

“Is that a threat, punk?!”

Axe tapped the side of his skull, a little below the large hole. “She gave me dis. Really fucked things up fer me, but m’ gettin’ some memories back thanks ta yer stupid face.”

“That is a terrible wound.” Toriel quickly tried to steer the conversation anywhere besides where it was going. “But I assume your brother has already done all that could be done?”

Axe’s eyelight shifted to her, and he gave a slow nod. “Yeah. I’d definitely be dead without ‘im.”

“He was unconscious for days. Scared me half to death,” Crooks said softly.

Crooks kept chatting with the meroctopuses’ school for several minutes. That was good; he needed more people to talk to. People who would remember what he said.

Axe let him enjoy himself and started surveying the school. There weren’t many people in it, and they were all very diverse. Most of them were mermaids, though. Mermaids weren’t quick to get violent, and they preferred talking to fighting. The meroctopuses in this school were pretty much domesticated. Nobody here wanted to eat Crooks.

A grin stretched Axe’s face, and it caught Undyne’s attention.

“If you’ve said your thanks to Blackberry and Red, you can leave now.”
Crooks had been opening up and enjoying some pleasant conversation, but his body language became sad and defensive.

Toriel frowned.

“Do not be rude to our guests, Undyne. They came a long way, I am sure they would like to rest a little.”

“Right,” she barked a laugh. “I’ll back off, and then you’re gonna invite them to stay the night. Tori, they eat people. You think I’d be okay with this?”

Axe fixed his sight on the fish, the only person so far who was openly against their presence. Should he try to say something to improve her opinion? Threaten her? Kill her? That would probably backfire.

“I’m so sorry.” Crooks sounded and looked disheartened. “We’re imposing on you aren’t we?” He stood up and wrung his chipped hands. “We can leave.”

Undyne looked like she felt a little bad about it, but she wasn’t backing down. The others looked ready to accept it since Crooks himself said they would go.

“No,” Axe stared out at the school. “We ain’t healthy. We can’t do dat swim twice in one day.” He focused his gaze on Undyne. “Ya gonna make us wander in unfamiliar waters? Ya know what’ll happen if someone tries ta fight us. Dat’ll be on you.”

Crooks flushed pink and raised his voice a little. “Axe! Enough of that! We’ve overstayed our welcome. I don’t want to be remembered as a bad guest.”

Undyne all but ignored crooks. Her yellow eyes narrowed at Axe, matching his dangerous stare.

“Bastard. One night under my guard. Would that satisfy you, you freak?”

Axe chuckled darkly. “Nope. We wanna live here.”

A vein bulged in the fish mermaid’s neck, and she gritted her teeth. “Excuse me?”

Crooks was just panicking now, looking helplessly between his brother and Undyne, unable to stop either of the stubborn mer.

“M’ one thing, but ya’d be crazy ta turn Crooks away. He has da best healin’ magic in da ocean. ‘E’d be an asset.”

“You’re really goddamn pushy, you know that?”

Undyne started leaning into an attack posture, so Blackberry cut her off.

“You will most likely lose if you fight him,” he warned. “He bested me even without using his magic.”

“Maybe,” Undyne glared directly at the mershark, “But I get the feeling that this guy is that type; if you give him an inch he’ll take a mile. So I’m not backing off.”

“We got one night?” Axe confirmed.

“And then you’re gone,” Undyne nodded.
Axe grinned wide. “I’ll use dat time ta change yer mind.”

Undyne matched his smile. “Good luck, punk.”

Throughout the course of the day, the mershark brothers were perfectly helpful and well-behaved. Obviously, Axe was trying to earn a spot for him and his brother in their school, but Crooks was just normally like that.

Speaking of the lanky dentist’s nightmare, he helped cook lunch and dinner, redefining what everyone thought good food was. Toriel asked him to teach her his technique, but she wasn’t able to replicate it. Despite looking big and awkward, Crooks had an inconceivable level of control over his magic. His technique required nearly unreachable levels of precision.

As for Axe, he found the pile of traps Red and Blackberry were repairing in their spare time. Years of use and struggling prey had worn them down. But they were both busy mer, so very little progress had been made in a while.

Axe didn’t need to be taught how these particular traps worked. He just saw and understood, then he fixed them all in about two hours.

He napped after that. Undyne attempted to sneak up on him once, hoping to prank him with some leeches in exchange for him getting on her nerves earlier.

He woke up the second she entered the room.

“Didn’t take ya fer da clingy type.”

“Dammitt! You win this one, freak.”

When it was about time for everyone to go to sleep, Axe went to Toriel to appeal again to join their school.

“We ain’t useless,” he told her. “And we’re used ta livin’ in a school. We won’t cause trouble. Won’t even eat nobody.”

“I understand,” Toriel nodded, frowning sympathetically, “but we make all of our decisions as a group. As long as Undyne can’t accept you two, I mustn’t force her to endure it.”

For mersharks, every school had an alpha who could override decisions, so Axe hadn’t expected this. He was left with no choice but to go convince Undyne directly. No more teasing; he would be serious and change her mind.

“You’d better be ready to leave in the morning, Axe.” She was in excellent form tonight as well.

Axe smiled like usual. “I get where yer comin’ from. I wouldn’t wan’ me here neither.” She watched him skeptically. “But ya should know by now dat dere’s no reason ta kick out Crooks. He’ll be nothin’ but nice n’ helpful.”

The fish mermaid sighed and crossed her arms. “Yeah, I’ve been watching. That dude’s sweeter than Asriel.”

Axe’s eyelight swelled. “So…?”

“I can’t,” she shook her head. “Nice as he is, he still eats people. I just can’t let that slide. No
amount of good cooking is going to make up for that. I wouldn’t even know if he was feeding me somebody!”

His eyelight deflated to its usual size. “He’s a great healer too.”

“I’m sure it isn’t that amazing.”

“You’ll believe it if ya see it.” He turned around. “Come n’ see.”

Undyne sighed, but she felt bad so she decided to give him a chance. She followed Axe to one of the common rooms where Crooks was tidying up some to make a place for them to sleep.

“Hey bro,” Axe gathered Crooks’ attention.

“Yes, Axe? What is it?”

Axe took out his weapon and swung it against his chest as hard as he could. Dust and red magic filled the water, and the bones cracked almost to shattering.

“**Brother!**” Crooks practically screamed. He was shocked that had just happened right in front of him.

People sped in like torpedos. At the sight of Axe on the ground, Toriel slapped a hand over her mouth and Sans went pale. Alphys directly passed out. They were the three best healers in the school, but that was quite simply a fatal injury. Even working together, they couldn’t do anything.

Crooks had tears in his eye sockets, but he fixed his jaw and refused to cry. Instead, he got right to work healing Axe. Undyne just backed up slowly, repeating “What the fuck?” to herself under her breath.

He was asleep for two days, and Toriel refused to cast them out like that. Hell, even Undyne was too baffled to speak out much.

When Axe finally woke up, Crooks started crying. He was a silent cryer, but the magic pink tears were being carried off on the current in thick drops.

“How could you be so reckless?! Axe, you idiot! I was scared to death!”

Axe flinched at the loud noise, but his crazy smile was a happy one.

“I don’t remember nothin’, but lemme guess. I tried ta off myself?”

Crooks let out a quiet sob and nodded. “Why, brother?”

Axe looked around at the rest of the school, gathered to hear this. “‘Cause I knew ya could save me.”

“Brother, that isn’t--”

“--I was da only one who knew dat.” Crooks shut his mouth, and Axe grinned at Undyne. “See? Ya’d be crazy ta turn away a healer dat good.”

“You’re the crazy one here,” she muttered half-heartedly.
“Well I do got a big fuckin’ hole in my skull,” he beamed maniacally at her. “So can he stay?”

“He can stay,” she said, defeated. “You can both stay. I can’t turn away someone with the guts to die for their brother.”


“Just, no more eating people.”

“Oh, certainly not!” Crooks said in a hurry. “Since it makes you all so uncomfortable, we wouldn’t dream of it. Isn’t that right, Axe?”

“Sure, why not?”

And so, their little school had grown a little bigger and a little stranger yet again.

Chapter End Notes

This isn't even the end of the planned cast. I still have six more skeletons to bring in at some point. And maybe more along the way.

Everybody gets time to be developed and established, though, so it will take some time.

I guess this fic ends when I run out of skeletons???? Idk where I'm going with any of this, but it sure is fun. :3
Alphys and Asgore got to work right away constructing new rooms for Axe and Crooks. Like the meroctopuses, they preferred as little light to leak in as possible. And, unlike the meroctopuses, they weren’t really fans of tight spaces.

It was a pretty big project, so it was expected to take a few days. Crooks came forward right away and offered to help. He really wasn’t very strong, considering his size, but he did his best. Axe didn’t look like he was planning on helping, but he was there the moment Crooks bit off more than he could chew.

“I got dis, bro. Take a rest.”

Crooks hung his head but nodded. He went and found some lighter chores he could help with instead.

Now that Axe was off his tail and helping, he would do it properly, but he couldn’t help but think there was someone stronger with a few more limbs who would have been better suited for this.

“So’ Red out huntin’ or somethin’?”

“Y-yeah,” Alphys answered. "He's usually out most of the m-morning."

“How’d he end up here? I never seen a Meroctopus livin’ in a school.”

“Oh,” she spoke absentmindedly while measuring a section of wall, "h-he’s Sans’s mate.”

Axe’s single eyelight shrunk. “Da sleepy lil’ blue one? Fer real?”

She smiled, “Y-yeah. Stretch, Black, and Blueberry are their kids.”
“Dey had kids t’gether?! ”

Was the hole in his skull acting up again? According to Axe's memory, different types of mer couldn't breed together?? But a mermaid and a meroctopus managed to have three kids???

“We didn’t know it was possible e-either. Th-they learned how to do it after g-going to the surface.”

Axe found his balance again quickly. “Da surface, huh? Crooks n’ me prob’ly can’t go dere. Bu’ I guess da leggy boys carry da rest of ya around?”

Alphys hesitated, tipping her head in thought. “Actually, most of us haven’t gone up there.”

Axe frowned a little. “Why not?”

If the place was so amazing with so much new knowledge and technology, wouldn't they be leaping over the waves to get there?

“Why? Um, that’s a good question. A-at first, it was because Red c-could only carry so many people, but Stretch and Black a-are big enough to help out now. Maybe it’s a-about time we had a look?” The dinosaur mermaid nodded to herself, “I-I’ll talk to Sans about it. I am pretty c-curious what it's like.”

Axe chuckled. “He in charge, huh? Gets ta call da shots fer da big guy?”

“W-well, Red isn’t very good a-at discussions. B-being put on the spot to make a-a decision m-makes him nervous. B-but Sans w-wouldn't make him do something he d-didn't want to do.”

“Ain't good at yer kind of d'scussions, I guess.”

Alphys paused in the middle of picking up a chunk of coral and frowned a little, “O-our kind? What do you mean?”

Axe grinned his signature insane smile, and his eyesockets narrowed dangerously. “He’s real good at givin’ threats.”

Oh yeah, Red didn't even have to say anything, and Axe already knew exactly what would happen if he overstepped his bounds and hurt someone in this school. He would be dead—nobody would be able to talk Red out of it. It was a really impressive unspoken threat that poured out of every ounce of his body language when the mersharks had first arrived. Axe considered himself the observant type, but he couldn't have missed that if he'd tried. Nobody who knew how "discussions" worked in the deep ocean could have.

But that was fine. It wasn’t like Axe was some mindless killing machine just because he liked the taste of monsters. If he didn’t have to do anything, he wouldn’t. And also, he had given his own silent ultimatum right back: "you hurt my family, I hurt yours."

It might sound excessively hostile, but they understood each other. Nobody was going to pull anything on the other's watch.

Alphys and Asgore reached a point in the construction where they decided it was time for a break, so Axe immediately went off to find a good spot to nap. No sooner did he lay down and close his sockets than he felt someone else enter the room. He could tell from the change in the current that
it was one of the kids, so he decided to stick to what he’d been doing. But he felt them reaching toward his face and opened his eyes.

He caught Blueberry about to poke his cheek.

“Wha’s up, berry?”

“Blueberry!” the mermaid said brightly.

“Snack,” Axe corrected. He sat up begrudgingly. “Whadaya wan’?”

“Do you wanna play tag with me?”

“Nope.” Axe started to lay back down.

Blueberry wasn’t discouraged. “What about racing?”

“Ain’t got energy fer dat, kid.”

“Hide and seek?”

Axe sighed through his nasal hole. “Yer stubborn. Can’t ya jus’ play wit’ da other kids?”

“Yeah,” he said. “I’m inviting you to play with us!” Blueberry lowered his voice to a stage whisper and leaned forward. “They’re scared of you and Crooks, but everybody will be friends if we play together!”

“You ain’t scared tho?”

The mermaid child puffed up his chest. “I’m not scared of anything!”

Axe chuckled. “Yer cute, kid.” He rolled his eyelight around a bit. An opportunity for Crooks to make friends, huh? The mershark forced himself to sit up. “Fine, hide n’ seek. Le’s go get Crooks.”

“Oh! I know where he is!”

Blueberry led the way to another common room where Crooks was folding fresh kelp into little pillows.

“Hey, bro.”

Crooks frowned suspiciously. “Hello, brother. I thought you’d be napping by now. You aren’t planning on doing something foolish, are you? Because I’m getting Deja Vu.”

Axe resisted blinking in confusion. Something foolish? What did he do? Crooks rarely ever used his stern voice like this. No, because his memory was garbage, Axe never did anything he wouldn’t do again. More importantly, if he thought too much about it now, he would forget what he was supposed to be doing.

“Nothin’ bad, bro. We got invited ta play a game.”

Crooks sat up a little straighter. “We… really?” He set down his busy work. “Wh-What kind of game?”

“Hide and seek first,” Blueberry grinned, “that was Axe’s pick. But we can do others too! Like tag and racing! Racing is my favorite.”
“I see. They all sound very fun. How do you play hide and seek?”

“One person is it. They count to thirty with their eyes closed while everyone else hides. Then the person who’s it has to come find everybody.”

“We can hide anywhere?”

“Anywhere you can go within thirty seconds. I’m fast, so I can hide lots of places.”

“It sounds simple enough. I’ll do my best.”

“Great! Wait here; I’ll get the others.”

Blueberry swam off, and Crooks looked at Axe in confusion. “Others? It isn’t just us three?”

“He’s tryin’ ta help us make friends,” Axe chuckled. “Sweet kid.”

Crooks' sunken eyesockets stung a little, but he put on his best smile. “He certainly is.”

Axe's eyelight dilated slightly. "Oh! 'fore I forget, got a fun fact. Da berries're twins--brothers. Stretch too."

Crooks let his mangled jaw hang slightly open. "N-not in a biological sense, surely?"

"Yep. No fuckin' idea how, but dey're Red n' Sansy's kids."

Crooks shook his head, but he had on a happy little smile for the odd couple. "The deep ocean is vast, but I'm getting the feeling the world we lived in before was rather small."

Small? Small couldn't begin to describe it. Axe wondered what the people in this school would think--mating and breeding between types, moving between ocean layers, and even socializing with creatures on the surface--of the things that went on in their old little water-tight community.

“I know you’re in here somewhere,” Crooks muttered, leaning down to look inside of cubbies and pushing back seaweed curtains. “I can smell you, Asriel.”

Curled up behind the bowls under the cooking counter, the little goat mermaid slapped his hand over his muzzle. Crooks felt the current stir, and his head snapped in that direction.

“There you are!”

Azzy screamed when Crooks’ face appeared right in front of him, and he hit his elbow on the wall.

“Oh dear! I didn’t mean to startle you.”

Crooks reached under the counter and pulled out the kid who had curled up to nurse his arm.

“There there, it’s not that bad.” Crooks healed the forming bruise in an instant, and the little goat wiped his eyes. “Better?”

“Yeah, thanks.”

He started wiggling, and Crooks let him go.

“Am I the first one you found?”
“Yes. Would you like to help me look for the others?”

“Sure! Um, Chara and Frisk always hide close together.”

“Thank you for the hint.” Crooks swam back to where they all started and tried to pick up the mermaids’ scents. He found them hiding behind a curtain and Sans’s couch in a communal room.

“No fair!” Chara thumped the sand with their tail. “How are we supposed to hide if you can smell us out?!”

“Do something to hide your scent,” Crooks said simply. “Axe and I used to leave bones near the entrance of our den so other mersharks couldn’t find us.”

“Bones huh?” Chara smiled wickedly. “Alright. I’ll outsmart you next time for sure.”

Crooks smiled and turned around. “Come on, let's go find Blueberry.”

Crooks led everyone back to the starting point again and swam around in circles a few times.

Frisk tilted their head.

“Crooks?” Asriel asked.

He stopped swimming and pressed his index fingers together. “Sorry. Axe is better at this than I am. All I can smell is you three.”

Chara shrugged. “Oh well. We’ll split up and find him the hard way.”

Everybody picked a different direction and swam off. After about ten minutes, Frisk returned triumphant, holding Blueberry’s hand.

“So the only person we haven’t found yet is Axe,” Azzy stated.

“He’ll be somewhere we wouldn’t expect,” Crooks said. “Maybe outside, or in somebody else’s room. Pay careful attention to dark corners and shadows, he tends to disappear in them.”

They began the search again, checking everywhere carefully. For such a big guy, Axe was really hard to find.

“He’d better not be moving,” Chara huffed after they regathered.

“Moving is against the rules!” Blueberry replied.

“I told you he’s good at this,” Crooks sighed in light frustration. “Shall we just let him win this round?”

“I’m tired of looking,” Asriel said. “I want to hide again.”

“Agreed,” Chara said, and Frisk nodded.

"If everybody else thinks so, then okay,” Blueberry smiled.

Crooks cupped his long fingers around his mouth. “We give up, brother! Please come out!”

The sand stirred in a corner of the starting room, and Axe’s head popped up out of it. He had been hiding in that dune the whole time.
“Easy,” he grinned.

“Bold hiding technique,” Blueberry commended.

Chara smirked, “You know it won’t work a second time.”

“Ya think I don’t got more?”

The next round, as the last person found, Axe was it. There was no contest at all. He sniffed most of the kids immediately. Chara, he couldn’t smell, so he immediately deduced that they were hiding in the food storage. They were quite upset to be found so quickly. Crooks took longer. Just like his brother, he was good at hiding, despite being huge.

Axe slowly meandered down the halls, scanning the sand, walls, and shadows. At one point he stopped and looked behind him at the group of kids curiously following. He looked at them, looked at his surroundings, and then just looked confused.

“Not a lot to go on with dis one,” he muttered and laughed slightly. Then he looked at the kids again. “Wha’ were we doin’ again?”

“Huh?!” Chara’s face twisted in disbelief. “What do you mean? We’re looking for Crooks! Duh!”

Axe’s lone eyelight shrunk in panic, but he took in the calm looks on the kids’ faces and took a deep breath. Crooks was fine. He wasn’t hurt or lost. The kids just needed him for something. If anything, this was good. His brother was making friends.

“M’kay.” Axe went back to swimming. He looked in all the obvious places, and when he still didn’t see Crooks, he thought things through again. Together with kids, searching for someone trying not to be found...

*Oh. Dis’s a game. I get it.*

He started searching more seriously, but the kids became concerned when he repeatedly looked in the same spots.

“Are you okay, Axe?” Asriel swam up next to him.

Axe moved his eyelight down without turning his head. “Why? M’ I repeatin’ stuff?”

“Yeah…”

“Dat happens sometimes. Don’t worry ‘bout it.”

“Do you forget things a lot?” Chara knocked their knuckles lightly against the side of their head. “Is it ‘cause of that big hole in your head?”

Axe smiled, “Yeah. Sorry if it gets annoyin’. Can’t really help it. On dat note, how long we been at dis?”

“About half an hour?” Asriel offered.

“Alright, Imma call it. Bro! I give up! Come out!”

Distantly, they heard a reply. “Then it is a tie!” After a minute, Crooks appeared before them, beaming. “We have each won one round, brother. I couldn’t find you either.”
“Where were you?” Chara demanded.

“On the roof,” Crooks smiled and pointed up. “The sun is awful, but I knew Axe would wait to search there last because of it. So as long as he just searched inside over and over and nobody else decided to look there, my hiding spot would be secured!” Crooks’ proud smile became bashful. “Sorry for exploiting your forgetfulness, brother.”

“S’ fine,” Axe shrugged. “M’ tired tho. Gonna take a nap.”

“Aw, but we had so many more games planned!” Blueberry whined.

“You go rest, brother,” Crooks said gently. He smiled down at Blue, “I would love to play more games!”

With Axe and Crooks helping where they could, Asgore and Alphys were able to finish building the new rooms in a few days.

The mersharks really were behaving themselves. Or rather, Axe was a lot less trouble than Undyne had expected him to be. He slept a lot of the day. He would work, unlike Sans, but only when he had to. Otherwise, he rested as much as possible. Several of the more observant people had pieced together that it was probably due to his injury, rather than laziness.

Crooks, of course, did his best to help out around the den. He did odd-jobs, chores, cooking, and cleaning. Everybody loved the food he made so much that he’d reduced Toriel to prep-chef. She was more than fine with it, though she did still occasionally attempt to learn Crooks’ technique, to no avail. He was happy to re-teach her every time she asked, though.

Neither of the brothers went outside, like, ever.

“This isn’t the deep, you know,” Blackberry lectured Crooks. He would have said it to Axe too, but he was sleeping. Actually, there was no point since Axe would just forget. “You can go outside. I would even encourage learning the layout of your surroundings.”

The gentle giant wrung his hands. “I would rather not. The sunlight makes my bones sting, not to mention I can’t see anything with all the glare.”

He rolled his eyes and folded his arms, “So go out at night.”

“But I sleep at night.” Crooks sounded so innocent.

Blackberry sighed in exasperation, and Crooks ducked his head. He spoke up as if trying to appease the meroctopus child.

“Um, I think Axe sometimes leaves the den at night.”

Black frowned. “He does?”

“Y-yes. Sometimes he takes too many naps and can’t sleep when he’s supposed to.”

“He really does nap excessively--worse than dad,” Blackberry put his hands on his hips. “I thought he was the proactive type at first, to be honest.”

“Well, he certainly is, but he’d rather sleep if there isn’t anything in particular that needs doing. His injury takes a lot out of him, and he gets more forgetful when he isn’t well rested.”
“Hm. I’m out of the den a lot these days, but even I’ve noticed that.” Blackberry frowned and pondered things. “If magic won’t do it, we could only ask a human doctor for help, but we still don’t know if you two can even go to the surface.”

Blackberry looked at Crooks firmly. “Find out about that, would you? It could be important information in an emergency.”

Crooks wrung his hands. “Emergency? What kind of emergency?”

Blackberry sighed and folded his arms. “It isn’t like I had anything in particular in mind. But we have friends on the surface. They’re willing and able to help. You can find them by the docks two hours that way. Their names are Edge and Papyrus. They’re land skeletons.”

“I… I will remember that.”

“You’d better, because your brother won’t.” Any info they needed Axe to remember, they’d learned to pass along to Crooks. Crooks seemed to never forget anything.

Speaking of the kindly horrorshow, he smiled with a slight wince and changed the subject. “You’re probably heading out again, but Blueberry asked me to pass on a message if I saw you.”

“What message?”

“You’re invited to a race with him.”

Blackberry’s grin twisted maliciously. “Hmph! He’s cocky as usual.” The child turned and shot down the hall. “Blue! Where are you? I accept your challenge, and I will not lose again!”

Chapter End Notes

Black lost.
**School Field Trip**

Chapter Summary

*In which Axe resolves himself and the school goes to see the surface.

Chapter Notes

Hi! Sorry for the slow release schedule lately. I'm working 60+ hours a week lately, and I got a promotion, which means fewer breaks! (More like, my breaks go to keeping up with my paperwork.) I've got a lot written. I just needed time and brainpower to sit down and edit it into something presentable. And I had today off for my birthday! Woot woot!

Here is a magnificent art!

[The Nicest Shark Ever]

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Axe slept most of the day away. It wasn’t until after dinner that he was awake and Crooks had some free time. The gentle horrorshow sought his brother out at the earliest opportunity.

“Brother, Blackberry asked us to find out whether we can breathe air or not.”

Axe responded immediately, “We can’t.”

Crooks was so surprised by the instant shutdown that he couldn’t help but ask again. “A-are you sure?”

Axe examined his brother unblinkingly and nodded. “We can’t. I already tried it. Why’s it matter?”

Crooks hunched his shoulders and wrung his bony hands. “Ah, well, I suppose it would matter if either of us wanted to go see a doctor on the surface.”

Axe’s mind usually worked pretty fast, despite stuttering inconveniently, but he felt it slowing down to a crawl. He couldn’t wrap his skull around why he’d suddenly broken into a cold sweat.

“... Doctor?”

“They… I’m to understand that they heal people without using magic. It’s possible they could do something about my teeth and your head injury.”

Axe’s sockets went wide, and the chills he was feeling intensified. “... M’ gonna go see how long we can hold our breath.”

Axe flicked his tail, transitioning from a ready-for-another-nap posture to a sprint in no time flat. Crooks found himself staring at bubbles and spun around in confusion.
“Axe, where are you going? It’s still light out!”

Crooks swam after his brother, wincing when the afternoon sunlight touched him. It wasn’t like he couldn’t be out in the light, but the stinging sensation really wasn’t comfortable.

At first, Crooks wasn’t sure it wasn’t just another defect of his, but Axe felt it too.

Crooks finally hid in the shade of the rock outcropping Axe had crawled up onto. He swam up enough to poke his head out of the water. As long as his gills were submerged, he could breathe just fine.

Crooks squinted his already small eye sockets to offset the glare, trying to see more of his brother than a blob of grey and red.

“Axe. Don’t just swim off like that. Couldn’t you have waited until night?”

“Pull me in if I pass out, alright bro?”

“I certainly will, but please don’t push yourself that hard!”

“We’ll do ya next.”

“I have to do it too?”

“Don’t make me keep talkin’.”

Oh, right. Axe was testing how long he could hold his breath. Crooks supposed… he wanted them both to do it because there was no guarantee they could hold their breath for the same amount of time. There tended to be some unity among a species, but the mershark brothers had both been through a lot.

Crooks did his part by keeping track of how much time passed. Eventually, Axe rolled over and dove off the rock, and the first thing he asked was, “How long?”

“Two hours,” Crooks smiled. “Are you feeling alright? Are you lightheaded?”

“Lighter den it used ta be,” Axe chuckled. “M’ fine. Didn’t push it too hard.” Axe pointed up at the rock. “Yer turn. I’ll pull ya in if ya pass out, but ya’d better keep time.”

“Can’t we wait until it’s a little darker?”

“No.” If they ever went to the surface for medical treatment, it would be during the day when doctors were awake, right? If the presence or absence of sunlight changed the length of time they could hold their breath, this was the more important measurement to know.

Crooks just sighed and accepted it. Axe was… probably actually crazy, but he always thought things through. Crooks had never seen him make a wrong decision, so he trusted even the choices that seemed arbitrary.

Crooks climbed up onto the rock and laid facing the water so the sun wasn’t in his eyes. He couldn’t make out Axe’s skull among the glittering reflections on the water.

“You’re watching, right?”

“Mhm.”
“Good. Please don’t fall asleep.”

“I’ll be right here, bro. I promise.”

By Crooks’ count, he held his breath for two hours and ten minutes. When he started feeling lightheaded, he began scooting toward the water. Chipped bony fingers grabbed his wrist tightly and pulled him under in an instant.

Crooks winced at the sensation of water running over his dried-out gills. “Thank you, brother.”

“No prob. How long didja make it?”

“Two hours, ten minutes: that’s ten minutes longer than you.”

“Dat’s good. Good job, bro.”

“Nyeh heh,” Crooks laughed shyly. “So, shall we go back now? We left without saying anything. Somebody might be worried.” There was a hint of hopefulness in Crooks’ voice.

“Yeah, I bet dey miss ya,” Axe grinned. “Let’s stay a lil’ longer tho.”

“What for? It’s nearly bedtime, brother.”

“Wanna show ya somethin’.”

Crooks was sleepy and skeptical, but he stayed with Axe for a while longer. Axe kept his one eyelight fixed on the surface. He swam up and poked his head through, grinned, and went back under. “M’kay, come see.”

Crooks followed Axe up and looked around for what he was supposed to be seeing. Axe seemed to be looking straight up, so Crooks tipped his head back.

“Oh! That’s pretty.” Crooks smiled at the moon’s cool glow. “What is it? Some kind of flying jellyfish?”

Axe glanced over where Crooks was looking. “Dat’s a rock. S’ called da moon.”

“A floating rock?” Crooks tilted his head. “But rocks sink.”

“Dat one’s special.” Axe pointed up at another section of the night sky. “Da little ones’re balls of fire. I dunno what dat means, but dey’re beautiful.”

Crooks frowned and squinted, following Axe’s finger.

“... What little ones?”

Axe froze then slowly turned to look at Crooks. “... Whadaya see up dere?”

“Um,” Crooks squinted his sockets more. “A dark grey sky and the moon?”

Axe was quiet for a minute. “S’ more like a black sky an’ a bunch a bright specks.”

“Oh. I can’t quite make them out from here.”

“Mm.” Axe took a second, then shrugged. “Well, dat’s all I wanted ta show ya. Ya can go back n’ sleep now.”
When Crooks was gone, Axe crawled back onto the rock, lying down to watch the stars from the best possible angle. He thought the sky was something amazing. During the day, it was something hot and bright for creatures that liked the shallows, and at night it was cold and dark like the deep, but still oh so pretty.

He reached up and slowly, carefully dug his claws into his dead eye socket, scraping and scratching at the inside until his mind went white. His manic grin stretched wider with the pain.

Crooks was going to get to see the sky this way too, or Axe would personally tear down every star until there was nothing left.

But the moon could stay.

***

Today was a special day. Today, the whole school was going on a field trip to the surface. Well, almost the whole school. Crooks and Axe were staying behind to guard the den.

A week had gone by since the battered Mersharks had joined the school, and they had been on their best behavior the whole time. (Some might be inclined to complain that Axe’s best behavior was him doing nothing but sleeping, but he was behaving himself.) It was clear that the brothers wanted to make this work, and that had done well to increase the others’ confidence in them. They had a budding relationship of trust.

The arrangement actually worked out nicely. The sun stung the mersharks, they couldn’t breathe air, and they didn’t have legs, so they were completely unsuited to the surface. Thus, they didn’t even want to go. It was nice that nobody who wanted to come had to sit out while the rest went above the water to have fun.

After a long swim, everyone was gathered in front of the docks. Before they surfaced, Sans turned around to lay down some important reminders.

“We can only carry a few people at a time, so when it isn’t your turn, don’t wander out of sight of the docks. It’s fine to chat with people and take pictures, but don’t let anyone besides Red, Stretch, Blackberry, Edge, and Papyrus carry you anywhere.”

Before letting the children go up, Toriel and Asgore wanted to see the surface for themselves. They were both pretty large mer, so Stretch and Blackberry couldn’t really help carry them. Undyne and Alphys would pose the same problem later. Red had a long day ahead of him. Thankfully the surface was rather cool in the fall, so at least he wouldn’t turn into calamari on the hot pavement.

“Oh my!” Toriel brushed her wet fur out of her eyes. This was her first time experiencing dripping. It was disconcerting how similar it felt to bleeding, but she quickly gathered that she wasn’t in any danger. Though her wet fur clinging to her body wasn’t a very pleasant sensation, not to mention she felt positively sluggish.

Red was going to voice his usual complaints about coming to the surface, but his train of thought derailed when he looked down at the co-founder of his school. She looked wrong. Like a wet cat. And she looked grumpy about it. Red got stuck somewhere between shock and laughter, and he just stared at her.
Toriel was too busy dealing with this new experience to notice Red, but she clearly heard laughter from just behind them.

“Mom! Oh my god, you look ridiculous!”

Toriel whipped her head around. Stretch had Chara in his arms and was standing on the dock, his head turned away in an armless shrug. She glared at him.

“Chara, dear, you were supposed to wait until I had decided it was safe. And you, Stretch, you are also at fault.”

He turned his head further, “She, uh, just kept nagging.”

“Whatever!” The willful kid beamed, “It’s obviously safe with Red here, and you still saw it before me. It’s fine, right? I wanna look around!”

Toriel opened her mouth, but before she could respond, Blackberry poked his head out of the water.

“Stretch! I only looked away for a second! What do you think you’re doing up there?” He looked down to where the water obscured their vision, “And for stars’ sake stop poking me you infernal creature!” He snapped his head to the soggy goat woman. “Miss Toriel, Frisk is being a pest!”

Suddenly, there was splashing from the direction of the beach, and five heads turned to see little Blueberry crawling onto the sand and grinning like a fool. Asriel followed shortly behind him. The little goat mer lunged forward and grappled Blueberry around his waist.

“You can’t! It isn’t our turn!”

He spotted everyone staring at him and gasped in embarrassment. “Hi, mom.”

Toriel finally just held her head and let out a deep sigh. “It would appear there is no stopping them. Red, dear, would you set me down and go fetch Asgore? It would appear I am needed to supervise things.”

“Uh, yeah, sure.” Things were moving too fast up here for him anyway.

Red set Toriel on the edge of the docks and lowered himself back into the water. It was chaos down below as well. Undyne was playing with MK by throwing him like a torpedo and racing to receive him in a bizarre solo game of catch. The kid was giggling hysterically. Alphys was taking pictures and posting them to social media, “Aerodynamic… thumbs up… winky face.”

Frisk was bothering Blackberry to take her up to the surface, and since they were nonverbal, it was a lot of poking and prodding. The victim of their stubbornness looked about ready to bite their face off.

“Do not test me, you absolute vermin! This is for your own safety!” Frisk reached out fearlessly and gave him a good poke on the cheek. “IF YOU DON’T WANT TO BE SAFE, I CAN OBLIGE! Do it one more time, I dare you!”

Red looked back and forth between the troublesome groups, then looked for Sans and Asgore. They were just watching and letting this happen. Asgore looked like he was amused by the lively young people, but Sans’s lazy grin just said, “meh.”

*Holy shit does that mean I have to do it?*
Red gulped and started sweating. Diffusing things… uh, one looked like a confrontation, but the other was more of a game? How, uh… What would be the best way to… Oh, fuck it.

“Can you guys fucking not?”

It came out as mostly a growl because he was stressed and frustrated, and it stopped everybody in their tracks. Including Undyne. Sans picked that moment to step in, teleporting to catch MK before the baby could fly off into open waters.

Even while she was trembling in place, Alphys managed to shoot off a short tweet: ‘Oops, we’re in trouble. Teehee~.’

Red had managed to put a stop to the chaos, but he didn’t know where to go from there. His expression crumpled into panic now that everyone was looking at him, and he shot a look at Sans. The lazy mermaid chuckled.

“Okay, looks like plan A isn’t working. Everybody just get up on the beach and we’ll figure things out from there.”

“Aw, sweet!” Undyne swam over to retrieve her kid and her mate and bolted for the shore.

Blackberry glared at Frisk. “Do not think you will get whatever you want just by throwing up a fuss. It’s pathetic.”

Frisk shot him a grin, ‘You love me.’

“I told you this isn’t your accomplishment! Don’t look so satisfied!”

He begrudgingly carried Frisk up to go find Chara and Stretch. Red looked at Asgore.

“Yer, uh, Tori wants you.”

“Alright,” the old mer chuckled, “let’s see what all this fuss is about.”

Red set Asgore next to Toriel on the docks while he was still absolutely pouring seawater off of himself.

“Oh my,” he slicked his hair back and blinked a few times.

“My thoughts exactly,” Tori smiled, holding his hand. “It does get a little better as time passes, though.”

Red started fidgeting with his hands, feeling like a third wheel.

“Psst. Hey.” A familiar voice gave him something to focus on. He looked down and saw Sans grinning up at him, his face just barely poking up above the waves. “Do I get to come up too, or what?”

“Shit! ‘Course!”

Red pulled up his mate and held him in what was more of a hug than a carry. Everyone was hopping around on the beach like fucking lunatics, but Sans was always so relaxed. It grounded him. Before Red realized it, he had gone from an anxious mess to purring like a radiator. Gotta love his meroctopus mood swings. What would he do without this lazy little fish around to give him an up-swing every now and then?
It took practically no time for the land creatures to realize there were a dozen mer monsters having a party on the beach (thank you, Alphys, for broadcasting that to the whole fucking world), and they gathered with remarkable speed to take pictures and offer free snacks.

There was also a bit of chatting and cultural exchange. A human man showed Undyne his tattoos and explained the concept.

“Whoa! So it’s like a battle scar except only non-wusses can have them? That’s super neat, dude! Hey, check out this scar I got fighting a swordfish!”

Alphys had found her crowd.

“Y-you like M-mew Mew Kissy Cutie? I’ve seen both seasons and the special release films a-at least three times!” She patted the sand excitedly with her fins. “I-I have a Twitter! W-we can follow each other! It’ll be great! Like pen pals, right?”

Toriel and Asgore were treating this like the vacation it was and enjoying the local foods.

“So this is hot food.” Toriel chewed on a meat skewer given to her by a cat monster. “Sans and the others are always talking about it. I can see the appeal.”

“Perhaps we could get a stove for the den,” Asgore thought aloud. “That fire is a rather beautiful thing. I would like to take some back with us.”

The cat monster looked distressed. “Fire? Underwater? Dude, I hate to break this to you…”

The kids were being kids. Chara and Frisk were eagerly following Blueberry’s lead, posing for the cameras. Stretch and Blackberry were dragged along, but they were tolerating it. Asriel was shy at first, but he was quickly warming up to it. The cute little goat quickly became a crowd favorite, especially once his fur started drying off and became fluffy.

MK had found a crab and was dancing along with it. People were filming every second of it.

Sans watched everyone from a distance while he was held by a purring Red. Everybody was having a good time, so he decided to call the vacation part of this trip a success.

There were some people noticeably missing though.

Sans pulled out his phone and texted Edge ‘yo. where u at?’

He got three rapid-fire replies almost immediately. Edge and Papyrus were good about that.

‘I am at the city limits. People are driving in from everywhere and I have to keep it under control.’

‘Papyrus and Rus will be there to greet you shortly.’

‘I really wish you had told me ahead of time that you were going to do this.’

Sans furrowed his brow and scrolled up through his messages just to be sure. Then he replied, ‘we told you we were bringing everyone here for a vacation.’

‘Yes. However you did not tell me you were going to post it all over social media. You people know you’re famous, right?’
whoops, sorry. that was alphys.

‘I know. I lectured her first and she blocked me.’

‘wait, she blocked you?’

“It happens a lot. She usually unblocks me by the next morning.”

Well if Edge wasn’t upset about it, Sans would let it slide.

After a few dozen more minutes, a red convertible pulled up on the beach. The guards let it right
on through the barricade and queue because, of course, it was their captain’s husband. Papyrus got
out and took Rus out of the baby seat. He carried blanket-wrapped bundle in one arm and a plastic
shopping bag with the other. The cheerful land skeleton called out pleasant greetings to everyone
as he passed by. He had to stop for longer when he reached the docks, since Toriel wanted to see
the baby and be properly introduced.

“Papyrus, I presume.”

“Yes! I’m impressed you got it right on the first try. I do believe we neglected to send any
photographs your way.”

“You text the way you speak, so it was not difficult to piece together.”

“I’ve heard plenty about you, lady Toriel, but not that you are proficient at puzzles. We absolutely
must meet up again to solve some together!”

Toriel smiled sweetly. “That sounds wonderful, Papyrus. I only hope I don’t disappoint you.” Now
that her fur was dry and fluffy, the surface wasn’t so bad. She wouldn’t be so against coming back
at some point.

Papyrus excused himself and walked up to Sans and Red, holding out the small shopping bag.

“So sorry I’m late, but I finished that errand for you.”

“No problem. Thanks.”

Sans took the bag and peeked inside. It contained a box with another waterproof phone inside and a
solar charger. They were for Axe. He had requested a phone of his own to take notes with because
of his memory issues, and since the mershark brothers were guarding the den so everyone else
could have a vacation, Sans thought it would make a nice thank you gift or souvenir or whatever.

“Is Edge still tied up?”

Papyrus smiled apologetically and nodded. “He said he would leave things to his subordinates
once the situation stabilizes.”

Well, that was if it stabilized. Alphys had accidentally made a mess of things.

“People get really excited about mer monsters, huh?” Sans said absently.

“They really do. I suppose it’s no wonder though. Land and ocean creatures have had very little
contact for hundreds of years. There are all kinds of stories floating around.”

“Yeah? Anything interesting?”
Papyrus held his chin with his free hand. “Not really. It’s all nonsense from what I’ve experienced. There are the expected stories about mer monsters drowning or saving land monsters, stories about gaining immortality by eating a mermaid’s tail, tales of giant meroctopuses sinking ships, of lamias stealing people as mates, mermaids luring sailors to their deaths with beautiful songs, and even rumors about gods living deep underwater. Something to do with life starting in the ocean, I think.”

“Wow, uh, it’s a pretty mixed batch when it comes to quality, huh? Some of those are garbage.”

“They’re just rumors,” Papyrus shrugged. “It would be silly to believe them. Then again, there are humans who didn’t believe in mer monsters at all until you two appeared.”

It was interesting to Sans. There were rumors about different kinds of mer monsters underwater as well, but they were far less… mystical. It was mostly things like ‘this type is dangerous’ or ‘that type eats people’.

“Well, enough of that talk. You all are here to relax and have fun! Is there anything at all I can do to contribute?”

Sans glanced down at the beach and saw pretty much everyone gathered around Papyrus’s car.

“I think maybe they want a ride.”

Papyrus looked over his shoulder and grinned. “Nyeh heh! I understand.” He gave Rus to Toriel to watch over and jogged back to his car. “Alright! I can take four people at a time! Children first!”

Edge did eventually join up with them. It was slightly ominous, though, the conversation that happened when Sans jokingly asked him what took him so long.

"I've taken care of everything up here."

"Lots of pesky tourists, huh?"

"No."

He wouldn't say anything more even when pressed, but at least whatever it was had been taken care of? Apparently?

Chapter End Notes

Something amazing is coming? No spoilers though.
A Fish's Best Friend

Chapter Summary

*In which Edge has a cousin (?), Undyne has had a change of heart, Crooks gets consoled, and Axe never changes.

Chapter Notes

Comments are the best noms. ^3^

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

After seeing off Sans and the rest of his group, Edge helped the other guards disperse the crowds and then returned home to Papyrus and their child.

“Oh, you’re just in time,” Papyrus smiled in relief while bouncing a stressed-out skeleton baby. “He’s already hungry again and I can’t nurse him anymore today.”

Edge shrugged off his jacket and hung it up in the entranceway. “Alright, hand him over then.”

He took Rus to the living room and sat down in a comfortable armchair. A vibrant red soul floated out of Edge’s chest, and he held it delicately while pretending it to Rus like a bottle.

The baby naturally closed his mouth around whatever part he grabbed first, clumsily holding the sides with his tiny hands. He relaxed as safe and familiar magic slowly filtered into his little body.

Baring his soul made Edge incredibly nervous, and it was best to nurse a monster child with positive emotions, so Papyrus did most of the nursing, but they could each only give so much in a day.

When the baby stopped absorbing the magic, Papyrus appeared to put him down for a nap. Edge, who was left alone, took out his phone. He unblocked a certain number, shot off a text, then blocked the number again and deleted it from his history.

‘Tighten your damn leash.’

He barely had time to put his phone down before he got a text from an unknown number.

‘They weren’t mine, but I can pull some strings special for you.’ Followed by another before he could block the new number, ‘So when do I get to see my nephew?’

‘Never.’ Edge wasn’t surprised he’d found out about Rus, but he was far from happy about it.

‘Heheh. Always such a hardass.’

Edge quickly blocked the number with a scowl, only to get one last text from yet another unknown number.
Axe had been working hard for several days to learn how to read. He had asked Stretch to help him—since the young meroctopus was simultaneously available and patient—and they had found a good learning app for it. At this point, Axe’s main problem was that he had to relearn the same letters over and over. He was on his phone a lot playing with the app and doing just that.

For the most part, Crooks naturally ignored the existence of smartphones, but he had finally gotten a little curious now that his brother’s face was buried in one every hour that he wasn’t eating or sleeping.

“What are these ‘phone’ things people keep poking at and burying their noses in?”

Undyne looked up at him and raised her brows. “You don’t know about smartphones yet? Why the hell did you wait so long to ask, man!” She swiped Alphys’s phone and gave the startled dinosaur a kiss on the cheek. “Sorry, babe. Lemme borrow this for a bit.”

“B-be… just be careful with it!”

Undyne grinned widely, “Of course!”

She grabbed Crooks’ wrist and pulled him into another room where it wasn’t so noisy.

“Okay, look. These things can do a lot of neat stuff, and you can only get them on the surface.”

Crooks examined the object’s sleek surface. “I believe you. It doesn’t look like something from the ocean.” He watched Undyne press the screen a few times until the image on it changed. “What is it for?”

“Well, the most important thing is that people who have one of these can talk to each other no matter how far away they are. But you can also watch cool videos, play games, google stuff, and take pictures!”

The mershark furrowed his brow. “I don’t really understand.”

“Lemme just show you! It’s faster that way anyway. Watch, I’ll take a picture.”

She held the phone up for a quick selfie and turned the screen to Crooks. “See? It’s me, right? Isn’t that awesome!”

It was. The frozen image was so lifelike. Even with his poor eyesight, Crooks could see that the image was perfect when he brought the phone screen closer to his face.

“Absolutely. I’ve never seen anything like this. It’s like a smaller you is frozen in this little thing.”

Undyne wrapped her arm around Crooks’ shoulders and turned the camera sideways. Crooks could vaguely see little mirrors of their outlines moving as if copying them. The screen flickered as she took a quick photo of them both.
“It can hold, like, hundreds of these, probably. Here, you try. Just press that white circle to take the picture.”

Undyne pushed the phone into Crooks’ hands, but he didn’t take a picture with it. Instead, out of curiosity, he tapped on the photo she’d just taken and brought the screen close enough to see clearly. Crooks looked at the photograph and froze solid.

Heavens. Oh stars above. Was that what he looked like? Undyne’s likeness was perfect, so his must have been too, but... It was difficult to process.

He understood now why people stared when they met him, and why they winced when he smiled. It was actually harder to understand how the people in his new school could interact with him so casually. Crooks himself wouldn’t want to look at a face like his.

Undyne quickly noticed that her sweetheart of a buddy wasn’t saying much, and she saw quite a painful expression when she looked over at him. Her own satisfied smile dropped away.

“Hey, what’s the matter, buddy?”

Crooks snapped out of his thoughts and forced on a smile. “Nothing is wrong. I’m perfectly fine.”

“Crooks, man, don’t lie to me.”

Crooks held the phone against his chest as if to hide it and hung his head. “This is the first time I’ve seen myself,” he admitted quietly.

Undyne’s eyes went wide.

“Oh! Uh… man.” She rubbed the back of her head. “That’s awkward. You good, dude?”

“I’m not sure,” he said softly.

Undyne groaned a little, deep in her throat.

“Hey, don’t worry about it, Crooks. It doesn’t matter what you look like. What’s important is what’s on the inside! And you are literally the nicest person I know!”

He smiled half-heartedly. “Thank you for the encouragement, Undyne.” But, a moment later, he was rubbing tears out of his eye sockets before the current could catch them. “I’m hideous.”

“What? Dude, that’s not true.”

“Yes it is.”

Undyne was hard-pressed to lie to Crooks. Instead, she backpedaled and rubbed her neck. “You get used to it, though. It doesn’t bother me anymore.”

“‘Get used to it’, huh?”

This clearly wasn’t helping, but Undyne didn’t know what else she could say to cheer Crooks up.

“I dunno what to tell you, man. I’m sorry.”

Crooks wiped the last of his tears away and put on a calm smile. “You didn’t do anything to apologize for. Honestly, there are so many worse things that could happen to a person; I’m silly for getting upset over this.”
Undyne grinned and slapped Crooks’ back, causing him to lurch forward a little. “That’s the spirit! Exactly!”

Crooks laughed a little and resettled himself. “So why did my brother want one of these? I doubt it’s to take pictures of himself.”

“I think he wanted it to take notes. You know, something he can look back at in case he forgets something important.”

“So it’s going to do my job for me?”

Undyne blinked at the tinge of sarcasm she’d heard from Crooks practically for the first time, then she guwaffed.

“Fuhuhuhuhu! In theory! You should probably learn to read, ‘cause I don’t think Axe is gonna be able to keep anything in that broken skull of his. He’ll need your help when he can’t read his own notes.”

Crooks chuckled reservedly. “Ah, yes. I had better.

***

Sans watched Crooks do his self-imposed chores. He looked as cheerful as usual, but nothing of this nature ever slipped past Sans’s level 100 social skills.

“Something eating ya?”

Crooks smiled and shook his head. “No, nothing at all. I’m perfectly fine.”

Sans hummed. “Well, do you wanna talk about this ‘nothing’? It helps to get it off your chest.”

Crooks flatly gave him the side-eye, “Am I that obvious?” Sans shrugged and Crooks sighed, “Undyne was showing me how pictures worked, and I saw my own face for the first time. I don’t know how the rest of you can stand it.”

“Oh, that.” Sans chuckled softly. “Yeah, Red doesn’t like the way he looks either.”

Crooks looked up in surprise. “Really? He doesn’t strike me as the type to worry about things like that.”

Sans smiled and raised a brow teasingly. “Why not?”

Crooks wrung his hands. “Because he never worries about himself.”

Sans blinked and his smile dropped briefly. “Huh. Good answer.” The lazy blue mermaid laid back and shrugged. “And I guess you weren’t there when Toriel and I showed Axe his head wound for the first time.”

Crooks’ surprise deepened and worry seeped in. “Oh, um, h-how did he take it?”

“He laughed, cracked some jokes, and then shrugged it off.”
Crooks frowned and curled his fists. “That idiot. It’s a serious wound and he should take it seriously!”

“Yeah,” Sans chuckled. “But he’s kinda like you that way. I’m pretty sure it was just a front.”

Crooks’ expression fell to regret in an instant. “Oh…”

Sans eyed him and then looked at the ceiling. “Anyway, the point is none of the rest of us are bothered by it, and we’re the only ones who have to look.” He winked. “What’re you worried about when you got the better end of the bargain?”

“That’s… quite a way to twist this. I’m not sure you’ve convinced me.”

Sans chuckled. “In that case, how about if I said it won’t keep you from making friends or finding a mate?”

“I’m pretty sure it almost did—the friends part, I mean. You all didn’t exactly react positively when my brother and I appeared.”

“Oh…” Sans smiled awkwardly. “And how would you react if giant strangers turned up in your den without warning?”

Crooks held his chin and looked at the ceiling. “I think I would start by offering them a place to sit and something to eat.”

Sans blinked, then smiled bitterly. “Of course you would.” Crooks was hard to convince, so he thought about it a little harder. “How about you ask Axe about it? You’ll believe it’s fine if he says so, right?”

“Well, that’s true. My brother never lies about anything because he knows he’ll get caught. But I’m afraid to ask him for the same reason.” Crooks visibly wilted. “What if he tells me it really is that bad?”

Sans shrugged. “At this point, just ask him. I’m sure you’ll feel better.”

Sans knew Axe was smart. Sure, he was usually honest to a fault, but he would twist his words a little to protect his brother’s self-esteem, right?

He was invested now, so he followed Crooks to see how it went.

“Axe, can I ask you something?”

“Hm? Sure, bro.”

“Am I ugly?”

Axe gave his usual unblinking stare. “First, why?”

“He saw a picture of himself for the first time,” Sans said from a respectful distance.

Axe stared at the mermaid for a minute, then looked back at Crooks. He was quiet for a while, enough for Crooks to get nervous and start wringing his hands.

“… Do ya wan’ an objective answer, or my personal opinion?”

“Um, how about the objective one?” Crooks said unsurely.
Axe chuckled darkly. “Well, ya ain’t pretty. Yer teeth’re a mess, ya got small eyes, an’ ya slouch. ‘Sides dat, yer still way too damn skinny. Yer magic ain’t a very lively color, an’ up here, yer kinda freakishly big.”

Sans was baffled to the point that all his thoughts had ground to a halt. So much for protecting Crooks’ self-esteem! This was actually a disaster!

“But,” Axe continued, “none of dat’s yer fault. If anybody ever makes ya feel bad fer it, I’ll kill ’em.”

Sans cleared his throat. “Right now, I think that’s you.”

Axe looked at Sans, then looked at Crooks hunched over and forcing a very small, sad smile while holding back tears.

“And, uh, in your... personal opinion?” he asked quietly.

“Yer size an’ color’re fine fer a mershark, I don’ care if ya slouch, an’ yer face don’t matter. ‘S gonna get fixed eventually anyway.”

Crooks was caught off guard enough that his negative thoughts flew away. “What do you mean it’s going to get fixed?”

Axe tilted his head. “M’ I forgettin’ somethin’? Weren’t we plannin’ on gettin’ yer teeth an’ eyes fixed so ya could see an’ eat?”

Crooks raised his brows. “Well… There was some hope that that might happen.”

“No hope about it. Dey’re gettin’ fixed. An’ if dey bother ya, we can make sure dey’re nice and pretty after.”

Sans looked at Crooks’ absolute, pleasant shock and chuckled. “Feeling better now?”

The mershark blushed. “It, it’s just a comforting idea. M-maybe we can do Red and Axe as well.”

Axe chuckled darkly. “Why? I got somethin’ on my face? Where?” He pointed at the hole in his skull. “‘S’ it here? Heh. I don’t need dis ta look pretty. How else’re people s’posed ta know m’a total headcase?”

“I suppose they could just try talking to you,” Crooks replied in irritation, rolling his faint eyelights. Axe chuckled, and Sans was satisfied that their moods had been improved for now.

***

Undyne volunteered to help Toriel clean up after dinner. It wasn’t unheard of, but it was slightly uncommon. Because of that, the goat woman wasn’t very surprised when her assistant struck up a somewhat serious conversation.

“Hey, Tori? I actually wanted to talk to you about something.”

“Oh?” Toriel looked over in fabricated surprise, then smiled warmly, “Is something troubling you, my friend?”
The look on the fish’s face was contemplative and worried. “I’ve been thinking. You remember how we called an ocean council to keep Red and his kids from getting attacked? Shouldn’t we do the same thing for Crooks?” She hesitated and rolled her eyes. “And for Axe, I guess.”

Toriel muffled a laugh at the fish mer’s continued grudge against their crooked sweetheart’s brother, then frowned at the seriousness of the issue.

“You think they could be hurt if we didn’t?”

Undyne nodded tightly. “We’re used to them already, and used to big scary-looking monsters in general, but I think most people would panic.”

“I suppose it wouldn’t hurt to talk to them about it. If they agree to participate and feel that it’s necessary, I will certainly call for another council.”

Axe looked up from his phone screen and stared uninterestedly, “Wha’s an ocean council?”

“It would basically be to introduce you two to all the nearby schools at once so that they know you’re with us,” Undyne waved her arms and explained. “We had one for Red and the kids after Blackberry was attacked.”

“I don’t think it’s necessary,” Crooks smiled softly. “Axe and I almost never go outside.”

Axe nodded and added, “Da safest thing fer us is dat dey don’t even know we exist.”

“Are you sure?” Toriel asked. “Forcing yourselves to stay cooped up in here all the time sounds a little lonely.”

“Whyever would we be lonely?” Crooks smiled, “We have so many friends here.”

“Are you sure?” Toriel asked.

“Of course! Everyone here is the very best kind of friend.”

As another person who would be attending the council if it happened, Sans was listening from nearby. “The best kind of friend, huh?” the lazy mermaid chuckled. “What’s that?”

“The kind that doesn’t want to eat us, obviously.”

Sans was shaken by that cheerful response, and his usual calm expression dropped for a minute. He recalled that Crooks’ previous school had tried to eat him and that was why he and Axe had fought their way out of it.

“Jeez, Crooks,” Undyne said softly. “Try not to trip over the bar on your way out.”

“So we’re not calling an ocean council?” Sans asked. He personally though it would be a good idea, but if the involved parties were against it, that was that.

“No thanks,” Axe shrugged him off and went back to staring at his phone. He started typing something, presumably a note that they’d decided against holding an ocean council.

“But what if--” Undyne still tried to press the issue, but Toriel placed a furry hand on her shoulder.

“Now now, Undyne. They’ve said they don’t want to have one. For now, let’s just respect their
wishes. If anything does happen in the future, we’ll bring the matter up again.”

“It’s because I don’t want anything to happen!” She gestured at Crooks, who twitched at the motion. “He’s too nice for that shit!”

“I appreciate your concern, Undyne,” Crooks smiled meekly. “I can tell you care. But it is a little hurtful that you’re so convinced I’d be attacked.”

A look of guilt flashed across the fish’s face, and she lowered her head. “B-because you’re a shark,” she murmured in an uncharacteristically quiet voice. Her volume picked back up when she turned tail, though. “Since you said no, make sure you stay safe, okay?!”

Crooks gave a little wave, and Axe chuckled. “She’s sure changed her tune, huh?”

“Well, for one of you,” Toriel jabbed, placing a hand on her hip and smiling in amusement.

“She’s still not so fond of you, Axe,” Sans added with a teasing grin.

Axe was being double-teamed, but his usual grin didn’t even twitch. If anything, his eye sockets lifted a little in contentment.

“Dat don’t matter.”

Chapter End Notes

The amazing thing comes soon. Ya'll're gonna be amazed.
The school had just finished eating dinner. While the others were scattering, chatting, or cleaning up, Axe went to peek outside to see how long it would be until he could go out for a bit of star gazing.

His overblown eyelight fixed unblinkingly on a group of mermaids watching from a distance. They looked like they were pretending to be out on a hunt, but the act wasn’t nearly good enough to trick Axe. The fact that they were watching the den was made even more obvious by how they became agitated once Axe came into view.

Toriel noticed Axe just floating around and left the cleaning to the kids while she went to check on him.

“Is everything alright, Axe?”

Honestly, she’d expected he was having one of his forgetful moments, but then he nodded his head out at the ocean, casting her attention there.

“Who’re dey?”

Toriel frowned and huffed. “Just some rude people. Do not worry, they will not risk breaking the rules of the ocean council to do anything bad.”

“... Dat’s good.”

Axe wasn’t put at ease by Toriel’s reassurance; he could sense the group’s bloodlust from here.

“So wha’s deir problem?” He needed more information. Mermaid culture was still unfamiliar to him, and he couldn’t take any risks without investigating things first.

Toriel sighed. “They are afraid of Red and his children, and they are too stubborn to learn better.”

“Racists, huh?”

“That is one way to put it.” It had been bothering her for a while so Toriel accidentally let some of her tiredness show, pinching the bridge of her nose. “I do not imagine they are very happy to see you here either. Perhaps we should have called that ocean council after all.” The goat mermaid took a deep breath and locked her hands together. “Please do be careful. It would be better if you and Crooks did not encounter those people directly.”

Toriel turned back to the kitchen and Axe glared oppressively the spies until they swam off. He would leave them alone for now, but his fuze was short. They had better mind their manners. And
At this point, it had been almost a month since Axe and Crooks had joined the school. They had adapted quite a bit better than most of the other members had been expecting. Perhaps because they were creatures who were accustomed to living in groups. The mermaids were no longer concerned that the mersharks would do bad things, and instead, they were worried that bad things would happen to them. Toriel approached Red with one such concern.

“I must ask, aside from the obvious, do Axe and Crooks appear healthy for mersharks?”

Red stopped building the trap he was working on and looked down at the goat mom skeptically.

“Define obvious.”

The worried woman clasped her hands in front of her waist. “I thought they were eating better after coming here, but they still look malnourished to me. I suppose I am hoping they naturally appear that way.”

Red looked back down at his work and fiddled with a few parts.

“Nah, they’re starvin’.”

Toriel frowned at his nonchalance. “But how can that be? We have more than enough food, and they have been eating regular meals.”

Red shrugged and continued what he was doing. “I dunno what ta tell ya. They just ain’t eatin’ more than they’re usin’.”

“Could you explain it in more detail?”

“Uh, well… For example, Crooks only eats as much as he has ta, and he uses plenty of magic cooking for everyone. I’m not surprised he ain’t put on any weight.”

Toriel had to agree there. She hadn’t exactly crunched the numbers for Crooks’ magical intake and output, but it sounded like a reasonable conclusion.

“But what about Axe? I do not think I have seen him ever use magic.”

Red abruptly stopped moving his hands. He turned his gaze to Toriel with the cautious look of someone who suspected they were being pranked. “... What?”

Toriel furrowed her brow. “What do you mean ‘what’? Did I say something strange?”

Red examined Toriel’s expression and body language intently, but he couldn’t really glean anything from it, and it frustrated him. “You can’t be serious, right?”

She raised an eyebrow, “I assure you, I am being serious. I do not understand why you would think otherwise.”

“Because it’s plain as day that Axe’s constantly usin’ magic?”
“What exactly about that is plain as day, I have no idea. How can you tell he’s using magic?”

“’Cause his soul is like that.”

“Like what?”

“That.”

Red gestured weirdly with his hands and Toriel frowned in confusion.

“... Well what kind of magic is it?”

“How the fuck should I know?”

Toriel frowned. This settled absolutely nothing, and the conversation was going nowhere. Talking to this man should be used as a test to measure how adept one’s communication skills are, she thought in mild frustration. *I do not know how Sans manages it.*

Speak of the mermaid, Sans drifted by at about that moment.

“Hey Red, can you convince Axe to stop napping on my couch? There isn’t enough room for one of him, let alone both of us. I already asked him nicely a few times, but he keeps forgetting.”

“Axe uses magic all the time, right Angel?” Red shot back.

Sans blinked at the sudden topic change.

“Uh, I don’t think I’ve ever seen him use magic, no. Why?”

Red’s sharp teeth parted in shock, and he hung his head.

“That is exactly what I told him,” Toriel said, “but he insists Axe is using magic constantly. Something about his soul?”

Sans looked a little curious and turned his head back to Red. “Care to elaborate, big guy?”

“I dunno how ta. S’ fuckin’ obvious.”

Sans tilted his head. “Hm. How about we just ask him while you get him off my couch?”

Red grunted, but he put down his trap and followed Sans to the couch. Axe was sprawled out on it with his head on one armrest and most of his tail hanging over the other. He didn’t come close to fitting, but apparently, it was comfy enough to justify the inconvenience.

Axe was already used to the members of the school, so he didn’t wake up the moment others entered the room. He did, however, wake up when Red marked the couch with his magic. The mershark swam off of it reflexively, before his mind could even process what he was doing.

As far as Sans could tell, Red just set a hand on the couch and startled Axe awake, so the following conversation was confusing to him.

“Off limits?” Axe grinned tightly.

“Quit forgettin’ already.”

“Ya shoulda marked it in da first place if it bothers ya. M’ *gonna* forget shit.”
Sans finally cut in. “What are you guys talking about? What’s marking?”

Axe chuckled in amusement while Red looked mildly stunned.

“Ya didn’t tell ‘im ‘bout it?”

Red just stared at Sans, “Ya didn’t know about it?”

Axe snorted, “Nothin’ here’s marked ‘cept fer what ya marked yerself. Dat didn’t tip ya off?” Axe shrugged while Red struggled to process the information. “Well, it don’t surprise me. Markin’ shit’s a threat. Don’t really fit wit’ mermaids, do it?”

“So what is it?” Sans asked again.

“Uh… it’s, well…” Red struggled to explain what was mostly an instinctual, non-verbal concept to him. “If somethin’s important, or if ya wanna protect it… keep it to yourself? Ya mark it, y’know?”

Sans furrowed his brow and tried to reformat Red’s words into something sensible. “…Okay, I think I get what it’s for. It’s some kind of warning to others to stay away from your things, right?”

Red nodded and smiled in relief, glad Angel could understand him.

“But how do you mark something? And how do you tell if something’s been marked?”

Red started sweating. “…Uh… ya just… do…”

Axe waved his hand and stepped up to the plate. “S’ a kind of magic, like cookin’ or makin’ attacks. Ya put a lil’ of yer magic in somethin’ or someone. S’ thin, but s’ locked in so it pretty much never fuckin’ goes away. Den other people who’re used ta dat sorta thing can feel it. Even animals can tell if dey got good instincts.”

“Huh.” Sans looked at Red curiously. “So what kind of things have you marked around here?”

“Uh, well… My room, the entrance, you and the kids, and now the couch.”

“You marked us?” Sans examined Red with raised brows, and the octopus tried to make himself look smaller.

Axe chuckled, “In da deep, s’ wha’ a mate’s s’posed ta do. Keeps things’ weaker den him from attackin’ ya.”

“Didn’t you attack Blackberry?” Sans pointed out.

“Yeah.” Nothing surprising about that, his face seemed to say.

Sans could only chuckle helplessly, and he gave the fidgeting Red a pat.

“Hey, I’m not mad, I’m just surprised. You say you marked us, but I can’t tell at all. Kinda figured I would notice something like that, y’know?”

Yeah, me too, Red thought helplessly.

“Well, we got kind of sidetracked,” Sans said, turning to Axe. “We wanted you to clear something up for us. Toriel and I say you don’t use magic, and Red says you use it all the time. Which is it?”
Axe stared for a second. “Red’s got ya there.”

“Seriously? What kind of magic is it?”

Axe chuckled darkly, “Da kind dat’s none of yer business.”

Sans smiled awkwardly and shrugged. “Well, as long as it isn’t anything bad, I guess I don’t need to know. More importantly, Toriel’s worried because you and Crooks aren’t gaining any weight.”

Axe frowned for a second, then deliberately smiled. “She’s a nice lady.”

Sans nodded. “Yep. So if you can’t use less magic for whatever reason, you should eat more. We have plenty of food here.”

Axe’s smile wasn’t as wide as usual, and he scratched his cheek almost bashfully.

“Well, I think so too, but… Nah, we’ll give it a shot.”

They tried to make the mersharks eat more. But it was impossible. Surprisingly, Axe had a sensitive stomach… or a sensitive whatever magic skeletons used to process food. He ate about as much as he usually did, tried to eat a little more, and had to stop because he got nauseous and almost threw up. Crooks initially refused to even attempt it and nearly cried when they tried to make him. The issue was put on hold for the time being.

***

Fifteen people breathing. The current moved minutely with every rise and fall of their chests. Fifteen people breathing in the den.

It was a quiet night, like they’d had every night since Axe and Crooks moved to this place. It seemed that creatures in the shallows preferred to sleep when it got dark. The ocean denizens became calm, and the current flowed in relaxing, lulling rhythms.

It was easy to draw comfort from the sixteen people quietly breathing.

… Sixteen?

Axe’s eye sockets snapped open, and he swam out of his room into the hall. There was a wolf mermaid sneaking around inside their den, peeking into each room as he passed it. The intruder shivered, suddenly feeling like he was being watched, but he couldn’t see the ominous red ring glowing dimly behind his head.

Axe stalked the intruder, twisting his tail ever so gently so that the current didn’t noticeably change. He couldn’t messily kill someone here—waking the school up to a murder scene was a no-go, and at the very least, he needed more to go on than trespassing as their crime. Well, Axe didn’t need much personally, but he was pretty well aware that the mermaids in his school wouldn’t be okay with wanton killing.

The intruder stopped in front of Red’s room, looking grim, and quietly materialized a harpoon. Unseen behind him, Axe’s smile nearly split his skull.

Obviously, Red wasn’t in any danger. As soon as an attack was made, he would wake up, and this
weakling couldn’t kill him even if he managed to land the hit. But Axe saw him first, so he was his prey.

That was why, before the intruder could throw his weapon, his neck was snapped, and he stopped thinking.

Axe almost brought the body to the pantry without a second thought. Then he thought better and buried it in the sand outside. It wouldn’t be there for long.

He checked out the surroundings, and there were two more mermaids sneaking around out there. They followed their friend in short order and were buried with their pal. With three kills under his belt, Axe snuck into Crooks’ room and woke him up.

“Hey, bro.”

“Axe?” Crooks sat up on his bed of kelp and rubbed his eye sockets. “What time is it?”

“Late. I killed some people.”

“What?!” To Crooks’ credit, he managed to shout in a whisper, knowing the others would be sleeping. “Not somebody we know, I hope!”


“How dreadful!”

“Yes. Listen, dere’s some stuff goin’ on between Red an’ da outsider mermaids right now. Nobody can know dey were here. Help me get rid a dem quietly?”

Crooks smiled shyly. “I’ve also heard about that ‘stuff’. Thank goodness he isn’t the one who killed them.”

“Thank me,” Axe chuckled.

Crooks rolled his eyes and stretched out his arms. “Yes, thank you, Axe. Now, show me where my ingredients are. We still have work to do.”

Crooks followed Axe outside where they discretely cut up three bodies. Crooks properly cooked everything and, between two giant mersharks, the three little mermaids were easily disposed of, bones, scales, fur and all.

“I’m not gonna keep any notes about dis,” Axe said. “M’ gonna forget sooner or later. S’long as ya don’t say nothin’, it’ll be like dey were never here. Den da others can’t get in any trouble.”

Crooks smiled softly. “It does feel nice to be able to help them in some way. I just wish our methods weren’t so… antithetical to their values. I would rather not have to hide things from my friends.”

“Don’t beat yerself up over it. We did somethin’ good.”

Crooks smiled brightly, “Yes.”
The next morning at breakfast, Toriel started up the conversation on Axe and Crooks’ health again.

“I’ve been thinking about it. Perhaps rather than more food, we should try finding food with a higher nutritional value for you. Something with a high concentration of magic, perhaps?” Toriel suggested.

Axe thought it was funny for some reason, and Crooks excused himself from the table. Regardless, they started feeding the mersharks surface food after that, since it was almost entirely magic, and their conditions finally started to improve. Crooks’ favorite was spider cider. He had his own sippy cup for it.

Also, incidentally, Red had noticed a faint smell of blood outside of the den that morning, and it didn't escape his notice that Axe and Crooks ate a little less than usual for breakfast. But everyone in the school was alive and well, so he didn't really give a crap about what or who died that night. Fortunately, nobody else managed to connect the dots.

Chapter End Notes

Before anybody asks, Axe isn’t up to anything funny. The magic he secretly uses all the time isn’t bad; it’s for self-maintenance. He’s just embarrassed to talk about how bad his condition actually is after his injury.

———

Now for the amazing thing???

Winkette was willing to work with me on making a comic for this series! Her art is so good and I’m super grateful. Here are some links to the character references she recently finished working on.

Blackberry, Blueberry, Alphys, MK, Asgore
Chara, Sans, Toriel, Asriel, Edge
Frisk, Rus, Papyrus, Edge
Undyne, Axe, Crooks, Stretch
I'll keep you guys posted on that. ^w^
A Week With An Angel

Chapter Summary

*In which Sans and Red go on vacation

Chapter Notes

I’m back in school!
That isn’t why this chapter took so long. I was writing things out of order again. Stuff y’all won’t see for a while. ^w^u

After Blueberry was born, it was hard for Sans to just up and follow Red around whenever he went out hunting. An important part of a young mermaid’s development was having at least one of their parents available pretty much whenever. They were a species who would get lonely easily.

And on that note, even someone as patient as Sans would eventually get tired of being apart from his mate. It was eating at him to the point where he even complained about it at dinner. Sans the skeleton complaining about something and actually being serious about it was an event about as rare as bubbles floating down, so the rest of the school immediately rearranged their schedules so that Red didn’t have any work to do for a week.

The big idiot put up a bit of a fight when he realized the others were banning him from working. Sans had to get in his face and tell him why it was happening before he got the picture.

“So… we’re leavin’ for a whole week?”

He looked skeptical at best, but Sans brought his face close and persuaded Red with a sultry smile, “The two of us are going to find somewhere comfortable where we can be alone for a while.”

Red couldn’t stop himself from blushing, and a short purr rolled out before he stopped it. “Wh-What about the kids?”

“They’ll be fine. They have a whole school to take care of them.” Sans held Red’s cheek in his little hand. “But your mate is lonely and wants to spend time with you.”

Red’s eyelights morphed into hearts. He just sat there, purring, curling and uncurling the tips of his tentacles. Sans tugged on Red’s shoulder gently to get him to leave the room. Toriel saw them from the entrance and clapped her hands together.

“So it looks like that is settled. Asgore and Undyne left to hunt just a moment ago.”

“Great. I guess we’ll leave now,” Sans nodded. Next to him, Red was still blushing, and his teeth were apparently welded shut. He grunted at Toriel and that was all she got for a goodbye.

“Have a safe trip,” the goat woman smiled and waved them off.
It was late fall at this point, So Sans and Red swam south to look for a vacation spot. They ended up at an archipelago where the water was a couple degrees warmer: pleasant for Sans; not unpleasant for Red. They picked an island with a small natural cave underneath and cleared it out of less intelligent sea life, claiming it as their vacation home.

Sans started exploring the shore beneath the waves. He picked up a large, round, green thing and looked at it curiously.

“One of these things? How far into the warm waters did we go?”

Red peeked over Sans’s shoulder and gave the strange item an unimpressed look. “What is it?”

“Coconut,” Sans replied. “They must be growing on this island.”

“Surface food?” Red leaned in to look closer. “S’ it taste good?”

“I dunno. They’re hard to open, so I’ve never had one. But this stuff was in some of the sweets Stretch brought home, so it must be edible.”

Red hummed and reached one hand over Sans’s shoulder, unceremoniously crushing the fruit in his claws. Some misty liquid dispersed into the water, and they were left with chunks of green rind and white flesh.

Sans chuckled. It was nice having Red around; there was no such thing as an obstacle for him.

As always, Red tasted the strange fruit first to make sure it was safe. It was kind of tough, and the flavor was meh in Red’s opinion. He treated it with green magic to at least make it softer before giving it to sans. Sans chewed a piece, looking thoughtful, then shrugged.

“Eh. At least I can say I’ve tried it now.”

Sans looked out along the shoreline and saw a few more coconuts scattered about.

“If it’s warm enough for these, it should be warm enough for Lamias,” he mused. “I wonder if we’ll see any of them?” Sans smiled humorously at Red, but the meroctopus just looked confused.

“Do you not know what a Lamia is?”

Red shook his head.

“It’s a mermonster with the lower half of a snake. They like really warm water, so we almost never see them around us.”

Red frowned in contemplation. “Lower half of a snake, huh? So those’re called Lamias.”

Sans raised his eyebrows. “So you have seen them?”

He nodded. “I think so. That was in the deep though. Saw a couple of ‘em harassin’ an Angler mer. Jus’ for a second though. They ran away when they saw me.”

Sans looked a little uncertain. “H-harassing? I didn’t think they were bullies. I didn’t know they could swim that deep either. Are you sure those were Lamias?”

“No,” Red replied honestly. “But they were mer with snake tails.” He blushed a little, “And it wasn’t the violent kinda harrassin’ neither.”
Sans blinked and then made an awkward face. “Yeah, that sounds a little more like Lamias.”

They had stuffed a bunch of food in their item boxes before leaving the den, so they didn’t have to hunt during this trip. Red was happy enough to cuddle on the sand with Sans until evening, then cuddle in the cave until morning, but by the second day, he was feeling restless. He wasn’t used to not doing things. In the past, he and Sans were always doing something when they hung out. Checking Red’s traps, usually.

“We gonna… do somethin’?”

“What do you wanna do?” Sans smiled coyly.

“Mm… hunt? Make traps?”

Sans’s smile twisted awkwardly. “Uh, we’re not supposed to work during our vacation.”

Red pouted, and Sans let out a small, sympathetic sigh.

“So the hell’re people s’posed to do on vacation?”

*We could talk,* Sans swallowed the words before he could say them. *Heh, yeah right.*

“How about we explore the islands then,” the little socialite suggested.

“Mm. Okay.”

Red carried Sans up onto the beach of the nearest island and looked curiously at the native flora. The surface here looked nothing like it did where Edge and Papyrus lived. Primarily, there was too much greenery.

Sans pointed up at a tall tree with a leafy feathered top. “Hey look, it’s more of those things.” Red looked up at the coconuts hanging off the tree and grunted in response. “I guess that’s where they come from.”

Sans’s eyelights flickered in thought. “Could we climb up there?” he asked slowly. “We’d be able to see most of the island from the top.”

Red hummed and gave the trunk an experimental tug with one tentacle. It had some sturdiness to it. He climbed up a few steps, but the trunk was thinner higher up. The whole thing bent into an arc and practically deposited Red back onto the sand. If he had let go right that second, the trunk probably would’ve been spared from snapping in half, but it couldn’t take the stress for more than that instant.

Red threw the severed tree trunk off of himself with a dissatisfied growl and began untangling himself from his many limbs. Naturally, Sans had been carefully protected in his arms the whole while.

“Alright, I’m just gonna teleport to the top of that one,” Sans pointed.

“Hey, wai—!” Red started to protest, but the little fish vanished from his arms. He crawled over to the tree Sans had indicated and frantically searched the leaves with his eyelights.

Up top, Sans was holding an armful of leaves tightly for security, gazing out at the sea of rolling green with wide sockets. He could see the ocean, the land, and a small portion of the air all cast out
below him. There was something enchanting and thrilling about it, and very beautiful.

From below, Red called up in concern.

“Hey, Sans? You alright? Please don’t fall, sweetheart. Stay put, okay? M’ comin’ up there.”

Sans’s eyelight shrunk, “No no no!” He looked down the trunk to see Red frozen in a ready-to-climb position. In his worry, he was like a big dog who didn’t realize it wasn’t a puppy anymore.

“Seriously, don’t! I’m fine, okay? Just stay there and I’ll teleport down in a minute.”

Red whined nervously but stayed put. Sans spared himself a few more moments to admire the scenery, remembered to take a few pictures, and then returned to alleviate Red’s panic. The giant meroctopus nuzzled their faces together the instant Sans was back safely in his arms, purring from sheer relief.

“Ya had me worried, Angel,” he chided ever so gently. “Thought ya’d fall n’ hurt yerself.”

“Sorry I made you worried.” Sans smiled reassuringly and petted the top of Red’s skull. “Take a look at the pictures I took, huh? It’s better in person, but isn’t it pretty?”

Sans held his phone facing Red and the meroctopus got close to examine the details. It was… fine. Compared to his Angel, nothing else was all that dazzling, but he gave a little nod to satisfy Sans.

They continued to explore the islands for most of the day. Though they didn’t have a campfire, Sans asked a campfire-like question while they cuddled together on the beach.

“Hey Red, what do you want out of life?”

The giant looked confused. “Uh, to not die?”

“Besides that,” Sans waved. “Is there anything you’ve always wanted to do if you had the chance?”

Red shrunk like he thought he was in trouble. “Never really thought about it.” He looked at Sans. “You got somethin’ like that?”

Sans hummed. “Nope. I’m pretty much satisfied with my life.” He frowned in thought. “Though if it were possible, I’d want to get the mermaids to fully accept you and the kids. Maybe Crooks and Axe while I’m at it.” He chuckled, “And if there were a way to cure your social anxiety, that could be nice.”

Red pointed at him. “That! That can be my thing.”

“If anything were possible, you’d cure your social anxiety?” Sans asked to clarify. Red nodded, then clearly hesitated. “On second thought… Instead of that, I’d rather take ya somewhere safe n’ comfortable where no one could ever find us. N’ it would be just us forever.”

Sans made a complicated face. “Vetoed.”

“Then I’d want another kid.”

Sans chuckled helplessly. “You know we’ve got a ban on that right now.”
Red shrugged and looked away like a child caught doing something bad.

“Stretch n’ Black’re pretty much good on their own now. ‘Sides, thought we’re s’posed ta do what we want while we’re on vacation.”

“Still, let’s put that on hold for now,” Sans insisted.

They ran out of things to do after a couple of days. It felt wrong to nap and cuddle their whole vacation away, so Sans expanded his thinking a little.

The things Red wanted to do didn’t necessarily have to be classified as work. They could turn it into a bonding experience somehow.

“He, Red.”

The giant peeked an eye socket open. “Mm?”

“You wanna hunt?”

He perked up immediately. “Yeah.”

Sans nodded, rolled onto his stomach, leaned his chin on his hands and flicked his tail back and forth like a pendulum. Red’s eyes followed it, attracted to the motion and the pretty color.

“Teach me.”

That broke the short spell, and Red blinked in wide-eyed confusion.

“Whadja say, Angel?”

“Teach me how to hunt.”

“Uhh…” Red’s earlier excitement had ebbed away, replaced by uncertainty. His ultimate response was one Sans hadn’t even thought about. “Am I… not bringing back enough food?”

Sans laughed, and maybe he shouldn’t have, because it looked like Red’s pride as a provider was hurt.

“Ah, It has nothing to do with that. Relax. I just thought, if you taught me how to hunt, we could turn it into… sort of a fun couple’s exercise. I’m not really expecting to catch anything myself.”

“Oh.”

The meroctopus looked relieved. Then he put on his serious face and gave his mate a once-over, from his powerful tail to his easy-going smile. What did he have to work with here…

Well, Sans was fast, so actually catching prey wouldn’t be too hard for him. But he was also weak, and he didn’t have natural weapons like claws, fangs, or poison to finish the job. The scenario Red pictured happening was that Sans would get ahold of something and then lose it right away.

He would have him use magic to attack, but he knew Sans preferred to save his magic for healing and teleporting—just in case.

“It’ll hafta be traps, then.” He decided. “Sorry, Angel, But yer not really built fer anythin’ close n’
Sans chuckled. “Alright, so traps. I already know a little from watching you. Where should we start?”

“By makin’ one.”

Red started searching the ocean floor, picking up all kinds of junk. Twine and plant fibers, bits of driftwood, and scrap metal all got thrown together in one ugly junk pile.

“Is this enough?” Sans asked uncertainly.

“Depends on whatcha wanna catch,” Red shrugged. “S’ enough ta trap some crabs. Help me wind these stringy things real tight.”

Sans took a minute to watch Red, then copied his technique—albeit with a few minor changes, due to his hands being so much smaller.

They were making little strings, Sans realized. And once he knew what the goal was, he could move his hands a little faster. After a few minutes, he had actually overtaken Red, who had to work slow and careful so he didn’t accidentally cut the string on his sharp claws.

“Hey, yer pretty good at that, Angel.”

“Thanks.”

They finished making the string, and then they wove it into a neat little net. Sans didn’t really have a feel for it yet, but Red apparently knew exactly how big the holes could be.

They assembled the net together with the bits of driftwood and scrap metal and had something that looked decently close to the traps Red had back home.

“It looks pretty good. Color me surprised.”

“The traps back home’re made of junk too, ya know? Just… slightly nicer junk.”

Red went on to teach Sans all about where to put the trap and how often to check up on it, and then all that was left was to wait.

Now that Red’s mind had been on crabs all day, he turned to Sans again. “Actually, I remembered a way ya could hunt without traps.”

Sans blinked and tipped his head, smiling skeptically. “Really?”

“Mm. C’mere.”

He led Sans to a spot where a crab was buried in the sand and pointed.

“There’s a crab there. Smack it with yer tail real good.”

Sans smiled awkwardly. “Just smack it?”

“Yer a fast swimmer, so ya got a strong tail, yeah? Ya can probably hit pretty hard with it if ya try.”

Sans hummed. He’d never thought of using his tail as a weapon before.
Red pointed at the sand again. “Once ya hit it, it’ll be stunned. Ya can smash it on a rock or somethin’ after that.”

Sans winced. “I feel kind of bad for the crab. Also, if I’m going to hit it with a rock anyway, why hit it with my tail first?”

Red looked at him stupidly. “‘Cause it’s a crab. If ya don’t confuse it first, it’ll pinch ya.”

It made so much sense.

“Can I just kill it with my tail then?” Sans asked, although he wasn’t certain he wanted to.

“Thing is, yer hittin’ it into the sand. S’ got a cushion, so it probably won’t get hurt that bad. The usual strategy is ta crush or bite it after ya stun it.” Red gave Sans a hesitant look and another quick once-over.

“I dunno. D’ya think ya can?”

Sans winced at the mental image of cracking a tooth doing something stupid like biting a crabshell. “Eh, pass. I guess I’ll try the rock thing.”

The little mer snuck up on the patch of sand that Red indicated and gave it a hard thwack with his tail. Red quickly passed Sans a rock to finish the job, but when the sand cleared enough to see—

“It died?” Red murmured, gobsmacked.

Sans was caught off guard too, and he laughed in bewilderment. “Didn’t know I had it in me.”

Red pulled Sans into a big hug. “Ya did such a good job, Angel! M’ so proud of ya!”

Sans chuckled and blushed. It felt surprisingly good to be complemented and praised like this by Red. The big guy really did seem proud of his accomplishment.

Red hugged his mate tightly and rattled off a few more words of praise, then he pulled back a fraction and grinned blissfully.

“Yeah, let’s have that kid after all.”

Sans blanked out, automatically responding with the first thing that popped into his head.

“How did you come to that conclusion?!?”

At being outright asked that question, a flurry of thoughts traveled through Red’s mind so jam-packed and tangled up in instincts he barely understood, that he was just left confused.

Because it’s hot? Your first kill is special. Isn’t it obvious to wanna have a strong person’s babies? You’re actually even better than I realized. Mm, that tail. Do you not want my kids when I hunt for you? Shut up and let’s get rough. I wanna hug ya again. That crab looks tasty. Kids please?

“Uh…” Red shook his head to refocus his thoughts. “That don’t matter. We’re doin’ it. I ain’t takin’ no fer an answer.”

Sans smiled awkwardly. “No.”

Red hung his head and immediately gave up, which Sans found amusing considering the words he’d literally just said.
“But I can think of something else we can do if you’re riled up.”

Red lifted his head a fraction due to curiosity, and Sans beckoned him back to the cave.

Sans one-sidedly pleased his mate who was simultaneously always and never in heat. He’d been thinking for a while that it might be a little mean to make Red wait for the few days every year that his mermaid biology decided it was time to make love. Right now, when they had nothing but time on their hands, was the perfect time to remedy that injustice a little.

However, Red didn’t forget his earlier request, nor did the instincts cluttering his head and heart ease up for the rest of the vacation. In the end, Sans was weak, and he sighed internally.

*Toriel’s going to kill me*, he laughed bitterly.
Chapter Summary

*In which we learn what went on at the school while Red and Sans were away.

Chapter Notes

This one’s a little shorter, but it felt done.

Blueberry looked around the den. Looked again, and again. Then he curled up in a sad little ball on the sand. Blackberry nearly swam past him, stopped to sigh, and then asked in a tone that barely feigned interest, “Are you playing hide and seek? That is a terrible hiding spot.”

Blueberry turned his head up so he could see his brother. His round sockets full of cyan tears. “I can’t find mom.”

Blackberry recoiled like the little fish’s gaze carried an electric current. He’s crying?! “M-mom and dad went on a vacation together. You know that.”

“When are they coming back?”

“Five more days.” He should know that too.

Blueberry curled into a smaller blue ball. “I miss them…”

Blackberry felt extremely uncomfortable seeing his hyperactive twin looking so… depressed.

“Well... I have training to do.”

He turned to leave but felt something catch one of his legs. Blueberry was pouting up at him with big, round eyes.

“Please don’t go. I’m lonely.”

“Play with Stretch,” Blackberry grimaced, trying to pull his tentacle free. Blueberry’s grip was like iron.

“Stretch is sleeping.”

“The others then!”

“I wanna play with you.”

Blackberry sighed and finally shook off Blue’s grip—by literally shaking him off.

“Fine! You can come and train with me, but when it’s too much for you, you have to go back,
Okay? I'm not going to baby you.”

Blueberry rubbed his tears away and smiled brightly. “Okay!”

From there, Blackberry began a special training exercise: an exercise to be totally aware of his surroundings except for the bubbly blue mermaid swimming happy circles around him. It took an immense amount of effort, but so did most techniques worth having.

And, in fact, Blackberry got used to tuning his brother out. At some point, he really did forget Blueberry was there. Black just went about his day as usual, cautiously exploring and mentally mapping the deep waters nearest to the den.

A sudden tug on Black’s hand nearly shocked his soul out of his body, and he just barely held back from driving a bone attack straight through Blueberry’s skull.

“Hey, Black, isn’t it lunchtime yet? I’m kinda hungry.”

“You’re still here?! The young meroctopus scattered his unused attack and stared in disbelief. The water pressure should be crushing his tiny body. He should be blind and suffocating. Why had he followed this far?!”

“Go home, Blue! It isn’t safe!”

“But I feel fine. And you said before that I could come with you until I didn’t feel good.”

Blackberry just looked at his twin in shock.

… His… twin.

Just like Blackberry was half mermaid, Blueberry was half meroctopus.

Blackberry knew that, but because Blue looked exactly like a mermaid, he hadn’t realized that he had inherited, well, any of Red’s genes. Now, because of that oversight, he had mistakenly agreed to let Blueberry follow him to the deep ocean.

Blackberry suddenly shuddered. Mom is going to kill me.

“Y-you’re right,” he excused, “it’s lunchtime. We’re going back. Stay close to me, don’t swim in circles, and don’t glow your tail no matter what.”

“Are we playing a game?” Blue smiled excitedly, eyelights glittering.

“Yes, a game,” Black spat. “It’s called don’t get eaten by deep sea creatures!”

“The name could use work,” Blueberry replied, to which black gritted his teeth.

The very first thing he did when they got home was find Undyne and beg her to teach Blueberry how to defend himself. Blueberry already had a habit of wandering off, and he could go a long way before anybody noticed he was gone. If there was a chance he could wander into the deep…

Blackberry would train his brother himself, but their bodies and fighting styles were so different that there wasn’t much that effectively carried over. He also could have asked Asgore to train Blue, but Undyne was the queen of crash courses, and this was something that needed sorting fast.
All Undyne had had to do was hand Blue a weapon and show him how to swing it. He thought their sparring was a great game. There was no skill or technique whatsoever behind his movements, but he was fast enough to block Undyne’s semi-serious attacks, and he hit hard back.

Undyne blocked another attack from the little guy, her eyes widening when the small training spear she’d made for him snapped in half. The fish woman took some distance and smiled tensely.

“What’s with this? A kid shouldn’t be this strong.”

“He is my twin,” Blackberry folded his arms. “It would be pathetic if he had no talent.”

Honestly, he was beyond relieved. If Blue could go to the deep yet lacked the capacity to protect himself, that would have been the worst situation.

Undyne stared at the meroctopus for a minute, then slapped her forehead. “Oh, duh! He’s half meroctopus!” She looked down at the training spear little Blue had snapped in half. “It must be Red’s genes. He didn’t get that from Sans.”

“Give him a real weapon,” Black ordered. “One that won’t break.”

“I’ll do you one better,” the fish lady grinned dangerously. “Hey Blue, how’d you like to learn how to create your own attacks?”

Blueberry blinked, then his eyes got wide and sparkly. “Yes! Yes yes yes! I want too!”

“H-hold on. Isn’t it still a little early for that?” A pit of nervousness formed in the meroctopus’s stomach.

“It’ll be fine! He’s your twin, right? And you learned ages ago!”

“You’re overlooking the fact that I’m far less excitable than—”

“Alright, Blueberry, listen up! Auntie Undyne’s gonna teach you how to summon an attack!”

Blueberry just trembled in place, holding his little fists up to his chin and laughing “mwehehe!” excitedly. Black couldn’t get either of their attentions with words, and he hesitated too long to stop them by force.

About ten minutes later, the surrounding sand was littered with summoned bones and bits of debris, and Blueberry was passed out from magic overuse with a blissful grin on his face. Undyne turned her head rigidly to Black, her long red hair a mess and her expression shell-shocked.

“I, uh, think maybe your parents are going to kill me.”

Blackberry sighed deeply. “Give me your hand, Undyne,” he requested tiredly.

Undyne smiled crookedly, “Huh? Why?”

“I’M GOING TO BITE IT OFF, YOU STUPID FISH!”

He swam toward her, and she blocked him with a sudden barrage of spears, panic on her face.

“What?! No way, dude! I already lost my finger once!”
“I know! You don’t deserve any of them!”

They continued shouting at each other between volleys of attacks, Undyne just barely managing to keep Blue’s furious brother (and his dangerous-looking teeth) at bay. But she was already tired from dealing with Blueberry’s uncontrolled flurry of summoned attacks. A pained scream echoed out over the sand.


“I bit her,” Blackberry muttered, looking away from the scene of Crooks mending the severed hand back to Undyne’s wrist.

“And I stabbed him when he wouldn’t let go,” Undyne said glumly, her eyes flickering to the small new scar Black had on his collarbone and the hole in his tentacle from trying to block the blow.

“I know I’m a bit nearsighted, but I can see that,” Crooks smiled awkwardly.

He finished with Undyne’s hand and moved on to Blackberry’s scar. Thanks to the mershark’s otherworldly healing ability, the mark faded to nothing. Undyne breathed a sigh of relief that she wouldn’t have an even angrier Red to deal with when he got back. In fact, even her wrist didn’t have any scars left over. Fuck, even the scar from Red biting her finger off was gone!

“Dude, you’re seriously good at this,” she complimented genuinely, turning her hand over in front of her face.

Crooks smiled mildly and blushed a little—for a moment. “Thank you, but let’s not change the subject. Why were the two of you fighting?”

Blackberry took it upon himself to explain the situation, starting from that morning and ending when he threw himself at Undyne. Crooks, meanwhile, decided the sleeping Blueberry didn’t look warm enough and tucked him in with a blanket.

“That does explain it,” he surmised calmly. “Alright, I will help convince Blue to stay away from the deep, and you two should work with Asgore to teach him magic control in the time you have left before Sans and Red return.”

“You’re going to keep Blue away from the deep?” Undyne tilted her head. “What’re you gonna say to him?”

“Nothing that isn’t true,” Crooks assured her with a smile. “The cautions I was told as a child will do, I suppose. I certainly would have left for the shallows after hearing that if I could have.”

Blueberry woke up a few hours later, but he still looked quite pale when he left the healing room. Others had asked him what was wrong, but he just covered his mouth and shook his head, looking ill.

Over the next few days, if the deep was mentioned, the little guy would start shaking, and he had become vehemently against Black going down there. Finally, the meroctopus confronted Crooks.

“He’s traumatized! What in the world did you tell him?!”
“Oh.” Crooks set down the kelp blankets he was folding and held his chin. “I never did get to finish that talk. I’d only mentioned a bit about my background before he swam off. I only thought to establish that I was from the deep and therefore have some authority on the subject, that way he would take my warning seriously. I suppose all he really needed was a small chiding?”

Black stared at Crooks’ oblivious smile and remedied a few things in his head. First, he understood a bit more why Red never talked about his personal history. And second, while he wasn’t as bad as Axe, Crooks wasn’t completely sane himself. He had a distorted perspective of what was normal or frightening due to his upbringing.

“I understand. It’s my mistake for not stopping you.” Crooks tilted his head curiously and Blackberry sighed. “Hopefully he cheers up soon.”

Blue did cheer up. He was a hard one to keep down. Though his visibly traumatized reactions to the deep stopped, he kept a good distance from it, and he at least learned not to use his magic without adult supervision. It could be said his rushed training was complete by the time Sans and Red returned. Undyne and Black were still worried they were going to get in trouble, but it turned out the skeleton parents were too preoccupied getting scolded by Toriel to scold anybody themselves.

”Another child?! That makes four, Sans! We are already oversaturated and you know it! Undyne and Alphys happen to want another of their own, you know? They will have to wait even longer now! Little can be done for Red, but I expected you to know better!”

And it went on, loud enough for most of the den to listen in on. As a matter of fact, Red had teleported away in a panic the moment the yelling started, probably hiding as far away as his old cave. Sans stayed behind and absorbed the scolding for Toriel’s stress-relief. He didn’t let it get to him at all, and even managed to talk her tentatively around to his side when it was over. Of course, even if she didn’t accept it, the damage was done. They were having another kid.

Black’s misgivings were banished by the euphoric news that he was going to have a younger sibling. Soon, he would be a big brother! No longer the youngest! It was more than worth the stress of the last few days.
Learning to read had opened up a whole new world to Axe; the surface world, to be specific. And the more he learned about it, the more complicated it got. There was money to be exchanged for goods and services, jobs with which to earn that money, banks to safeguard it, taxes to redirect a portion of it to government functions… Governments were a whole other can of worms he wasn’t interested in at the moment.

Anyway, the service he was looking into was some kind of “dental surgery” for Crooks. For that, not only did one need money, but they needed to choose a specific doctor or clinical office out of millions, and they were expected to have some form of “identification” or “insurance” before said doctor would even allow a discussion about a monetary exchange.

Axe didn’t have those things. It was nearly impossible to get those things on his own. But money could be exchanged for services, including hiring people to forge all that information for you, or paying your doctor of choice to look the other way. However, these things were against the law, and if the people were caught, they would be forced to pay a fine. The amount you paid them had to at least match that fine, but realistically, no one would even look your way if you weren’t offering at least double.

So Axe had to pay people to help him bypass any barriers, and then he had to pay for the original service. It came down to needing a lot of money, didn’t it? So besides getting a job, how could he earn money? Because, let’s face it, Axe couldn’t even breathe air, there wasn’t a single surface job he could reliably do.

Red and Sans had money. Where did they get it then? Axe asked around and found that Red had sold gold found on the ocean floor and gotten surface money in exchange. Axe could do the same, right? The surface was a no-go for him, but the deep was his birthplace. He’d seen plenty of sunken ships and piles of treasure in his time. But transporting enough of it would take a lot of trips. That was a lot of time and energy that Axe didn’t have.

Oh, but cellphones had a pretty useful feature called an item box. He could put all the gold in there and make just one trip. Surface technology was convenient.

It was still a bit much to ask Axe to do that long swim, hunt for gold, and return all in the same day. He was still recovering from a nearly life-long period of starvation. He would need to hole up somewhere down there and rest at some point. The whole operation wasn’t something he could sneak off and do without anyone noticing.

Since he couldn’t do it secretly, he wouldn’t.

“Hey, bro. M’ goin’ back ta da deep fer a bit.”
Crooks dropped the plate he had been cleaning. Thankfully, the water resistance kept it from falling fast and shattering.

“Whatever for?” the gangly mershark asked in a shaky voice, reaching to retrieve the dish with trembling phalanges.

“Ta find gold.”

Crooks visibly relaxed and put on a relieved smile. “Oh, is that all? I understand. I myself was worrying about Sans and Red buying food for us from the surface. Even if they seem so willing to share,” he trailed off a little. “Well, I don’t want to be a burden on them.” He cleared his throat shyly. “Do you need me to come with you?”

Axe shook his head, and Crooks smiled in sad understanding.

“Of course not. What about Red or Blackberry?”

“Nah thanks.”


“Alone, nothin’l even catch my tail shadow,” Axe excused. “Wit’ dose two ‘round, I might get noticed’.”

“It’s still better to have help if something *does* happen,” Crooks insisted. “Besides, what could be the harm? If you take Red, he can handle any fights that come up all on his own.”

Axe stared at Crooks while he deliberated, but if he was so insistent…

“Fine. I’ll take Red wit’.”

Crooks smiled sweetly. “Good.”

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Red had to remind himself to release the treasure chest from his suckers. It was so easy to forget that he and Axe weren’t competing over this. Judging by the rusty glint of Axe’s weapon, if he kept grabbing all the gold they discovered in his tentacles, he was going to lose one of them.

The reason was one even Red could understand. Axe wanted money to help Crooks. In comparison, Red only wanted to secure a little extra funds while he was down here anyway.

Red had gotten very good at the concept of sharing when he was in the den, but down here, he had a tendency to relapse into his old lifestyle. Something about the general atmosphere of the deep—the memories just flooded back into him.

“Sorry. Go ahead.”

Axe lowered his weapon back down the fraction it had risen up and glided over to the chest. He poured most of the ancient currency into his item box, but he left some for Red.

He would have preferred to take all of it, but Red’s memories were what had led them to find so
many sunken vessels. Axe owed him some of the loot.

“Ya still need more?” The meroctopus asked, already searching his skull for their next stop.

Axe hummed and spun his axe around casually. “M’not really sure. Maybe, but I don’t wanna be
gone too long.”

Red moved over to the mangled door that was the treasure hold’s exit. “So we’re goin’ back now?” He
eager to see his little Angelfish again.

“I’d love ta,” Axe chuckled, equally anxious to get back to Crooks, “but I need a break first.” He
was already positioning himself on a section of floor. “Get comfy.”

Red frowned and let go of the bent door frame, taking a seat a reasonable distance away from Axe
—pretty much in the opposite corner of the room, due to their sizes.

If Red were someone other than himself, it would have been a good moment to ask Axe some of
the lingering questions he had, but… As expected, he couldn’t do it. Now, Axe would chat and
banter, but he wasn’t one to make conversation where there wasn’t any to be had. Or, in other
words, he only talked when there was something to talk about. Red braced himself for a few hours
of awkward silence, but he only had to endure it for a few minutes.

“Got a question fer ya,” Axe murmured, sockets opening slowly like he’d still been planning on
taking a nap until that very moment. “How’d ya have kids wit’ a mermaid?”

“H-huh?” Red tumbled into bashful nervousness in record time at the intimate question out of left
field. It was completely unexpected on his end, and he even wondered if he’d heard it right through
Axe’s slightly thicker accent. “Ya mean… in general, or me specifically?”

Axe’s teasing grin was filled with silent laughter. “S’ dere a difference?”

Red shook his head stupidly. “Uh, no…? Wait, yeah. Ya ain’t interested in one are ya?”

The only mermaids in the school without mates were the children, and Axe shouldn’t have met
anyone from a different school. Nobody who was still alive, anyway. If that really was the case, it
was worrying.

“M’ jus’ curious,” Axe shrugged. “Thought it was impossible fer different types ta have kids. If
dat ain’t da case after all, I wanna know more.” He let his eyelight drift to the side absently and
volunteered a little extra information. “Info like dat’d be worth more’n a few get-outa-death-free
cards fer us.”

Red furrowed his brow. He understood that kind of exchange with other species, but the mersharks
were starving, weren’t they? Was it really worth enough for a starving person to miss a free meal?

“Why?” Red asked stupidly.

“Axe studied him, then lidded his eyesockets casually. “Call it population problems,” he shrugged.
Then the shark hummed, “Crooks’d be upset if I said more.”

Red hesitated. There would be no problem with telling Axe about it, but if he did, he’d lose what
was apparently a good bargaining chip.

“Let’s trade. I’ll tell ya how ta mate with other types of monster, n’ you tell me exactly why ya
wanna know.”
Axe’s smile drained off his face. It was rare to see him be overtly serious.

“Didn’tcha hear me?” the mershark said darkly. “I said Crooks’ be upset if I toldja.”

Red frowned, somewhat unhappy that his attempt at negotiation had fallen flat.

“Fine. Then tell me what da magic yer always usin’s for.”

Axe clearly wasn’t thrilled about that either.

“None of yer business,” he said flatly.

Red pouted. “Then how about—”

“I don’t hafta trade nothin’,” Axe cut in. “Dere’re plenty’a people back home who’ll tell me fer free.”

Red frowned, but he wasn’t all that upset. He’d never thought he had the conversational skills to make a trade like this in the first place.

“Yeah, fine,” the meroctopus shrugged. “All ya gotta do’s fall in love with someone, touch your souls together, and both of ya gotta want ta have a kid together.”

“Dat’s all?” Axe confirmed, whipping out his phone to take notes.

“S’ really that easy,” Red confirmed. “Ya can’t have more’n one kid at a time that way though.”

“Oh man.” Axe’s somewhat insane smile stretched wide across his face, and he tugged at his dead eye socket. “Dat’s good news… real good.”

Red nodded. “Glad yer happy.” He’d officially given up his only bargaining chip, but, “Can I ask ya a question anyway?”

Axe grinned at him. “Ya can ask,” he said teasingly, strongly implying he wouldn’t be offering an answer.

“I never had any siblings,” Red prefaced, “but Crooks n’ ya seem a lil’ too close ta me. D’ya like him?”

Red wasn’t expecting a response of overwhelming killing intent, but he was one of the best people to take it in stride. Axe’s hand twitched, his brain caught between reaching for his weapon and responding with words.

“Say it again,” he hissed, “I fuckin’ dare ya.”

“Sorry,” Red shrugged. “M’ kinda stupid. Wazzat a no, or didja get rejected?”

Axe’s thread of self-restraint snapped, and he swung his weapon without holding back. Red batted it away casually, and Axe didn’t look particularly upset that he’d missed. In the end, it had been nothing more than a common phrase in the deep ocean’s language. Translation: quit you’re bullshit.

“A taboo subject,” he growled. “Ya got any idea wha’ happens when a species of bloodthirsty cannibals splits up inta lil’ groups dat don’t change fer generations?”

Axe’s bloated eyelight shrunk to a pinprick, and he slapped a gnarled hand over his mouth, cursing
his damn scatterbrain with every fiber of his being.

Red just hummed. “Ya got a problem with inbreedin’?”

He knew a little about it. For most monsters, it wasn’t a big deal. Monsters were spared the physical bodies of humans, and they were resistant to the ill effects of incest. But even so, if it was perpetuated long enough, it could get pretty bad.

“Izzat why Crooks’ got so many health problems?”

If that was the case, it would make perfect sense that the brothers would be vehemently against the idea of being romantically involved.

Axe gave Red a very off-putting glare, where his smile was wide and twitching and his sockets were wide open, he clawed aggressively at the dead one.

“I wasn’t s’posed ta tell ya dat,” he said, his voice surprisingly well-controlled. “Ya’d better keep it ta yerself.”

“That’s not so hard,” Red shrugged. He wasn’t a gossip. “Since I already know ‘bout it, ya might as well gimme da whole story.”

Axe chuckled darkly, and his expression normalized somewhat.

“Sure. But if ya tell anyone else, Crooks’ gonna cry, n’ den imma halfta kill ya in yer sleep. Dat fine?”

Red returned a lopsided, shark-toothed smile. “I ain’t gonna tell ‘em shit. I like my Angel soft n’ nice like he is. I ain’t gonna break him—or da kids.”

Axe smiled, dark and dangerous, and got himself comfortable on the floor.

“Alright. Don’t go whinin’ ta me later dat ya can’t stomach it.”

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter will be Axe and Crooks’ backstory. It’s gonna be heavy, guys.
A Story from the Deep

Chapter Summary

*In which we flash back to Axe and Crooks’ lives before meeting Blackberry.

Chapter Notes

It is... long.

**Angst warning.** Dial it to max. This is about as much angst as a fluff queen like me is capable of writing.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The mother shark held up her head proudly and displayed her children to the school. There were two of them in total. One was small, with only one working eye, and the other was brittle with a broken mouth. But they were two. With two children, she had successfully replaced herself and her mate for the next generation.

Her mate… She had loved her mate more than anyone, but she had devoured him regardless. Since the nutrients had allowed two of their clutch to survive, it was worth the sacrifice.

Some in the school mocked her children, while others were apathetic. The mother disregarded them. She once fought off someone from another school who thought they would make a good snack, and her school had had a nice meal.

Crooks didn’t like to eat. His teeth caused him pain, and he cried anytime there was pressure on them. She scolded him that he would eat or he would die. Sometimes he still refused. She helped him file some of his more badly overgrown teeth down and pulled out one that had been stabbing the inside of his mouth. He was a little more compliant after that. Or maybe he was just worried that complaining more would compel her to repeat the procedure.

Axe needed no encouragement. He was aggressive and liked to try and swing the weapon she favored. She told him to always be strong and to protect his brother. They two were the last skeletons in their school, as she and her mate had been, and as their three shared grandparents had been. They alone were the future of their kind. They were irreplaceable.

The children slowly grew bigger. They didn’t have enough to eat, so they were larger but weighed the same. The mother saw her last night when Axe finally managed to lift her weapon himself.

The children ate well that night, but they were left alone.

Axe swam close to crooks with his oversized weapon in hand. Together, they searched the cliff sides for debris. Crooks spotted a hint of white hiding amongst the grey-black. He tried to pretend
he hadn’t noticed it, but Axe saw his head jerk away too quickly. He swam forward to pick up the bones himself. There were three and a half rib bones from a small fish. Axe started gnawing on one and handed Crooks another. The brittle skeleton grimaced.

“I don’t like bones,” he said shortly. “They’re hard to chew.”

“Well hurt worse den an empty stomach?” Axe asked.

“Sometimes,” his brother replied. He scratched at the bone with his fingertip, but it wasn’t sharp enough to shave off the marrow. Axe sighed through his nose and held his hand out. Crooks passed back the bone with a guilty look and watched Axe carefully chip away at it with his blade. Skeletons didn’t really have to chew. If Crooks was patient enough, he could keep bite-sized pieces in his mouth until they dissolved on their own—or at least until they softened up a little.

Axe started cutting up the next one for him before finishing his portion. He held the blade a little too close and nicked his finger. Like lightning, he shoved the digit into his mouth, hoping nobody had smelled the blood he could taste like a supernova of flavor on his tongue.

Crooks put a fragile hand on his shoulder. “Let me see it.”

Slowly, axe pulled his finger out of his mouth. He gave it a good lick so the saliva would get in the way of the small leakage of blood flow. Crooks held his hand, closing his eyes in peaceful concentration, and the scratch healed over before anyone could notice it.

Axe’s eyelight wobbled faintly in amazement. He’d only seen his brother do this once or twice before, but it was still just as amazing.

“How do dat?” he asked.

Crooks shrugged. “It’s hard to explain. I just… want you to stop hurting—to be better—and let my magic move on its own.”

It was possible to use specialized magic without any training, but you had to have the aptitude. Axe couldn’t express how it made him feel to have just one person who genuinely cared about him.

“It makes me tired though,” Crooks added, slouching his weak shoulders.

Axe wordlessly handed him a bite-sized piece of bone and got back to work cutting up more.

They had almost finished eating when a fuss stirred up in the distance. Axe and Crooks swam through the darkness to see what was going on, and saw that the rest of the group had found something great.

It looked like a couple of meroctopuses had gotten into a fight, and there was one left lying on the rocks, barely clinging to life. The bear-type meroctopus had a green tentacle grasped tightly in his paw, showing that his opponent hadn’t gotten away unscathed.

The bear shoved away the sharks that tried to get close, but he was severely weakened. Axe tried to move in, but a limb flailed out at him. He managed to cut off the tip and retreat with it, grinning wildly as he showed it to Crooks.

The rest of the sharks had a bit of a game of chicken going on with their prey, and the alpha finished it, shoving her gnarled, old harpoon through the bear’s chest. Everyone cheered. They would scavenge when they had to, but the only real way for their school to survive was to risk their lives to take down the occasional big game. If they were careful, they could survive for half a
month on a kill like this.

Members of the school dedicatedly started cutting up the body, compelled by the alpha’s glare not to eat anything until it had been rationed out. Meanwhile, she caught Axe’s eye and swam over.

Emperia was a stern-looking fish woman, with a wiry but strong, reliable body. Her thin lips, gouged left eye, and needle teeth would have made her a nightmare in shallower waters, but she was pretty standard-looking at this depth.

Axe guarded his little piece of magical flesh suspiciously as she approached him.

“Not bad, kid. You’ve got guts charging in instead of running away the first time you see a meroctopus.” Her grin stretched wider. “You can keep that piece. You worked hard for it. And you’ll get your rations too. Good work.”

Axe blinked when she swam off, and his cheeks heated up in an unfamiliar way. But he shook the feeling off and turned to Crooks.

“Hey, ya should try dat thing on dis,” he said, holding up the piece of meat. “D’ya think maybe da rest’d grow back?”

“I don’t know,” Crooks frowned. “I can try.”

They swam off somewhere others couldn’t see them easily, and Crooks tried using his strange green magic. Unfortunately, the meat didn’t grow any, but it did turn a little clearer and sparkly. The frail mershark gave up after a few seconds, slouching and holding his hands to his chest while he got his breath back.

“Maybe,” he huffed, “I just done have enough magic for it.”

Axe hummed and examined the pretty-looking meat. “Ya did somethin’ ta it.”

He tore off a bite, and his eyes went wide. “… Tasty.”

Meroctopus was delicious. No one had ever mentioned that to him before.

He and Crooks shared their little meal together and went excitedly to get their rations from the alpha. It wasn’t as delicious as they’d expected. Axe suggested Crooks’ magic had improved the taste. They tested it out on a little piece of meat and realized it was true. However… it took a lot of magic for Crooks to do, and all it was was an improvement in taste. They decided only to use that ability on special occasions and buried it in their minds.

Seasons passed, but the weather never changed at this depth. There were more children in the school. Three more. The school had lost one capable adult male to his mate, and another to her children. In the future, they would have increased their hunting strength by one, but for now, it was down significantly.

They ran into a lone meroctopus in the middle of the night, and it apparently thought that was a good enough reason to fight them. They could have been wiped out, but the alpha called a retreat just in time and threw herself in for a suicide attack. She knew they would be chased if she didn’t finish it here. She stabbed the meroctopus through the eye just as it gouged her stomach, and they both hung limply in the water.
Axe stared. The woman who had encouraged him, praised him as a hunter, and let him and Crooks have extra food, was dying.

He moved to grab Crooks and drag him over to heal her, but his brother was already swimming just as fast as he could.

With his small amount of magic, he couldn’t do much more than seal the wound, but that was enough for the alpha to wake up. She was tough as nails.

Emperia looked at Crooks gasping, crying, and focusing with all his might as he held his little hands over her stomach. The green magic coming from his hands, her wound stopping bleeding right in front of her eyes. What on earth was going on?

“How are you doing that?” She gurgled. In all honesty, she probably shouldn’t be talking yet.

“I just can,” Crooks sniffled.

He ran out of expendable magic, and Axe caught his shoulder before he could faint face-first on the alpha’s wound. It was tender and red—jarring against her pale blue skin—but it wasn’t bleeding.

Stubbornly, the alpha raised her hand and patted Crooks gently on the shoulder.

“That’s a special power you have, kid. Thanks.”

“Thanks fer protectin’ us,” Axe said for his brother. “He could heal ya even better if he had more magic ta spare.”

Emperia nodded. “Oh, he’s getting double rations tonight.” She frowned, “I wish I could promise more.”

Emperia checked that the others were preoccupied preparing her kill, and chuckled derisively. “You know, I don’t really like skeletons much. I feel so damn guilty looking at you, and I can’t tell just how close you are to dusting.”

Axe said nothing, and the alpha sighed, looking off into the middle distance for a moment.

“Tell me if either of you are on the edge, okay? I’ll do something if I can.”

“’Kay,” Axe nodded.

Crooks woke up, and Emperia smiled her terrifying smile at him. “Good news little guy. You get double rations tonight.”

“O-oh. Uh, thank you.”

“Nah. You deserve more than that.” Floating not too far off, Emperia saw a piece of her intestines that had been gouged out earlier. She snatched it out of the water and grinned.

“It’s a ball,” she said. “You pass it back and forth and play with it.” She shrugged. “If you get hungry, you can eat it. It’s yours now.”
Crooks looked at the ball in fascination. He tested bouncing it on his palms, and blushed at the fluffy feeling that blossomed in his soul.

“D’ya like it?” Emperia grinned.

“Y-yes. Thank you.”

The alpha smiled, but it quickly turned bitter. “You know, we used to let the kids play, but now it’s too important to have all the hunters we can get.” She willed the smile into something more cheerful and gave the frail skeleton an extremely gentle noogy. “But you can’t hunt anyway, so you should play.”

“Um… okay.”

The alpha smiled at the promising two children. Axe had grade-A hunter’s instincts and admirable killing intent. Crooks could heal him if he bit off more than he could chew. She looked forward to meeting their children. If they had talent like their parents, she wouldn’t mind helping to rear them up a little.

Axe woke up with a fever one day. At first, he thought he was ill, but he had never gotten sick before. There were no illnesses in this part of the ocean, only parasites. He wondered if he’d caught one, but he hadn’t eaten anything suspicious lately. He hadn’t eaten much at all, in fact.

Axe took a few minutes to feel out the thoughts in his head and the sensations in his body, and then he understood. He was in heat.

Crooks should be in heat too. So that was it. It was finally time to pass this harsh life on to their children. Personally, Axe was ready for it. He thought maybe he wouldn’t feel so tired and hungry if he was dead.

Axe went to find Crooks, who had also woken up to his first heat, and together they made a plan. Since the young children would need protecting, Axe would be the mother. They would conceive immediately after their next meal. If it was enough, maybe the clutch would live without Crooks having to become food for their unborn. Axe thought they should meet him if they could, and he really didn’t want to have to endure any length of time here without Crooks for company.

They didn’t do it. The conception failed magnificently.

Crooks’ body had never worked quite right, but of all the things to be broken… He was incapable of forming a sex.

When he couldn’t make one type, they abruptly decided to switch roles, but he couldn’t make the other either.

Maybe it was just a fluke. It could be hard to use magic you’d never tried before. They endured another long, harsh year and tried again. Still nothing.

So, just like that, they were the last skeletons this school would ever have?

Crooks just kept crying, and he wouldn’t stop apologizing. Axe tried to console him, but he wouldn’t have it. Axe went to ask Emperia, the only other person in the school he actually liked,
how he could cheer his brother up.

“It didn’t work this year either, huh?” she grimaced. “I’m sorry, Axe. Maybe he’s just a late-bloomer, but if it’s because of inbreeding, he might never be able to have kids. It’s… happened before.”

“Wha’s inbreeding? Izzat a parasite?”

The alpha smiled bitterly. “Yeah. You’re young, huh, Axe?” And she explained that the world and the culture he knew were nothing more than a necessary sickness that circumstance has forced onto them.

“But, I mean, sick kids are better than no kids at all, right?” She smiled, but it looked painful.

Another year went by, and another heat came, and Axe asked if Crooks wanted to try again.

“No, I’d rather not,” he said.

Axe was confused. “Why not?”

Crooks gave Axe a look he’d never seen before. It might have been disdain, but he couldn’t tell where it was aimed at.

“Because even if we succeeded, why bring children into this world just to suffer?”

Axe was taken aback. Apparently Crooks had done some thinking over these past few years.

“Ya don’t know dat fer sure, right?” Axe mentioned. “Maybe dere’ll be lots more food ’round fer deir generation.”

“I don’t know what the ocean will be like in the future,” Crooks conceded. “But I do know what I’d be passing down to them. Knowingly allowing that would just be cruel.”

“Ya really… wanna stop tryin’?”

Crooks smiled bitterly and nodded. “I’m sorry, brother. For what it’s worth, if you ever happen upon… an alternative partner… I wouldn’t mind if you pursued them.”

Wouldn’t mind. He wouldn’t mind, huh? Axe felt knives stabbing at his soul, but he said nothing, and his expression stayed frozen.

It had never been about kids for him. It had never been about tradition or obligation. It was only ever because Crooks was perfect.

“D’ya wanna die anyway?” he asked. “If ya don’t wanna be stuck in dis hell like Emperia, I could help ya.”

“Thank you for the offer,” Crooks smiled softly, “but I don’t want to die. Life is… hard, but at least I know what to expect. Dying scares me.”

So Crooks wanted to stay alive. In that case, Axe was stuck here too. He wouldn’t leave Crooks alone to fend for himself.

“M’kay. … Hey, Crooks?”
“What is it?”

“I don’t really care ‘bout havin’ kids.” He swam closer and gingerly took Crooks’ hand. “And I ain’t never gonna be wit’ anyone ‘sides ya. I love ya. Really. Wit’ all my soul. D’ya… know dat?”

Crooks grimaced. “Let’s not talk about things like that.”


Crooks avoided his eyes and looked guiltily off to the side. “... It makes me uncomfortable.” He hung his head, “It’s… wrong. It hurts innocent people. I never asked to be born. Certainly not here, and certainly not like this.”

“But we can’t even have kids!”

“I dislike it by association.”

Crooks was holding firm on this, and it made Axe frustrated. But much, much heavier on his heart than that irritation was a crushing loneliness.

“Ya don’t love me.”

“I love you like a brother, Axe. Frankly, you shouldn’t want more than that from me.”

Crooks had come into this conversation prepared to lose everything: his relationship with his brother, and even his life. He already knew that while his own body was in metaphorical pieces, Axe’s mind was always teetering on the edge of collapse. It wasn’t helped in the least by the fact that he’d been guarding Crooks while he slept since they were born. When had Axe ever gotten the rest he needed? Nobody else in the school particularly noticed or cared—they only cared whether you could hunt or not—but Crooks worried over his brother’s mental state.

If there was anything Crooks could do that would set him off, it was rejecting him like this. But he had to be honest. He owed his family honesty.

“I don’t want to have a romantic relationship with you. I just want to be brothers.”

Axe was quiet, processing maybe.

“...Okay.”

“Are you mad?”

“... Nah. M’ sorry I made ya uncomfortable.”

“That’s alright. As long as you understand.”

Axe nodded. Crooks was the only person who had ever really cared about him. Emperia was nice, but she wouldn’t linger over it long if he died. She valued him because he helped keep the group alive, because he had been a promising mother, and now because he was cursed to stay childless just like her. Crooks cared about him as a person, Crooks would be sad if he died, and Crooks was the purest, most perfect person on this side of the ocean.

Axe ruefully accepted that he just wasn’t good enough to be anything more than his brother. They buried the conversation and didn’t talk about it again for years after.
The food was gone. Times had been hard before, but lately it was even worse. People went to bed with empty bellies and had fitful dreams. The tenuous alliance the mershark school had always been was quickly breaking down. The feeling in the water was palpable; everyone was thinking about who would be the best to eat first.

Many of them were looking at Crooks.

It was true that he wasn’t any help during a hunt, but Emperia had praised him for his special magic that could heal people. However, now, not only prey, but predators were absent. Nobody had the chance to hunt or get injured, so they didn’t need healing, and Crooks would need to use up magic to use the ability if it was needed.

It seemed people no longer thought they were getting a good return on the investment of feeding him. They would direct their hungry eyes at him… and then see Axe nearby, glaring back a warning.

Axe and Crooks weren’t just sexually mature, they were adults, like the alpha. Axe’s strength and social position were second only to the alpha. Without her help, Crooks wasn’t really on the menu. Her friendship with the skeletons was all that was stopping her from giving in to the suggestions of others, but the food crisis was reaching a critical pitch. Either somebody would die, or they all would, and it was better if that someone died before losing any more of their body mass.

“You should eat me,” Crooks told Axe. “You and the others. They’re right, after all. I’m only a burden in this situation.”

Axe stared at his brother and slowly shook his head. “I’d let it happen if ya wanted ta die, but ya don’t. Ya jus’ wan’ everyone else ta live.”

“Yes,” Crooks admitted. “I do want that.”

“Den it don’t hafta be ya,” Axe said stubbornly. “Da first person who makes a move on ya, imma kill ‘em.”

Crooks felt his insides twisting into tighter knots. He was so hungry. He thought back wistfully to the toy ball he had had for a few weeks as a child. He and Axe had gotten hungry and eaten it, but that was just as well. The cold salted water wouldn’t have kept it from rotting forever.

“Why do you suppose there isn’t anything down here anymore?” Crooks wondered. “Why are we the only ones who didn’t get the notice to leave?”

They had been swimming for months, trying to find anywhere that still had some life, but the results had been a failure.

“And,” Crooks continued when Axe didn’t have an answer, “are we doomed? Even if one or more of us become food for the others, all we can do is buy time. Someday there won’t be any of us left.”

Axe shrugged. “Personally, I don’t got da energy ta think about none of dat. But it don’t look good fer us as a species. Hell, even if everybody else keeps ta demselves, imma hafta do somethin’ while I can still swing my weapon. Probably jus’ a few more days ‘fore shit gets messy.”

Axe held his hand out, and Crooks squeezed it for comfort. “I’m afraid,” Crooks whispered.
“Yeah. Me too.” Axe looked at him. “Dunno if I’ll ever get another chance ta say dis, so I’m jus’ gonna say it. Bout half our lifetimes ago, I toldja I got feelin’s fer ya, an’ ya let me down hard.” Crooks frowned in a mixture of suspicion and guilt, and Axe chuckled. “Welp, my feelin’s never changed. I still love ya—as a brother an’ lots more.”

Crooks shook his head solemnly. “I’m sorry, Axe. I still don’t—”

“I know,” Axe cut him off. “I didn’t tell ya hopin’ fer dat.” He chuckled wryly, “Tho it woulda been nice. I jus’ wanted ta say I’m glad I got ta spend my life wit’ ya.”

Crooks started and abruptly teared up, and he pulled Axe into a gentle embrace. “Me too,” he choked out. “I don’t regret a minute of it.”

It was the next morning. As much as it burdened her, Emperia had accepted that action had to be taken, and she had brought a group to kill Crooks. Axe glared at her sad but decided face with menace.

“He saved yer life,” was all he could spit out.

“I know,” the alpha replied grimly. “I don’t like doing this.”

“Yer gonna like it even less in a minute.” He brought his weapon up, and the fight began. It was Axe against Emperia and three others. He shouldn’t have been their match, but he was fighting with literally everything on the line. Axe didn’t have a single concern for his own safety. He only wanted to protect Crooks and kill these people.

Two of the helpers went down, blood soaking the sea, and another joined from somewhere else. He was running out of stamina quickly. And then, in a moment of distraction, the alpha plunged her harpoon into his skull. They stayed frozen like that for a second, and then she yanked her weapon free. She forced herself to tune out Crooks’ screaming.

“I’m sorry about this, Crooks,” she said earnestly. She was about to go on and say that plenty of people had already died today, and they didn’t need to add to that list just yet, but then,

“Ya ain’t gonna touch him,” Axe’s strained voice came. “Not even over my dead body.”

She looked at the skeleton in horror. Half his damn skull was gouged out, but he was upright, talking and pointing his weapon at her!

“How in the actual fuck are you alive?” she gaped. But no. She could sense it. He was burning through pretty much all of his magic just keeping himself from falling apart. She could be done with this with just one more attack.

But before she realized it, her neck had blossomed into a fountain, and her head flew away. He had thrown away his only means of attack, just to kill her. And then he collapsed.

“Brother!” Crooks cried again and rushed toward him. Pouring in as much green magic as he could. Quietly, the remaining attackers surrounded them both.

“Please, stop this,” he cried. “I want to leave. I don’t want to stay here anymore. You can have all of the food. I only want to take my brother and his axe and go.”

For them, it was a good deal. They would get a large food supply, and a direction to follow for a
future harvest. Not to mention, they could save some energy by ending the fight here. They let Crooks retrieve Axe’s weapon and go in peace.

Crooks found a cave and holed up there with his brother for weeks. He had no source of food for all the healing magic he was using, but he also didn’t need to go anywhere, so he cut off his own tail and ate it. He would restore it later if Axe ever recovered enough to hunt. If not, they would die here together, but Crooks at least wanted to be able to say goodbye.

Axe eventually did wake up. He wasn’t exactly back to his usual self. He was shaking and stuttering, and he was having problems with his memory. He had forgotten a lot, actually. Tentatively, Crooks asked him… if he remembered who he liked.

Axe did. He knew it in his soul, not in his head. But something else in his soul shouted at him to keep that a secret. While his damaged skull swam with images of Crooks getting mad and crying, he shook his head no. Crooks had smiled.

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“So he don’t know ya like him?” Red asked.

“Nah. I never told him ‘bout it. I know how he feels ‘bout anythin’ incestuous.”

“Huh. I told Angel I liked him the same day I figured it out.”

Axe tilted his head. “Figured wha’ out?”

“That I was in love with him.”

Axe chuckled. Red really was an idiot. But so was he.

“‘Kay. M’ rested ‘nuff ta head back now.”

Red nodded and led the way out, eager to see Sans again after a long day fishing around in the deep.

Chapter End Notes

In case it wasn’t clear, the backstory you just read was the real thing (or at least a real summary of important events). Whatever Axe told Red was shorter at best and unreliable at worst.

Oh, and Emperia = Horrortale!Undyne
Now that Axe had found some gold coins, the next step was to sell them on the surface. Stretch was willing to make the land part of the trip for him, since he was planning to go over and buy more sweets anyway. Papyrus insisted that the mershark brothers take this opportunity to come along, learn where their port town was, and introduce themselves. Their stamina still wasn’t the best, but it was enough.

The school did have the thought though… The people in this town were familiar with mermonsters by now, but every one of them ended up plastered all over the internet. Until they had the land skeletons’ opinion on what the reaction would be to Axe and Crooks, they didn’t really want random people spotting them.

Therefore, Stretch went up at the docks on his own, and Edge and Papyrus waited off by the treeline to meet the mersharks.

At some point, the few pictures taken of Axe and Crooks had been mysteriously deleted, so they hadn’t been able to send any to their friends on the surface to help prepare them. Toriel had given them verbal warning, though, and even Undyne had sent a text to Edge warning him not to be mean to Crooks or else.

Papyrus peered out over the water, one hand supporting the three-year old skeleton he was carrying and the other shielding his eyes from the sun.

“I think I see something big swimming down there,” he mentioned. “Do you think it’s them?”

“Perhaps,” Edge replied. “I doubt they can see us from underwater. They’re probably being cautious.”

“I’ll just give them a little wave,” Papyrus smiled, dipping his hand into the water. The mersharks knew they were looking for skeletons, so it should hopefully encourage them to surface.

Papyrus froze and instinctively jerked his hand back when a nightmare popped up from below. A giant’s skull with a massive hole in it, an off-putting, one-eyed stare, and a crooked, insane smile.
He combed over the three land skeletons with his overblown eyelight, definitely, Papyrus realized with a pang of guilt, noticing how frightened they must have looked.

The soft skeleton looked worriedly at Edge to see him just glaring like usual. His eyelights were smaller and more focused than was typical for him, but he didn’t look afraid. Papyrus was impressed by his mate’s nerves of steel. He almost wished he had a chest to bury his face in like Rus did.

Internally, Edge was rather disturbed. He’d thought he had a scary face until he’d met Red, then the feeling had lightened a bit. Now, seeing this demon from the deep ocean, he had enough leeway to pity him. The advantages and disadvantages of having an intimidating appearance must have been applied tenfold.

“I’m Edge. This is my husband—or “mate”—Papyrus, and our son, Rus. You must be Axe?”

“Mhm.”

Overall, Axe’s impression of land skeletons was that they looked scrawny, barely worth the effort of hunting. The legs were also pretty weird. Nothing but two boney sticks.

They could very easily still be a threat, of course, but if these were the same skeletons he was told to expect, they should be about as friendly as he could hope to expect.

Axe gestured with his hand under the water, and Crooks popped up next to him.

“Did we find the right place?” He lisped.

Papyrus glanced once at his teeth before looking away, trying to disguise his violent wince as a small neck-stretching exercise. This time, Edge’s face did change slightly as it took on shadows of pity.

“And you must be Crooks.”

“Yes, I am. I’ve heard a lot about you three. It’s so nice to meet you in person like this.”

The faces were certainly more nightmarish than Papyrus had been ready for, but he warmed up quickly to the sweet and innocent sounding Crooks.

“We’re very glad you could come! Did the long swim give you any trouble?”

“It wasn’t too bad. I’m impressed that Stretch in particular makes the trip so often.”

“He’s lazier den Sans,” Axe chuckled. “He don’t got any excuse fer sleepin’ dat much.” Axe eyed the thin stretch of sand that passed for a shoreline here. “Speakin’ of, m’ tired. Gonna take a nap.”

The giant found a sliver of beach a short distance from the land skeletons. He wanted his head above water so he could hear if Crooks called for him, but obviously his gills needed to stay submerged. Axe folded his arms under his head and passed out impressively quick.

“He wasn’t kidding,” Papyrus said, startled.

“I’ll apologize on his behalf for the rude behavior,” Crooks smiled diplomatically.

Edge eyed the gaping hole in Axe’s skull and huffed through his nose hole. “Don’t worry about it. He looks like he needs it.”
“He’s a very light sleeper. He’ll probably tune in if we start talking about anything he’s interested in.”

“Oh, it really isn’t a problem,” Papyrus said, sitting down cross-legged in the grass. “Why don’t you come a little closer? I have something to give you.”

Crooks looked slightly skeptical, but he got as close as he could while still being able to breathe.

“You didn’t have to get me anything. I didn’t bring any gifts for you.”

“I did it just because I wanted to, so don’t mind it,” Papyrus waved. He pulled out his phone and took a fluffy pink thing out from the item box.

“This is a food I think you might like very much, but there was no way to send any to you underwater.”

Crooks took the little cloud by the stick and examined it. He put the whole thing into his mouth in one go, looking to avoid chewing, and it melted away like it had never existed, leaving behind a flowery sweetness.

“Goodness! Did I really just eat a cloud?”

“It’s called cotton candy,” Papyrus beamed. “It’s certainly a delicate food. Should I have brought more, I wonder? I wasn’t expecting both of you to be as big as Red.”

While Papyrus was playing host, Edge took out a picnic blanket and spread it out to sit on. Papyrus set little Rus down in the middle of the checkered cloth. He was wearing a cute, green sweater, black leggings, and toddler boots. Immediately, he hid behind his parents.

“There’s no need to be shy,” Papyrus said, rubbing Rus’s head. “Axe and Crooks are our friends, not strangers.” Papyrus took a seat cross-legged and laced his fingers. “We thought we might tell you about what the town is like, since you can’t really come up to see it. Would you be interested in that?”

“That sounds like a wonderful idea,” the mershark beamed.

They swapped stories for a while, and Axe continued blissfully snoozing until something came close enough to wake him up. He opened his eyes to see Rus within arm’s reach of him, just standing there and staring curiously at the hole in his skull, swinging his arms absently at his sides.

“Hey,” he called, interrupting the conversation. “Yer kid’s in snackin’ distance. Dat’s dangerous.”

Rus looked surprised and trotted to Edge, who picked him up almost unconsciously.

“We brought actual food if you’re hungry.” The land skeleton raised an eyebrow, “I thought it would be too rude to ask before, but would you really eat a person?”


“Axe, please don’t worry our friends,” Crooks chided him. “Come closer and have something to eat.” He gestured at a picnic basket.

Axe slid back into the water and crawled out again next to Crooks. He opened a basket his brother hadn’t touched and barely glanced at the contents before shoving them down his mouth hole.

“I’m a bit curious that neither of you check if the food is safe to eat like Red does,” Edge
“I’m sure Red checks for Sans’s benefit,” Crooks replied. “Meroctopuses have very strong stomachs, so most things don't bother them.”

“And mersharks as well?” Papyrus asked.

“Not particularly. We’re just used to it.” Crooks smiled.

Rus started wiggling around in Edge’s arms, so he set the little guy down to play some more. He ran to the back edge of the blanket and crouched down to watch a train of ants.

“Is Rus your only child?” Crooks asked delicately.

Papyrus nodded pleasantly. “Yes, he is. I don’t think we’ll have any more, either.”

“I’m sorry,” the mershark lowered his head.

Papyrus frowned quizzically, then held a hand to his mouth and gasped. “Oh! My apologies. Monsters on the surface don’t have many children at a time, and parents focusing their attention on just one or two children is quite common.” The soft land skeleton smiled. “It didn’t occur to me that you wouldn’t know that yet.”

Something tickled in the back of Axe’s skull, and he wondered briefly what he’d forgotten this time. It might have been important but... No, it was no use. The feeling was gone. If it really was important, it should be in his notes somewhere.

“I see,” Crooks let out a sigh of relief. “That’s... very good.”

The first impressions were rocky as usual, but the overall meeting was a pleasant one, and when Stretch was finished with his errands, they returned to the den.

In the following weeks, Axe went on more treasure hunts, and he and Crooks went on more visits to the surface. One day, the land skeletons sadly couldn’t make the time to meet them. Axe decided to take a nap under the docks, and Crooks swam slow, carefree circles under a large boat. They were just waiting for Stretch to finish their errands, really.

While they waited, there was a sudden series of quick thumps on the dock. Axe stayed sleeping, but Crooks poked his eyesockets above the water. There was a three or four year old human crouched at the edge, scanning the water. Back on the beach, he could see two blurry figures that might have been the kid’s parents. They didn’t seem to be paying much attention.

There was a little fish in the water, and the kid reached out a hand to try and pet it. He tipped forward and into the water. Crooks chuckled and brought his head back down to look. Had the surface child succeeded in catching the fish?

Crooks blinked and frowned. The human was moving his limbs around without really going anywhere. With sudden worry, he realized that the human didn’t know how to swim.

Crooks swam over and picked the human up by the back of his shirt, carefully depositing him back on the dock. They started coughing, and he gave him a gentle pat on the back to help him dislodge the water from their lungs.
The child started crying when he realized what had happened. Still, nobody else seemed to have noticed what was going on.

“It’s alright. You’re safe now. Does it hurt anywhere? Do you need healing, little human?”

“N-no,” the child rubbed his eyes and sobbed. “I want my mommy!”

“Your mother is over there, I think,” and Crooks pointed to the beach.

The child uncovered their eyes to look, saw Crooks--just his head and hand poking out of the water, really--and peed himself.

“Oh dear. What’s wrong?”

“S...scary… mommy…” the child was crying again.

Crooks momentarily froze before being washed over with a (rather undeserved) surge of guilt.

“Oh…” He hid his mouth behind his hands. “Oh my. I... I’m sorry, little one. Please don’t cry.”

Frankly, to a young human child, any adult they didn’t know was frightening. An adult with a scary face was definitely a monster that eats children. Crooks was well far and beyond the scariest thing a sheltered, innocent human child had ever been allowed to see in reality or fiction. And he was big, and that made it so much scarier.

Crooks didn’t know what to do. The child was still crying. He just hoped his mother would come to console him and went back under the water.

“Ya okay?”

Crooks looked at Axe, sitting up from his nap and looking at him in concern. He reached up and felt little tears that he quickly wiped away. Axe’s eyes narrowed dangerously. He gritted his teeth and grabbed his axe. Crooks rushed over and quickly held his arm.

“No, Axe, it’s okay.”

“Yer cryin’,” he stated the obvious.

“That’s, well… I accidentally frightened a child and felt bad about it. That’s all. You don’t need to hurt anyone over it.”

Axe raised his eyebrows, surprised to get a genuine rebuke from his brother. He lowered his axe back onto the sand. “If ya say so, den fine.”

Crooks frowned. Now he felt bad for being too harsh with Axe. He was just being his usual overprotective self. There had been no need to make it sound like he liked hurting people.

“I’m sorry. I’m being rude.”

“... Nah. S’ fine. Cryin’ kids’re hard ta deal wit’. Stressed ya out, dat’s all.”

“Y-yes. That’s exactly it.”

Up above, they heard rapid footsteps on the dock, and then a woman’s voice speaking loudly. It was too muffled to hear from underwater.
“I should go apologize for scaring her child,” Crooks sighed.

“Don’tcha mean say yer welcome fer helpin’ ‘em?”

Crooks blinked. “You were awake for that?”

“Nah.” Axe rubbed the back of his skull. “Can’t think of any other reason ya’d be talkin’ ta a human kid ‘cept if ya were helpin’ em. What’d he trip n’ cut himself or somethin’?”

“He fell in and couldn’t swim,” Crooks said mutely.

Axe’s eyes went wide in shock. “Ya saved his damn life an’ he made ya cry?” Axe gripped his axe handle hard, but he didn’t lift it. He just laughed to himself dangerously. “Oh man do I hate lil’ brats. He’d better hope he don’t fall in here again…”

“You quit that,” Crooks frowned. “I’ll be back in a moment.”

Crooks hid his teeth behind his hands preemptively and poked his head out of the water. A human woman jumped, but quickly collected herself.

“There you are! Finally! Did you pull my son into the water?”

“Pardon me?” Crooks was caught off guard. Clearly the child hadn’t recovered enough to tell his mother what had happened yet.

“Did you pull my son into the water?” the woman repeated. “He’s soaking wet and crying about a scary mermaid! I don’t care if you wanted to play, he can’t swim! You have to talk with the parents first before messing with their kids. I could report you!”

“Excuse me, ma’am, but I think there’s been a misunderstanding,” Crooks said patiently. “I didn’t pull your son into the water; I pulled him out of it. He fell off the dock and I saw that he wasn’t swimming up on his own.”

The woman stopped her bout of indignant rage short and gave her child a perplexed look. “Adrian, is that true? Did you fall off the dock?”

The kid was still sniffling and couldn’t really speak, but he nodded. Suddenly, the woman looked horribly embarrassed.

“Oh… god--I’m so sorry. I just assumed… I’m sorry. Thank you for saving my son.”

“That’s alright. I’m glad he wasn’t hurt.”

The woman nodded and sighed. “Adrian, why are you still crying? Come here and thank the nice mermaid for helping you.” She turned a curious eye to Crooks. “By the way, why have you been covering your mouth this whole time?”

“Oh, well, I’m… waiting on a visit to the dentist. They look pretty bad. I didn’t want to scare him again.”

“Ahh.” The woman nodded in understanding. “I’m sorry about that.”

She coaxed the kid out from behind her, and he gave Crooks a proper thank you, and then they walked back to the beach.

“Thanks again,” the woman waved. “Good luck with your dentist appointment.”
“Thank you,” Crooks smiled behind his hands and sank back underwater. “Well, that cleared up fairly well.”

Axe stared at him quietly. He hadn’t missed Crooks hiding his teeth to talk with the surfacedwellers. “...Dat’s good.”

He pulled out his phone to consult his notes, anxious to see how close he was to having enough to pay for Crooks’ treatment. The numbers were honestly pretty good. They improved his mood somewhat.

And then, before he put the phone back down, he got a text from an unknown number.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone’s curious, progress on the comic is going well. Winkette is doing a great job. We both have Tumblrs if ya’ll wanna stop by.
Chapter Summary

*In which Edge’s cousin comes to town.

Chapter Notes

I low-key forgot how old Rus was at this point. Had to make some edits to the previous chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A shiny shoe clacked down on the pavement at the edge of the town. Sliding up a pair of pressed black pants, a tidy red dress shirt, and a sleek black vest was a shark-toothed smile. The broadly-built skeleton man had a jacket slung over his shoulder, a fedora on his head, and a fat cigar between his teeth. Magical red smoke drifted up when he exhaled, taking in the scenery. There was a cool breeze due to the waterfront, and it smelled like salt, fish, and trees. He could see all the way down to the docks from here.

“As always, a real quiet-like place.”

He grinned and bit down on the tip of his cigar, a single gold tooth flashing in a mouth full of sharp teeth.

“Ain’t even any taxis. Ya might as well’ve retired in the countryside. Oh well.”

Hit repositioned his jacket on his shoulder and began the walk down to his cousin’s house.

***

Edge and Papyrus were supposed to meet Axe and Crooks by the shore in about an hour, so naturally they were making sure everything was tidied up at home before that.

“I’m going to help Rus get dressed,” Edge called, holding the toddler’s hand as they started up the stairs.

“Alright,” Papyrus called back. “Bring a hat! It might get chilly by the water today if the clouds come out.”

Edge snorted that he didn’t need to be reminded.

The soft skeleton went back to humming and packing the many picnic baskets lined up on the counter. A knock at the front door soon pulled him away.
“Just a moment!”

He’d been touching foodstuffs, so he rinsed and dried his hands before opening the front door. Papyrus found himself eye-level with a thick cigar and a wide, shark-toothed grin.

“Hey there, coz. Long time no see.”

The man was taller than Edge even with his usual heels on, and he had an impressive build for a skeleton monster. (His arms were as thick as some humans’ legs!) Though, his tidy, well-dressed appearance made him look more like the kind of guy to talk his way through most situations. Papyrus was surprised to see him here, since Edge didn’t seem to get along with his cousin very well, but he smiled regardless.

“Well this is a surprise! It’s nice to see you again, Hit. To what do we owe the visit?”

“Mind if I come in first?” he drawled in a smooth Brooklyn accent.

“Oh, of course! Make yourself at home.”

Papyrus led the way back into the living room, and Hit politely closed the door behind himself.

“I apologize for the mess. We’re getting ready for a picnic with some friends soon.”

“Ya got a lotta good friends, huh,” Hit commented, taking a seat on the couch while he eyed the many cute baskets.

“More everyday, I hope,” Papyrus chuckled. He spotted Hit’s cigar again and smiled that it had clearly been extinguished. “So how have you been lately?”

“Oh, the usual,” he shrugged. “The family business’s eatin’ up my life, but I wouldn’t have it any other way. Bro still has that stick up his—er, you know. Dad’s healthy. Little lady’s still a wildcat.” Hit relocated his cigar from between his teeth to between his fingers. “How about here? Heard ya had a kid.”

“Rus, yes. He’s doing quite well, thank you. Edge is upstairs right now helping him get dressed. You can meet him when they come down.” Papyrus rinsed an empty jar in the sink and dropped it into the recycling. “So what inspired this sudden visit?”

“Ah,” Hit rubbed the back of neck. “Wish I could say I came just for a family reunion, but it’s actually business.”


“Not exactly. I’m just here to meet a potential business partner, but I figured I might as well stop by. It ain’t often I’m in your neighborhood, after all.”

“I see. Well, whatever the case, we’re happy to have you. I should have offered sooner, but would you like anything to drink?”

“Some water would be good. Thanks.”

“It’s no trouble at all.”

Papyrus went to fill a cup in the sink, and Hit took a good look around. Edge’s place was tidy and clean. There were lots of bright colors and flowery patterns that made him think Papyrus had done the decorating. On a house, it kind of worked, though it wasn’t really to Hit’s taste. Now if only
that cheerful saint could do something about his abysmal taste in clothing.

On a different note, there weren’t any obvious security cameras lying around. Nor were there any hidden cameras or wiretaps, according to the quick electronic sweep he’d done around the outside before coming in.

There was a low creak, and Hit turned his head. Edge was standing on the bottom step of the stairs, barricading Rus behind him and glaring harshly at Hit.

“Why are you in my house?” he demanded icily.

“Aw, come on. Not even a hello?”

“Why are you here?”

Hit bit his cigar again, but he knew better than to light it around Papyrus, even though the itch was there in the back of his mind.

“Just stoppin’ by while I take care of a little errand,” Hit shrugged. He directed a nod at Rus, “Cute kid.”

Edge gritted his teeth, wanting to tell the man to just leave, but unable to ignore what he’d just said.

“An errand,” he echoed coldly. “Here? Where I work?” Edge snorted, “Why not just save yourself some time? Grab the gun I’m sure you have on you and shoot yourself in the foot.”

Hit cocked an eyebrow. “Ya know, you really oughta work on those diplomacy skills.”

Hit glanced back at Papyrus, standing uncertainly in the kitchen with a glass of water clasped in his hands. He curled a finger in a beckoning gesture and, to Edge’s absolute fury, Papyrus delivered the drink to him. Hit took a sip at his own goddamn pace and then set the glass on an end table.

“There ain’t really a need to get so worked up about it,” he said patiently. “I’m meetin’ someone here, but the business is gonna happen elsewhere. I’m hurt that you think I’d mess with your life like that.”

“I thought that was your job,” Edge said snidely.

“Business is business,” Hit shrugged. “You’re family. And your family is family. You guys get a pass.”

“I’m touched. Please leave.”

Hit stood up and took his jacket off the arm of the chair, folding it over his forearm. “Alright. I can tell when I’ve overstayed my welcome.” He looked at Papyrus, “Thanks for the hospitality. I appreciate it.”

“O-of course! Anytime.” Papyrus winced slightly, realizing that he really didn’t have the right to offer a repeat occurrence given the current mood.

If Hit noticed the tension in the room, he wasn’t bothered by it. He grinned down at Rus and tipped his hat. “As for you, little man, it was nice ta meetcha. Maybe we’ll see each other again someday.”

Edge’s glare was smoldering, and Hit decided not to push it any further. “Alright, I’ll get outta yer hair.” He walked to the front door, opened it, and stopped. “Oh yeah, and you should probably
tighten up the security around here. M’ pretty sure ya didn’t want info about those new sharks of yours gettin’ around yet. I had the boys block it. That and the location of their den. Yer welcome.”

And then he was gone, and if there was any furniture within reach, Edge would have thrown it at where he’d been.

Papyrus approached slowly and smiled down at Rus. “Would you go up to your room for a few more minutes, Rus? I’d like to have a little talk with your mother in private.”

“Oh okay.” Rus held the railing tightly and scaled back up the steps, and Papyrus quirked an eyebrow at his husband.

“You implied that we were keeping distance from your extended family due to a minor difference of opinions,” he reminded. “From what I saw just now, I got the distinct feeling there’s more to it than that. Do I get to hear about it?”

Edge gritted his teeth and growled, “Let’s go have a seat first and I’ll explain.”

***

Hit took a short stroll through town and found his way to the local bank and money exchange center. He pushed open the door and flashed a smile at the lone attendant currently present at the front counter. Taking a quick look around, he spotted two doors behind the counter, each with a simple gold placard pinned to it. One read David, and the other Marsha.

“Can I help you, sir?” the attendant asked.

“Sure ya can, dollface. Is your manager in?”

The attendant blinked and put up a reflexive barrier after being called something as foreign to this region as “dollface”.

“She is, yes. What do you need with her?”

Hit made to reach into his breast pocket. “Well, see, the thing is--ah shit. Hang on, I forgot the thing. I’ll hafta come back.”

Hit walked back outside the building, went somewhere he wouldn’t be noticed, and vanished in a puff of red smoke. When he reappeared, it was in David’s office. It was completely empty and all the lights were off. Hit ignored that and turned on the computer. While it booted up, he made himself comfortable.

From there, he opened the control panel, found the ip address and a few other tidbits, and texted them to a contact named Alpha. Hit leaned back and watched as applications opened and filtered data without any input from him. Soon, what he needed was pulled up on screen.

‘Nice. Thanks, Alph,’ he texted. No response. Typical.

Hit pocketed his phone and scanned the documents. Alright, so there were the dates and the exchange amounts. There was the video footage of the meroctopus who made the deposits… And there was the name on the account the funds were ultimately transferred to. Hit smiled
dangerously.

‘Bingo. My hunch was right. Pull up his recent online activity for me would ya, Alph?’

Hit closed all the applications and shut off the PC, teleporting back out of the office. He found a bench down by the docks where he could enjoy the nice breeze and sat down to wait for the data transfer. It took a few minutes to come through; a pretty big file and a text from Alpha.

‘Oh yeah, he’s desperate,’ it read.

Hit ran his eyes over the various google searches and chuckled wryly to himself.

‘Great, thanks. My turn.’

Alpha sent him one last text with a phone number attached, and Hit immediately sent a message to it.

‘Real nice weather today, ain’t it?’

***

Before the conversation had started in earnest, Papyrus had sent an apologetic text to the mer monsters that they might not be able to meet today. At least not in a timely matter. This talk needed to happen and it was likely to take some time.

It wasn’t like Papyrus had never met Edge’s family before or knew nothing about his upbringing. He knew his parents had died before he was a teenager and their close friends had taken him in. Hit and Edge mutually considered themselves something like cousins, but legally, they were closer to brothers.

“Nah, Paps. My dad and his were bros. Can’t just forget them and take ‘em outta the equation like that.”

Hit, his brother, his father, and so on; those people valued family extremely highly. They were open and friendly too, as far as Papyrus’s experience went. Edge had stubbornly kept their dating secret, but when he told his adoptive family that he was in love and leaving to a remote harbor town to marry his hitherto unknown lover, they were shockingly supportive. They were ready to throw a big party and an even bigger wedding and wholeheartedly welcomed him into their fold.

Edge had insisted on a smaller wedding instead, with only close family members present. That was honestly where Papyrus had met them for the first time. They really had been kind to him, and they had apparently heard a lot about him. It was a warm welcome, but he had almost never seen them again, and Edge never talked about them in any detail.

“Could you repeat that?” Papyrus asked softly.

“I said they’re in the mafia,” Edge cut bitterly. “They’re dangerous, and I don’t want them anywhere near you or Rus.”

“But they seemed like such nice people when I met them,” the soft skeleton said helplessly.

“They’re not base criminals, Papyrus. Mafia organizations are built on the principle that family are
the only people you can trust. Of course they’d be good to us.” Edge clenched his fists in his lap. “But they’re still criminals: murderers, thieves, blackmailers, and kidnappers. If they’re allowed free reign, anybody who mildly “disrespects” you on the streets could turn up dead or missing.”

Papyrus tugged at his shirt collar. That… certainly didn’t sound good.

“I didn’t know about it for a long time,” Edge continued. “But even then… I did notice people disappear occasionally. I was furious when I found out.”

“Do they know you’re in law enforcement now?” Papyrus asked carefully.

“They know. It doesn’t bother them, and I hate that. They probably think it’s some kind of rebellious phase and that I’ll start contributing to the family business someday.” He scowled, “They have enough people with positions at least as prestigious as mine in their pockets that they aren’t the least bit concerned I might actually show them to justice.”

“You mean they’re paying off guards and policemen?”

“Paying them off, blackmailing them, or they were part of the mafia to start with.”

“Oh dear.”

Edge took in the nervous look on his husband’s face and sighed. “It’s a lot worse than you think. Believe me. So many people owe them one way or another that they can get away with whatever they want—as long as they’re not grossly public about it. I’m fairly certain this is the largest town around that doesn’t have its leadership under their thumb. I’m proud of that, but I know they’re only staying away as a favor to me. I suppose, as the adopted son of the family head, I have the privilege to not participate.”

They sat in silence for a few beats.

“I never told you because knowing about things like this tends to invite trouble.” The image of Hit just relaxing in his home on his couch flashed in Edge’s mind, “But being too ignorant is dangerous in its own right.” He pinched his nasal ridge, “I’m sorry. I did everything I could to keep you out of it and to get out myself.”

“I don’t regret being with you,” Papyrus cut straight to the heart of Edge’s anxiety with one easy stroke. “But I am a little worried. You never hear about gangs in this day and age. I rather thought they weren’t prevalent anymore.”

Edge grimaced. “No, I’m afraid they just got smarter about how they do their business.”

“I see.” Papyrus lowered his head, and Edge wished he had something good to tell him.

“Hit being here isn’t a good sign. Just in case, I’m going to teach you certain things to look out for. If you see anything suspicious, call me immediately, got it? I more or less trust my family not to do anything drastic, but I don’t have the same faith in their enemies, and I won’t take any chances with you and Rus.”

“I understand.”
Axe looked at the message in confusion. This number wasn’t saved to his contacts. Who was this person and why were they asking him about the weather of all things?

‘Who dis?’ he shot back.

‘I’m your new best pal.’ The next text came before Axe could respond, ‘Heard you’re lookin’ fer a good doctor.’

Now, Axe just didn’t know what to say.

‘How’dya know dat?’ he asked stupidly.

‘Cause I know everything. The name’s Hit, and as it just so happens, I’m acquainted with some real good doctors.’

‘Where’re ya, what’re ya, whaddaya want, an’ what’re ya offerin’?’ Axe threw back mercilessly.

‘Heh. I like ya already. How ‘bout we go meet by that big warehouse, huh? Talk face to face.’

“Hm…”

“Who are you texting, brother?”

“I dunno, but he wants ta talk in person.” Axe’s fingertips twitched toward his dead socket, but he resisted. “I wanna hear wha’ he’s gotta say.”

“Shall I go with you?”

Axe hesitated, then he reluctantly nodded.

They knew where the big warehouse was. It was just at the edge of the shopping area, on the opposite side of the docks from the woods where they usually met the land skeletons.

It was an out-of-the-way, unpopulated place. The only times there were people there were when the ships were being loaded or unloaded. Axe poked his eyes out of the water and saw a stocky land skeleton in fancy clothes leaning against the side of the building and blowing smoky red magic into the air. He locked eyes with Axe and grinned a friendly yet predatory grin.

“Hey. Glad ya could make it.”

Crooks popped up next to Axe, and the land skeleton’s grin twisted wryly.

“And yer bro, too. A pleasure. The name’s Hit.”

Crooks’ small sockets widened a fraction. It was very rare that someone didn’t even flinch their first time seeing him.

“The pleasure is mine,” he said in mild shock. “My name is Crooks.”

The land skeleton grinned and pinched a brown stick between his teeth, blowing out more of the red smoke.

“So. Shall we get straight ta business?”
Axe grunted his permission.

“The deal is this,” Hit started, “You do me a little favor fer a few days, and I introduce ya to a good doctor.” He grinned wider and flashed his gold tooth. “Not a ton of dentists know how to treat skeletons, but I can personally vouch for this one.” He waved the hand holding his cigar. “And, by “introduce ya,” I mean I’ll make arrangements fer any transportation that ya need. Includin’ the logistics of gettin’ a water-breather to a surface hospital.”

Now that Crooks realized what kind of discussion this was, he was hanging back quietly; shy and embarrassed, but hopeful.

“Wha’s da favor?” Axe asked.

“Heh. Glad ya axed,” Hit winked. Axe’s smile twitched up a fraction despite himself, but the land skeleton transitioned smoothly and immediately back into business mode. “See, I’m a businessman,” he smiled dashingly, pointing at his broad chest. “I ain’t been using this place, but it’s still my territory. Problem is, some people seem ta have forgotten that. I wanna remind ‘em in a flashy sorta way.”

Axe was giving him an ‘enough of your bullshit fancy talk’ look, so Hit wrapped his presentation up.

“In two weeks, boats with a red seal on the bottom’re gonna start poppin’ up around here. When ya see one, follow it. Then, if anything happens to fall into the ocean while yer watching, pile it up on a nearby island. There’ll be three ships you gotta do it for.”

Axe tapped out a note of the details and glared at Hit. “Deal.” He displayed a smile so insane and deadly that even Crooks was startled back, but Hit took it without backing down. Even if his expression showed he knew he was looking into the jaws of death, he still wore a challenging smile.

“If ya try n’ pull out, ya’d better not come within’ a hundred miles of any ocean ever again. I will tear ya ta pieces.”

Hit chuckled. “Like I said: I’m a businessman. A promise is worth its weight in gold; breaking ‘em is bad for business.”

Axe just chuckled and sank back under the waves with Crooks right behind him. Hit took a long drag on his cigar and blew it out slowly. The weather really was nice today, so he decided to walk back to the town entrance and enjoy it.

Chapter End Notes

Amazing news everybody! The first five pages of the comic winkette is making for this fiction are out! It’s beautiful, so you should all go and take a look~

1-5
Blueberry Loses at Hide and Seek

Chapter Summary

*In which Blue stumbles onto a sinking ship and rescues a tailless mermaid.

Chapter Notes

Whoops, forgot to confirm last time, but Hit = Mafiafell!Sans

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Red had finished his hunting for the day. He was hanging out in the den, leaning against the side of the couch and watching Sans play some stupid app game. Steady purrs rolled out of his chest.

Sans beat a level and glanced over at his mate, chuckling. “What’s up, big guy?”

“You’re purring a lot.”

“M’ happy.”

“What about?”

“Dunno.”

Sans smiled. It was fine to be happy about nothing in particular. Sometimes that was the best kind of happiness.

“Well, I’m glad you’re in a good mood,” the mermaid chuckled. “I’m still waiting for the random rage fits now that you’re pregnant again.”

“M’ in too good a mood ta get angry,” Red hummed, leaning his skull against Sans’s.

Sans raised an eyebrow, but he didn’t protest. Although, he was pretty certain Red switched moods faster than anyone else he’d ever met. The only exception might be Axe, but he was crazy and had a hole in his skull nearly big enough for Sans to fit his whole skull inside of it. If that was what Red was competing with, his emotional landscape was a damn harsh environment indeed.

And Sans could somehow make him happy no matter what was going on in there.

“Any idea where the kids ran off to?” Sans asked idly.

"Nuh-uh,” Red mumbled. "But they're fine."

"Are you sure?” the small blue mermaid teased. "You didn't notice when Blueberry went nuts with his magic or when Blackberry got mad enough to bite Undyne’s hand off."
The meroctopus pouted. "That ain't my fault. Apparently, it's hard ta focus on that shit in the middle of havin' sex."

"Heheh, yeah." Sans gave Red's cheek a pat to show he really was only having a little fun. "But they handled it by themselves pretty well. I guess you were right when you said Stretch and Blackberry are pretty much fine on their own. Heck, even Blue's getting close to that point, which is kinda surprising." Red just tilted his head, and Sans chuckled. "It's not a huge difference, but he's developing a little faster than mermaids usually do. You didn't notice?"

"Nope."

"Well, I guess it's hard to notice compared to the other two."

Sans went back to playing with his app. Red snuggled up to him and went back to purring.

***

It started as a game of hide and seek. Blueberry was determined not to get caught, so he resolved to swim as far as he could in a straight line in the time he had to hide. Once he went a certain distance, he couldn’t hear MK counting anymore and he just kind of kept swimming. When he realized he’d gone too far, he hung his head. The countdown had definitely stopped, but he’d kept moving against the rules. It was an automatic loss. Blueberry turned around to start swimming back and caught a flicker of movement in the corner of his eye. Looking more closely… It was a ship! Already almost totally submerged in the water and still sinking!

The young mermaid’s eyes went wide and he swam over at top speed. As soon as he thought he might be close enough to be heard, he started shouting. “Does anyone need help?! Is anybody drowning?!”

Though, once he was almost on top of the vessel, he noticed the smell of blood on the water. He slapped a hand over his mouth when a human corpse floated by. He suddenly felt sick. Before this ship went down, something terrible must have happened on it.

Still, determined to help where he could, he started searching inside every cabin for survivors. Every human he found had been stabbed or slashed or pierced or burnt to death. But he didn’t give up until checking the very last room.

And he was glad he did. Inside was a survivor. A skeleton mer no less.

His breathing was shallow, and he was heavily wounded. The right half of his skull was all but melted away, his ribs were laced with cracks and leaking red magic. His red tail was ripped off after the first foot or so, so Blueberry wasn’t sure if he were a mermaid, mershark, or lamia. Then again, he was about Sans’s size, so he was much too small to be a mershark unless he was still a child.

“Hey!” Blueberry bolted over and held the mer gently. “Please don’t die yet, okay?!”

Blueberry called out for help with his soul, and suddenly the room was more full of bones and squishy red tentacles than water. Red quashed a complaint at being called for from such a tight space and spotted the two tiny mermaids he had somehow avoided crushing.
“Dad, please! This person needs help!”

Red looked at the mangled monster in shock. He shook his head. “He’s in bad shape, sweetheart. We need Crooks fer this.”

Red held the stranger gently in a tentacle and pulled Blueberry into his arms. Suddenly they were in the den’s healing room. Blueberry swam off immediately and dragged Crooks back in record time. He hadn’t explained anything to the confused mershark, but Crooks understood when he saw the severely wounded creature.

“I’ll do whatever I can,” he said and went straight to work.

“What happened to him?” Red asked.

“I don’t know,” Blueberry confessed. “I found a sinking ship and went to help rescue people. When I got there, all the humans were dead already, and he was like this.”

They left the room to give Crooks quiet to work his magic. It was a whole seven hours later when the gangly skeleton mer slid tiredly out of the healing room.

“Y’all right, bro?” Axe asked quietly, holding up his younger brother so he didn’t have to use energy to stay buoyant. He had started to worry when he heard Blueberry had found a sinking ship, but according to the dates he had saved, it wasn't time for the marked ships Hit had mentioned to start appearing.

“It was a close call,” Crooks held his forehead. “He should wake up in the morning though.”

“Thank you!” Blueberry swam up to hug the mershark healer, and Crooks blushed a pale pink.

“Oh, d-don’t mention it.”

***

Geno opened his eyes slowly and processed the pale green coral ceiling above him, the kelp bed below, the water all around...

He expected to be under water after the ship went down, but he didn’t expect to wake up again, let alone in a setting like this. This didn’t look like the inside of a shipwreck.

Geno tried sitting up, but his head swam terribly. He reached up to feel where one of the humans had shot him. As he expected, there was a hole in his skull. But why was it so smooth around the edges? Like it had been melted instead of blown apart. Maybe it had to do with the excessive magic numbing drugs the poachers had pumped into his system. But actually, the hole felt smaller than he thought it should. At the time, he’d thought for sure it would kill him. Had his rescuers managed to heal it somewhat?

More importantly, where was he right now? Where were his hypothetical rescuers?

The butchered mermaid wasn’t left to ponder long. A young skeleton mermaid with an electric blue tail and eyes came into the room to check on him after only a few minutes.

“You’re awake! Thank goodness!”
Geno was surprised to be suddenly hugged by a stranger, but it didn’t last long. The little guy soon backed off and gave him a concerned smile.

“Does it still hurt? Crooks tried really hard, but you were hurt really bad.”

Geno stared at the stranger in confused awe. “Why did you save me?”

“Why?” The young mermaid tipped his skull cutely. “Because you needed help!”

Geno lowered his head, staring sullenly at the nub of his tail. “... You shouldn’t have.”

The stranger shook his head firmly and smiled. “I’m Blueberry, but my friends call me Blue! What’s your name?”

He sighed, “Geno.”

“Nice to meet you, Geno!” Blueberry leaned in closer and spoke softly. “What happened on the boat? When I got there, everybody but you had been killed!” He leaned back again and pressed his hands into his lap. “Were you attacked?”

Geno looked at the stranger being genuinely concerned about his situation. It felt… complicated.

“I did it.”

The kid’s eye sockets went wide. “What?”

“I killed them. Sorry, but you saved a murderer.”

He waited for the angry words, the cold shoulder. He waited to be left to die, unable to even swim without his tail. But Blueberry smiled sheepishly and played with his fingertips.

“Um… I’m sure you probably had a reason. Right? I mean, dad and Axe killed people too, but it was because they had to.”

Geno’s mouth hung open. All his experience and common sense had led him to believe that mermaids weren’t killers. Even given his circumstances, he was a pariah for bending to that impulse. This child made it sound so common!

“You’re fine living with killers?”

“It’s not like they would hurt us.”

… This was insane. Geno wasn’t a member of this school—why was this child still talking to him after finding out he’d killed people?

“So why did you kill those humans? Did they kidnap you? They kidnapped my mom once, but my dad rescued him.”

Geno smiled bitterly. Maybe because this child had assumed his circumstances were similar to something he’d seen before; maybe that was why he acted so defenselessly. “Yeah, they did. Your mom was lucky.”

“I’m lucky too! He was pregnant with me when it happened.”

Geno looked up in shock, but Blueberry was already on his way out of the room.
“I’m gonna go get Crooks. He needs to make sure you’re as healed as possible! Just wait here.”

Geno chuckled humorlessly. How would he leave? How far could he get by crawling on his hands?

He waited around for a minute, examining the divots in the coral. And then, a frantically apologetic voice drifted in from outside; soft, high-pitched, and with a noticeable lisp.

“I’m so sorry! I meant to keep an eye on him, but I got caught up cooking lunch.”

“It’s fine, I was watching him!” Blueberry said brightly, just as he rounded the corner to enter the room.

Following right behind him was—Holy fucking stars!

If Geno’s tail was still attached, he would have shot to the back wall automatically at the sight of the ocean horror now sharing a room with him. As it was, the involuntary tail contractions just launched him off the bed a little.

First, it couldn’t be overstated, this thing was absolutely fucking huge! It must have been four or five times Geno’s size when he still had his tail. Despite growing so big, the creature was dangerously gaunt, and his malformed skeletal face was like something out of a nightmare.

There was also something odd about the way he swam—and Geno noticed his lower half was a shark tail.

What kind of monstrosity was this?!

“Are you still in pain? You look rather ill.”

Geno shook himself out of his frightened trance when the terror spoke.

“I-it doesn’t hurt.”

The mershark put a hand on his sternum and sighed. “Thank goodness. I would feel terrible if I did a poor job and left you in pain for so many hours.” He smiled, and Geno winced at those atrocious teeth twisting. “My name is Crooks. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“I’m… Geno.”


“I’m a mermaid. What… what about… your friend?”

“Crooks is a mershark.”

He said it like it was an obvious and expected thing. What the hell was a mershark? How and why did those exist?!

“I’ve, uh, never seen one before.”

“That’s not surprising,” Crooks had made himself busy fluffing up some new bedding for Geno. “Mermaids can’t go to the deep, and my brother and I only recently became able to survive in the shallows. We were both region-locked species until now.” He swam a little closer, and Geno flinched back.
Crooks smiled softly. “Relax. I need to lift you up for a moment to change your bedding. I’ll be gentle.”

What was Geno going to do? Resist? Run? All he could do was nod and let the giant, gangly mer do as he pleased. Though, Crooks was honest about being gentle with him. He handled things quite delicately considering his size... Or maybe it was just easy for someone his size to handle a smaller than average mermaid like Geno.

Blueberry folded his arms and leaned against the edge of the bed while it was being remade. He stared curiously at the nub of Geno’s tail.

“What happened to your tail?” he asked innocently.

The small mermaid’s face twisted in bitter hatred. “Humans cut it off.”

Blueberry was shocked. “But humans are so nice! They feed me snacks and take pictures with me!”

Geno looked at him, baffled, but before he could ask just what the kid was talking about, the giant shark freak spoke up.

“Alright, that’s enough for now, Blue. No need for prying questions. You can go back to playing.”

“Are you sure? Is he gonna be okay?”

“You don’t need to worry. I will take good care of him.”

Blueberry smiled and nodded, swimming off to join in on another game. Everybody said Crooks was the best of the most amazing healers, so everything would be okay if he said so.

Now that Geno was left alone with a creature straight out of his nightmares, he felt his tension steadily rising. Crooks set him on the neatly-made bed and smiled in apology. “If you can manage to relax, you’ll heal better. It seems like I’m not helping much.”

Geno shook his head and succeeded in clearing his thoughts a little. Terrifying monstrosity? He certainly was, but this mershark had been nothing but kind to him. Hell, from the way it sounded, it was thanks to him that Geno was still alive at all. He should be more polite … But why did he feel such a looming sense of danger still? He really couldn’t calm down.

“No, I’m sorry. You’ve been kind to me. I’m just still a little on edge from earlier.”

Crooks smiled tiredly. “How diplomatic of you. Either way, you need to eat something. Lunch is almost ready. I’ll be right back with some food.”

Crooks came back in a few minutes with some fish, and Geno obediently ate it. He was momentarily paralyzed.

“It’s… delicious. Wow.”

The mershark beamed and wrung his spindly hands. “You think so? I’m so glad you like it.”

“Did… did you make this?”

Crooks nodded shyly. “Green magic is really the only thing I’m good at, so I do most of the cooking and healing in this school.”
“You’re a shark, but you don’t hunt?” Geno chuckled dryly.

He felt a little bad about the comment when Crooks tucked in his chin.

“Erm, no. I’m too weak for that. Red takes care of the hunting.”

“Another mershark?”

“Red is a meroctopus, actually.”

Geno’s breath caught. He couldn’t believe what he was hearing right now. “There are meroctopuses in this school?”

“Only Red and two of his children. And you don’t need to get worked up about it. They’re all fairly well-adjusted to life in a school.”

“Are there actually any mermaids here besides that kid?”

“It’s mostly mermaids,” Crooks said. “There are—well, let’s see… ten mermaids, three meroctopuses, and two mersharks. One more meroctopus on the way. Be very careful if you run into Red. I’m told he got awfully cranky the last time he was expecting.”

Unfortunately, Geno’s face probably showed exactly what he was thinking: I’ve been taken into a den of demons. Crooks was looking at him though, so he quickly hid the expression and tried a different topic.

“You’re brother’s the other mershark, right? Does he hunt?”

To his surprise, Crooks shook his head. “My brother makes and fixes traps and sleeps a lot.”

Crooks smiled sadly and sighed a little. “You’re lucky. That wound to your skull didn’t go very deep and left your mind mostly untouched. I should be able to fix it in just a few weeks.”

That was a sudden subject change, but... Weeks, huh? That was a long time, but it was amazing that he could fix it at all.

“Well, I guess I’ve got time.”

Crooks shot him a glare that was maybe only ten percent serious. “It would be faster and easier if you didn’t have a red soul. Monsters like you and my brother can tank injuries like no one else, but your magic warps around them and becomes so much harder to set right.”

“I’ve never heard that before,” Geno murmured, genuinely surprised by the news.

“Well, it takes an awful lot of determination for the differences to become obvious,” Crooks answered. “Anyway, After your head is better, I’ll get to work on your tail, and then you’ll be free to return to your life.”

“You can fix my tail?!” Geno shot up. He’d known plenty of healers, but regrowing another person’s limbs was impossible. Reattaching could be done, but regrowing? He’d never heard of someone doing that before!

Crooks automatically curled into a defensive posture, small eye sockets widening. It was weird to see such a large creature back off so easily.

“Um… yes?”
Geno blinked and laid himself back down. “... You’re pretty skittish for such a big guy.”

“Axe is the fighter, not me. I’m also,” he rubbed the sides of his skull, “not used to hearing shouting except when people are fighting.”

That was so… weird. The hell was this giant terrifying shark monstrosity doing being afraid of a small, tailless mermaid like him?

“Sorry… Axe is your brother, I guess?”

“Yes.”

Geno tried to think of something else to say, but that overbearing feeling was still pressing down on him. Feelings of being somewhere he shouldn’t; of being in mortal danger.

“You killed a lot of people,” Crooks said softly, and Geno startled out of the daze he’d unknowingly entered.

“You’re a mermaid, but I get a sense from you like you were from the deep like my brother, myself, or Red. I wonder… can you feel anything strange?”

Geno stared at the mershark with wide eyes and slowly lowered his head. “I feel like I wandered into someplace really dangerous,” he started cautiously.

Crooks gasped, “I knew it! Red’s marked several areas in this den with his magic. It permeates everywhere and wards of predators and outsiders.” He suddenly looked very nervous, lowering his head, wringing his hands, and speaking much more softly. “If… if you can sense that, can you perhaps sense anything else?”

Geno looked directly at the mershark and decided to just be honest. “I feel like you’re going to eat me.”

Crooks winced hard and avoided making eye contact. “I… I see… I’m terribly sorry about that. I haven’t done anything like that lately—it’s against policy in this school—but I can’t help but think about it sometimes.” The mershark smiled awkwardly. “Actually, I haven’t eaten dinner yet, and frankly it isn’t helping. The others must be wondering where I am as well. I’d better go join them. You just stay here and… try to relax.” He paused momentarily at the door. “... I’m truly very sorry. I know being looked at like prey feels unpleasant. I’ll take better care for next time.”

“Uh, sure.”

Crooks left, and Geno rolled over, hugging himself. He was surrounded by murderous, monster-eating demons, and he couldn’t even swim to get away. ... He could probably just consider it punishment for all the people he killed. They had been living garbage, but it was still an objectively wrong thing to do.

... But what was worse was that these demons were being nice to him when he had done something so terrible.

Geno felt tears welling up, and he just let them silently get carried off by the current. He had needed to cry for a long time; now was fine.

Chapter End Notes
Geno = Aftertale!Sans ... duh X’D

Also, the next five pages of the comic are out~ Go take a look: it’s super good!

6-10
Welcome, Little Red Mage

Chapter Summary

*In which Geno is officially welcomed.

Geno was left alone for some time; probably until everyone else in the school had finished eating lunch. After that though, someone he hadn’t met yet came to visit him.

This time it was a mermaid (thank stars): a large goat woman with soft white fur and a gentle gaze.

“Hello, dear. I am Toriel, cofounder of this school. I apologize for taking so long to greet you.”

Geno propped himself up on his arms. “Oh, uh, don’t worry about it. It sounds like you’re taking me in for a while, so thanks.”

“Of course, you are most welcome.”

Toriel found a place to rest comfortably and settled in. “Now then. If you don’t mind, I’d like for you to tell me what happened.”

Geno’s fists automatically gripped the kelp bedding and squeezed it. His expression was blank for a moment, without even his eyelight showing, but he forced on a somewhat natural-looking smile.

“Is the short version fine?”

The goat lady nodded. “Yes, that will do.”

He sighed and made himself relax.

“Humans attacked my den and captured everyone. Once they had us on their ship, they finished us off one by one. They saved me for last, but their tranquilizers wore off, and I killed them all instead.”

He’d spoken about death so callously. This time, definitely, he would be kicked out.

Toriel reached out and put a large fluffy hand on one of his. “I am very sorry for your loss,” she said with downcast eyes.

Geno stared at her and felt tears welling up again. “What is wrong with you people?” he hiccuped. “I’m a murderer. I’d do it again if I was back there. Why are you being so nice?”

Toriel let him sob for a minute, keeping his hand warm and safe. Slowly, she started to explain herself.

“It would have been hard to warmly welcome you if I were myself from a few years ago,” she confessed. “Maybe, given some time… but it would have been a long process.”

She looked at Geno with a gaze that made him shiver, filled with nothing but warmth and acceptance.
“However, my world has expanded since then. Some of the sweetest and kindest people I know have done absolutely terrible things. They were hurt badly in the past, and they came here to heal. Now they are my precious family.”

She squeezed his hand, and he could do nothing to stop the flood of tears.

“No matter who you were or what you have done in the past, I see no reason why you should be any different. Especially if you have no one to return to. You are welcome here.”

***

“I-I’m surprised we settled that so fast,” Alphys mentioned, bringing her plate over to help Asgore with dish duty.

“Yes, the vote was unanimous on the first take,” the goat mer chuckled.

“Ya sure trust mermaids, huh?” Axe teased from back by the table. “Or’s dere some secret rule where anyone who ends up in yer sick room gets a free pass?”

Undyne swam over and flicked him on the forehead. She folded her arms while he grinned at her menacingly.

“Wrong. We just thought if a freak like you can fit in here, anybody can. And we all voted for him to stay, remember?”

Red and Axe chimed in at the same time.

“I voted yes ‘cause Crooks wanted him ta stay.”

“I only said yes ‘cause Angel did.”

Undyne bared her teeth. “Do you guys understand how a vote works?! Jeez! Toriel already went in there!”

“Y-you guys aren’t against it, though, right?” Alphys asked.

“S’long as he’s nice ta Crooks,” Axe shrugged.

“R-red?”

The meroctopus held his mate to his chest like a protective shield.

“He’s fine with it,” Sans answered. He wasn’t totally sure if it was true, but he said so anyway just to free Red from the pressure of answering.

“Whatsoever,” Undyne sighed. “We already voted, so he stays in this school until he decides to leave or majorly screws up.”

***
“Dinner is almost ready,” Crooks called sweetly.

Toriel, his assistant chef, looked over her shoulder, “Stretch, dear, would you please go invite Geno to join us?”

Stretch had just been lounging by the table, sucking on a lollipop while staring at his phone. He froze and looked up slowly when he was called on.

It wasn’t surprising. Stretch was called on all the time to help the adults with little chores, tasks, or shopping trips. Asking for him first was almost a habit now. But he wished Toriel would remember that he had trouble with strangers.

Stretch took a deep, calming breath and tried to rein in his social anxiety. He’d been working on this every day he went to the surface town. This was just one mermaid; he could handle it.

“He said he’d go get him.”

Of course, it was an effort; it wasn’t easy. As he swam down the hall, Stretch’s mind went to places it really didn’t need to be exploring right now. For example, how this would be his first meeting with a mermaid who had single-handedly killed an entire ship full of humans, and who probably had a bad impression of meroctopuses.

Stretch paused for a moment, set a hand on his sternum, and took another deep breath. Mermaids had the “talk first” instinct, he reminded himself. Even if things looked bad, he had at least one verbal exchange to figure that out and get out of there.

Stretch arrived at the healing room and peeked his head around the doorway. Yup, there he was. Seeing a skeleton mermaid around Sans’s size reminded Stretch of his dad. A little bit of his anxiety went away.

“Hey,” he called.

Geno stopped staring at the ceiling and looked at where the voice had come from. He propped himself up on his arms to see a little better. There was a skeleton mermaid kid peeking into the room.

“Uh, hi?”

“Tori said to invite you to dinner.”

“Oh, uh… thanks.”

“Do you need help swimming?”

Geno frowned down at his nub of a tail. “…That would be easier.”

“M’kay.” He almost swam in to help right then, but hesitated. Stretch didn’t think he was anything to get worked up about compared to Crooks, but it was probably better to be careful. “Hey, uh, fair warning: I’m a meroctopus. Don’t attack me or anything, okay?”

Geno’s whole body froze on a reflex. Wh...at?

“The shocked stare isn’t reassuring.”
Geno snapped out of it, shaking his head and sighing. “Uh, sorry. Look, I don’t even care anymore. The common sense I’m used to clearly doesn’t apply here.”

Stretch took a moment, then nodded. He came into the room and noted Geno’s hidden, curious glances at his lower half.

Stretch held out a hand and pulled Geno up into his arms the way Red always held Sans. Stretch wasn’t that much bigger than Geno, but it worked just fine. Stretch decided to talk while they walked.

“I don’t know how much you know about the people here. Want some pointers for how to deal with them?”

Geno considered the terrifying creatures he would likely see in the next room and nodded. “Yes, please.”

“Alright. First, don’t go near my mom; people stress him out. Be nice to Crooks; his brother is really protective of him. Undyne, the blue fish lady, is loud but she means well. Black, my youngest brother, has a bad mouth, but don’t let him get under your skin. He’s a nice guy deep down, he’s just bad at expressing it. Oh yeah, and don’t be mean to my dad, or my mom will get mad.”

Geno ran some quick numbers in his head. “Crooks said there were only three meroctopuses in this school, but you listed at least five.”

“It’s kind of a pain to explain it over and over,” Stretch sighed. “Monsters can breed between types by touching their souls together, wishing for kids, and using up a ton of magic. So technically, my brothers and I are all half mermaid and half meroctopus; our ectobiology just takes after whatever our mom was.”

Geno was still trying to process that when they arrived at the kitchen. Monsters breeding between types was huge news—huge enough that he could almost just ignore the fact that a mermaid and a meroctopus had apparently fallen in love and had three (soon to be four) mixed offspring. If he’d had any doubts about the authenticity of that absurd idea, they were dispelled when he actually saw the cuddly couple waiting at the table with everyone else.

Stretch set Geno down in an open chair, and Geno gritted his teeth, focusing his gaze on his food. He didn’t need to pay attention to the giant, battle-scarred meroctopus cuddling a chubby blue mermaid in his lap, or the equally giant mershark who wouldn’t stop staring at him.

He really tried not to look there, but it was clear now how a conversation about Crooks’ brother had transitioned into a talk about head injuries. Geno wondered if he looked that bad and hoped it was at least a little less gory to look at in his case.

There were three massive mer creatures crowded around the table with the normal-sized mermaids (and young meroctopuses), and it was kind of debatable which of them looked the scariest. Right now, though, Axe was definitely the one making him the most uncomfortable.

‘Be nice to Crooks’ Stretch had warned him. It was a little late for that warning, and he hoped he hadn’t been too rude to the mershark healer when they’d first met. Perhaps he had crossed some line, if the strong sense of being warned off he was getting from Axe really wasn’t his imagination. There weren’t any words to it, only feelings, so it was hard to interpret.

*Open your mouth if you want to say something to me,* Geno thought frustratedly, staring hard at the
food on his plate.

If the people gathered here were everyone in this school, it was a very small school. Geno had come from a small school himself, but they still numbered around fifty. Almost half of the people here were kids too. The hunting and fighting strength of a school this small was nowhere near sufficient to protect and raise them… or not. They had collected some massive and terrifying members. Crooks said he was weak and that his brother didn’t hunt, but… he couldn’t believe that gigantic shark people were unable to defend themselves, and he had seen how viscous meroctopuses could get when their territory was invaded.

As long as they wanted to protect this school, it would probably be safe. On the other hand, now the greatest dangers to these mermaids were all gathered up and living in their den.

Geno accidentally looked up from his plate for a second and met gazes with a young meroctopus who had sharp teeth and an ill-tempered scowl. Before anything could transpire, a male goat mer sitting next to Toriel announced that it was time to eat, and they broke eye contact.

The food was delicious. Truly. Crooks had probably cooked and ate sentient beings like this in the past, but he made really good food. Geno couldn’t have been disgusted eating it even if he’d wanted to.

“Since this is Geno’s first time meeting most of us,” Toriel started, interrupting a few bubbles of casual chatter, “Why do we not introduce ourselves?” She turned to him and set a hand on her chest. “As you already know, my name is Toriel, and I am one of the cofounders of this school. I assist with childbirth and rearing, and I used to be our main cook and healer, before Crooks joined us and did a far better job than I could.”

The lanky mershark wasn’t eating the delicious food he’d prepared. Instead, he was sipping from some strange, brightly colored container. He blushed bright pink when Toriel called him out.

“Toriel please,” he murmured. She just smiled and then patted the male goat mermaid’s hand.

“You go next, dear.”

They went around the table, and Geno learned everybody’s names and a little bit about them. Of course, he had to introduce himself at the end.

“My name’s Geno,” he clenched his fists in his lap, “and I’m all that’s left after my school was captured, butchered, and killed by human poachers.”

A heavy atmosphere settled around the table, but it was quickly dispelled by Black getting up and thumping Geno on the forehead with a summoned bone.

“Unacceptable. Nobody asked about that. Try again and tell us something about yourself that actually matters.”

Geno held the spot where he’d been hit and stared at the child in shock. “You’re saying that doesn’t matter?” he glared.

Black folded his arms in a dominating pose. “What happened to you and who you are are different things, imbecile. Tell me you hate humans! Tell me you aren’t afraid to defend yourself! Tell me what you do, not what was done to you!”

Geno just stared at the kid in shock for a while, until some chuckling from Toriel and Sans broke the silence. Geno set his jaw and sat up straighter.
“Fine. My name is Geno, and I’m an attack mage.”

Toriel covered her mouth to muffle her giggling. “Welcome to our school, Geno.”
Geno spent a lot of time in bed in the healing room. That couldn’t be helped; he could hardly swim without a tail. He could drag himself around with his arms if he really wanted to, but that was slow and embarrassing, so he preferred not to. The children of the school gave him a decent amount of company, mostly because they were dragged along by Blue’s energy, and sometimes he got visits from Toriel or Asgore. The person he interacted most with was Crooks, though.

Well, obviously. Crooks was the person healing him after all. He usually visited at least five or six times a day to check if Geno needed anything. The actual healing happened maybe once a day. There was no fixed schedule for it; Crooks just started whenever he felt like he had regained enough magic since the last time.

Getting healed was boring for Geno; all he did was lay there, so he occasionally tried to start up a conversation—preferably one where he didn’t have to talk much, since he’d never been very good at keeping his fins out of his mouth.

It just so happened that a suitable topic came to him while he was just sitting around waiting.

“How did a school like this even happen?”

Crooks lessened the amount of magic he was using to free up some of his focus, and he briefly smiled.

“Would you like to know? It’s a rather interesting story, actually.”

Crooks began recounting the tale he’d heard from Asgore while the hole in Geno’s skull slowly shrank.

Several years ago, Toriel, Asgore, Undyne, Alphys, Sans, and baby Asriel had lived together in a much bigger school ruled by a fair goat mermaid called Regalia. They had all found each other in the larger group and became very close friends.

One day, Asgore and Undyne were out hunting for food when they happened upon a sunken vessel. They went inside, hoping to find some easily-trapped fish, but instead they found two mermaid infants about Asriel’s age: Chara and Frisk. Asgore ignored the worried protests of the others in
the hunting group and brought the children back to Toriel. She and the rest of their close friends agreed that they should give the children a home.

However, Regalia, their leader, had a certain strict policy: human-type mermaids could not join her school. In the past, a group of human mermaids had sold out Regalia’s mate to surface poachers, and she couldn’t bring herself to forgive them. She was above warring with the whole race based on the actions of a few individuals, but she couldn’t bear to have those living reminders nearby.

So, Asgore and Toriel founded their own school in order to adopt the children, and their friends followed them.

Crooks smiled wistfully. “And then the rest of us sort of came along the way.”

Geno opened his mouth helplessly. *He skipped the parts I most wanted to know about.*

Although, that did explain why there were human mermaid children living here. They didn’t really stand out next to all the deep-ocean freaks of nature (no offense intended), but normally, human types had a hard time getting along with mer creatures unlike them. They weren’t *actual* humans, obviously, but they were closer to them than other monsters. There was a disproportionate number of difficult individuals among them, so they were somewhat discriminated against.

Still, the human-types aside, Geno wanted to ask how Crooks and his brother had ended up here, and how Red and Sans had become mates. But Crooks sighed and took his hands back. He’d used up all the magic he safely could for the time being. Geno reached up to feel the hole in his skull, and it was a little smaller than before. The progress was slow, but it was healing.

Geno thought back to the ugly hole in Axe’s skull and looked at Crooks curiously.

“Why haven’t you healed your brother’s skull yet?”

Crooks, who had taken a seat on a pile of spare kelp bedding, smiled bitterly. “Because I can’t.”

“Why not?” Geno had never imagined a healer as powerful as Crooks, so knowing there were still injuries he couldn’t fix was frightening.

“My brother’s mind is currently maintaining a very delicate homeostasis. Every alteration I make risks breaking him irreparably. So, I stopped as soon as he was well enough to function. I don’t have the confidence to try again.”

*A ‘delicate homeostasis,’ huh?* Geno had interacted with Axe as little as he could in the last few days, but he could already tell that the guy wasn’t all there.

“So, basically, he went crazy after getting his skull bashed in?”

Crooks, knowing that Axe’s personality hadn’t changed all that much after his injury, frowned slightly. “I’d appreciate if you didn’t talk about my brother that way. He’s not crazy.”

Geno winced, “Uh, sorry...” He quickly grasped for a change of topic. “W-where is Axe, anyway?”

Crooks answered simply, but at least he didn’t seem like he wanted to hold onto his irritation. “Oh, he went out.”
The sun was out, but the wind was blowing, and the season was starting to turn chilly. Hit used one hand to hold down his hat and nodded out at the mid-sized carrier ship drifting a few hundred meters off the shoreline of their little island.

“Alright, sink ‘em,” he ordered.

Two human men fired a pair of miniature rocket launchers, and a bull monster threw a massive fireball out over the waves. All three landed, and the ship started blaring its alarms. Some men were scrambling around, plugging leaks and putting out fires, while others jumped overboard.

“One more to the mainmast,” Hit told the attack mage. “Take out those sirens.”

The bull worked up another fireball while the other two removed the empty rocket launchers from their shoulders. One asked, “Nobody should be able to hear it from out here, right boss?”

“I can hear it,” Hit replied, exhaling a puff of smoke, “And it’s gettin’ on my nerves.”

The second fireball found its target, and the electronic wailing stopped.

“Much better,” the skeleton man grinned.

The first fireball had been aimed precisely so that it hit right about where the ship was keeping its illegal shipment of explosives. The ship transformed itself into a third massive fireball, and anyone who still remained onboard was forced off.

“Hey, boss, why’d ya bring your tools? The bull monster asked. “Ain’t we just lettin’ ‘em drown?”

“You kiddin’?” Hit laughed. “These guys left my coz for dead at the bottom of the ocean. They ain’t gettin’ off that easy.”

The two human men shared a look, and one spoke up dumbly, “Boss, we didn’t bring swimsuits.”

“Did I ask you to swim? Just relax; I asked a new pal to handle it.”

Right on cue, two half-drowned men were thrown onto the beach as if they were ragged dolls, and a huge, broken skull peeked up out of the water.

“Yer here too? Didn’t know ya were gonna supervise me.”

Hit grinned and bit down on a fresh cigar. He took his time to pull out a lighter and start it up, taking a long, deep drag. His boys bet on their boss’s confidence, and they managed not to run from whatever that giant in the water was.

“Sorry ‘bout being so vague before. Got a habit not to give out details where other people might pick up on ‘em. Anyway, if you can bring me the guys that’re still kickin’, we’ll be set.”

Axe ducked back under the water and brought body after body to the shore. He’d gotten to over twenty of them in time, but plenty of others had died whether to fire or water.

Axe swam as close to the shore as he could without dragging his tail in the sand and watched Hit and his boys set up a video camera and a metal table and strap one of the survivors to the surface.
“What’re dose fer?” Axe asked, staring at the metal toolbox full of strangely-shaped utensils.

“Torture,” Hit shot him a charming smile and spun a metal poker between his thick finger bones.

The shark hummed. “N’ wha’s da camera fer?”

“To film it,” the monster answered. “Some freaks like to watch this shit. We’re doin’ it anyway, might as well make some money off it.” He raised an eyebrow playfully, “You gonna stay and watch? Some people get squeamish.”


“Ah.”

The mafia boss was just about done preparing himself. He’d taken off his hat and nice jacket and put an apron over his shirt. He had his sleeves rolled up to his forearms and latex gloves on his hands. There was no reason for him to dirty himself in a literal sense, after all. He couldn’t show himself to Dolly like that, now could he?

“Just leave ‘em. It ain’t like we owe them a funeral or nothin’.”

“Can I eat ‘em?”

Hit stalled and almost dropped the poker his attack mage had just finished heating up for him. The mershark waited quite patiently for a response, considering the strong scent of blood and magic that was tempting him half out of his mind.

“If I can’t, say so quick so I can leave.”

“Holy fuckin’ shit, you eat people?! Are you fuckin’ serious?! Jesus!”

“Can I or not?”

“Hit took a deep breath and composed himself. “Yeah, sure. Why not? Fuckin’ freaks’re everywhere, I swear,” he muttered the complaint under his breath

Axe’s went back underwater right away and started gathering up deceased monsters and humans. Crooks didn’t have a phone of his own yet, so Axe texted Stretch. He trusted that kid more than anybody else not to spread things around without a reason.

‘Tell Crooks ta come here’ was all he sent. It didn’t matter that Crooks didn’t know where to find him; they could sniff each other out from way farther than this. And, rather than a distraction, all the blood in the water would serve as a beacon for Axe’s location.

“Axe?” Crooks questioned hesitantly.

“Wasn’t me,” he shook his head. “But da people who did it said we could have dese.”

Crooks looked at the considerable pile of corpses. “That’s quite generous… Axe, this is clearly too much for the two of us.”

Axe nodded. He knew it it too. And, although he hated the thought of wasting food, nothing ever really went to waste in the ocean. “Should we jus’ give up on ‘em?”

The lanky mershark pondered it seriously.
“Well… if we’re trying not to be wasteful, I think I know where these would be put to the best use.”

Leave it to Crooks, he’d thought of an amazing, conflicting, saint-like idea. But even as he felt conflicted about it, Axe followed him and helped him achieve it.

They swam the bodies over deep water and tossed them down, taking care to scatter them out. There was a chance they were feeding the bastards who’d tried to kill Crooks, and Axe strongly disliked that, but even he felt some pity for them. After all, they were still down there starving, if they weren’t dead already.

Axe looked over at his brother and sighed. “Yer too good, bro.”

“I think I’m quite terrible,” he answered softly.

After all, this was only a small mercy. If he were truly benevolent, he could go back down and spread the knowledge of how to rise to the shallows. The reason he didn’t, though, was understandable, but selfish.

_I rather like the comfort of knowing nobody up here is secretly out to eat me._

Apparently, he was willing to sit back and let people die for his own peace of mind. Crooks sighed and wondered if experiencing luxury had spoiled him.

“But I don’t feel pity enough to do anything more for them.”

“I’d’ve dropped ocean mines,” Axe shrugged carelessly. “Yer a saint fer feedin’ ‘em.”

Crooks rolled his eyes; his brother’s jokes were tasteless as always. “If that’s all of them, let’s head back. I’m quite tired now.”
Axe continued to watch the ships in the harbor for the next few days. Anytime one with a red marking on the bottom left the port, he followed it.

The main goal for Hit always seemed to be making the crews on board suffer, but sometimes he added something extra “to make it worth his time.” For example, after sinking the second ship in a way that didn’t blow it up, Hit asked Axe to gather up a bunch of crates from the cargo hold. From one busted up box, Axe saw that the contents were blocks and bags of white stuff, but he couldn’t give a crap what it was for.

Yet again, he asked if he could have the dead bodies.

“You don’t gotta ask,” Hit grumbled, waving his hand. “They’re dead, what the fuck do I care?”

There were fewer deceased than last time, but Crooks insisted that they weren’t facing any food troubles. As they had just finished hauling the bodies to the deep to dump them, a fresh one fell in from above. Axe’s phone buzzed, and he read a text from Hit.

‘Fucker died. Help yourself.’

The little rat monster was still freshly bleeding. Axe felt himself start drooling, and he looked at Crooks like a puppy begging for food. Crooks faked a cough and tried to look at least a little more composed.

“Yes, well, I suppose just one would be fine.”

“Yer da best, bro,” Axe grinned.

They dressed and cooked the monster right there and enjoyed a tasty snack.

“I guess, like usual, you’ll forget this and I’ll keep my mouth shut,” Crooks mused.

Axe raised a brow at the word “usual.” “We do dis a lot?”

Crooks shook his head. “Only every now and then, when the opportunity arises.”
Axe hummed. “We thanked Red yet?”

“For what?”

“Fer keepin’ quiet. Dere’s no way he ain’t noticed.”

Crooks was surprised by that revelation, but he didn’t doubt it. He actually felt silly for not thinking of it before. “I’ll be sure to thank him sometime soon.”

The next ship was the last one, and tragically, none of the crew died. After dragging them all to shore to be at Hit’s mercy, Axe asked if there was anything else he should fetch this time.

Hit scratched his chin, “I actually got no idea what this one was carryin’. Just bring a couple boxes up an’ I’ll see if I like any of it.”

Axe carried a few dozen crates ashore, and Hit’s boys cracked them open with crowbars. It seemed like a mixed batch. There were weapons (soaked and almost surely broken), rare animal pelts (also soaked), some bags of greenish-brown leaves (which Hit decided to keep), and…

Axe’s overblown eyelight shrunk in shock. The latest crate he’d fished up was full of severed mermaid tails.

Hit looked at that and whistled. “Hope it wasn’t anybody you knew.” He scratched his chin, “Come to think of it, there’s this rumor been going around lately in some parts: if you eat a mermaid’s tail, you’ll become immortal.”

Axe scoffed. “As if. Dat’s da stupidest thing I ever heard.”

“I guess you’d know,” the gangster shrugged. “I never bought it anyway.”

Axe started fishing around in the crate, tossing tails into the water behind him.

“H-hey!” one of the humans half-interjected.

“Ya ain’t sellin’ dese,” Axe stated coldly. “Unless ya wanna see me mad.”

The man shut his mouth quick.

Finally, Axe pulled out what he’d been hoping to find: a small red tail with a familiar smell. He couldn’t help but chuckle at his crazy luck; finding Geno’s tail in a place like this. It wasn’t in perfect shape anymore; the color was a little dull, the scales were soft, and it didn’t have that lively, springy feel, but he was willing to bet Crooks could use it for something.

If nothing else, maybe closure for that grumpy little snowflake.

“That one look tasty or somethin’?” Hit asked, leaning in a little to examine the magical chunk of meat. That he was even attempting to understand the mind of a cannibal, uh… good for him?

“Nah. Friend of mine got his tail chopped off. Dis’s it.”

Hit stood up straight and scratched his cheekbone. “Ya got a healer who can reattach it? I could probably hook you up with someone I know.”

Axe shook his head. “Nah. My bro can handle it.”
Hit hummed and tipped his hat. “Well, anyway, you did a great job, pal. Thanks for the help.”

“Ya know why I did it.”

“Haha, yeah. Don’t worry, I already scheduled your bro’s consultation. It’s in three weeks. I’ll send ya a link to verify it.”

Axe frowned when he heard how long he would still have to wait, but that irritation faded to shock when he checked out the link. Hit hadn’t been kidding about his contacts. The dentist he’d booked was seriously a big name in the industry. It wouldn’t be strange to wait a year for a consultation with him. If Crooks’ mouth could be fixed, this guy could do it, and he could do it better than just about anybody else.

“Thanks.”

“Hey, don’t mention it. After your bro’s all good n’ healthy, maybe I’ll need your help again.”

“S’ yers.”

Axe returned with Geno’s tail. People gave him strange looks, but he ignored them. Sans was the only one who actually approached and dared to ask him about it. “You brought a souvenier,” he joked. Axe was surprised a mermaid could make a joke like that. As expected of Red’s mate.

“Found Geno’s tail,” he explained briefly.

The little blue mermaid’s eyes went wide. “That’s… for real?”

Axe nodded. “Imma bring it ta Crooks. Maybe he can reattach it.”

“Holy crap. I hope it works out.”

Axe nodded and swam past, making his way toward the healing room. Sans conveniently explained to the others why he’d come back with a mermaid’s tail in his claws.

Axe followed Crooks’ scent to the kitchen where he was starting to prepare dinner.

“Hey, bro. Found somethin’ fer ya.”

“Oh!” Crooks jumped slightly. He’d been too absorbed in his task to notice someone as stealthy as Axe come in. “You’re back already? I kept expecting you to call me…”

Crooks turned around and saw what Axe was holding. He broke out into a cold sweat and swung his head around, checking if anybody else was around to see them. Crooks swam over to his brother and held his shoulders in a panic.

“Axe!” he whispered harshly. “You should know better than to…?”

Again, he cut himself off, this time lowering his face slightly to sniff at the severed tail. His eyebrows shot up and he released his vice-like grip, straightening up and holding his sternum with a flabbergasted look.

“Oh my god.”

“Can ya use it?” Axe grinned.
Crooks nodded and took the tail carefully in his hands. “I can, and it will save me weeks of effort.”

The lanky mershark went and quietly stashed the tail where the school kept additional healing supplies (stuff like hooks and fishing line to do emergency treatment if there weren’t any healers around), and then he returned to finish making dinner.

Everybody ate quickly because of the exciting news that Geno’s tail had been found. The little red mermaid himself could barely seem to force anything down his throat. Knowing he would be able to swim again so soon was such exciting news, his stomach was all twisted up into knots.

A bunch of people wanted to watch Geno’s tail get reattached, but Crooks insisted they have some space, so Geno was the only one who got to witness it. Crooks made the procedure look so simple. He held the severed tail and used some green magic, and it became vibrant and lively again. He held the severed halves together, used a little more green magic, and announced that he was done. It was like he’d done nothing more than apply a bandage!

“Try to move it a little. It’s okay to take it slow.”

Geno swallowed the knot in his throat and flicked his fins. They moved. He could feel them!

Without trying to swim any more than that, Geno covered his face and cried.

“I’ll give you some time,” Crooks smiled softly, making for the door.

“Thank you!” Geno quickly choked out. “Thank you so much.”

“It was my pleasure. Be sure to thank Axe too when you see him.”

“I will. I definitely will.”

Despite how easy he had made it look, Crooks was considerably worn out. Reattaching Geno’s tail had taken no small amount of magic. Dinner was already over, so he went to his room to rest. Strangely enough, Axe was waiting outside his door.

“He seem happy?”

“Yes,” Crooks nodded. “He was overjoyed. You did a wonderful thing, brother.”

“Good,” Axe nodded. “I got somethin’ else fer ya.”

“Oh?”

Crooks took the phone Axe handed out for him. There was some kind of document pulled up, so he enlarged the screen to read it.

Scheduled… consultation… on November 22nd… for…!

Crooks looked at Axe with pink tears welling up in his sunken eye sockets.

“Oh, Axe!”

Overcome with joy, Crooks embraced his brother tightly. Axe chuckled and returned a gentle pat on the back.
“I can’t thank you enough!”

“Dun worry ‘bout it.”

“Really!” Crooks insisted, his tears overflowing into the gentle current now, “Thank you.”

“If ya wanna thank me,” Axe chuckled and trailed off. His eyebrows shot up as a good idea popped into his head. “I know.”

He took his phone back from Crooks and started recording.

“Dere. If ya really wanna thank me, do it so I won’t forget.”

Crooks sniffled and wiped some of his tears away, then gave his best smile to the screen. “Thank you for finding a dentist to fix my teeth, Axe. Thank you so very much.”

“Heh,” Axe chuckled. “Yer welcome.”

He saved that video and uploaded it to the cloud as soon as possible. Like they said: people may forget, but the internet is forever. He would always have this memory.
The Day of Departure

Chapter Summary

*In which Geno swims a little, we meet a mad scientist, and the big bois go on a road trip.

Chapter Notes

Better than nothing, I hope? I’m not quite back into the swing of things yet. The best parts of this we’re already written before I took a break for the holidays.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Geno was still rubbing happy tears out of his eye sockets the morning after his tail was reattached. Crooks had advised he rest yesterday, but today he was finally swimming again. He felt a little weak still, but Crooks and Blueberry were accompanying him. As much as the healer was offering support and telling him it was fine to take it slow, the child was challenging him to push himself.

The entourage slowly navigated the main hallway, and Geno noticed Axe in one of the community rooms, working on a broken trap with a focused expression.

Geno felt his sockets heat up with tears for the umpteenth time that morning. He still couldn’t believe that the creature here he had found most off-putting had been the one to retrieve his tail for him. Really! The one that did nothing but stare creepily and send him near constant psychic waves of hatred (that Geno never understood the justification for and nobody else seemed to notice or care about) had gone out into the ocean and retrieved his severed tail for him.

Axe must’ve felt he was being watched; he lowered his hands and met eyes with Geno.

“U-um,” The red-tailed mermaid stumbled over his words. He felt guilt and gratitude in equal measures, and the threatening silent warnings from Axe threw him off balance further. “Thank you… for finding my tail.”

Axe glanced at Crooks, who had a hideous but pleased smile on his face, and shrugged. “Yer welcome.”

Crooks smiled, “Since I no longer have to work on your tail, you should be fully healed in time for me to leave for my appointment.”

Geno looked at the healer with furrowed brows. “Appointment? What’s that?”

Crooks tapped his chin with a spindly finger. “Let’s see… it means a meeting with a healer or a doctor at a specific time.”

“So, you’re going to meet with other healers? Like an ocean council just for you guys?”

With a start, Crooks realized that for as much time as he’d spent around Geno, he hadn’t brought
any of this up before.

“Erm, no, not exactly. I’m going to get healed myself.”

Geno’s confusion deepened. He knew healers could heal themselves. Why would Crooks go to someone else for healing? Was anybody better than him?

“More specifically, I’m going to see a doctor. They’re like healers, except they don’t use magic as part of their treatment.”

Geno’s eyes went wide in disbelief. “What can they even do without magic?”

Crooks templed his fingers together and looked off to the side. “… Repair natural deformities and birth defects, I hope,” he answered quietly.

“O-oh…”

It was news to Geno that magic couldn’t fix those things, but it made sense when he thought about it. Besides that though, this was the first time he’d gotten any confirmation about why Crooks looked so… broken. Of course, both mersharks looked pretty off, and they were creatures from the dark and mysterious deep. The little red mermaid had sort of just accepted that that was how they looked.

… Now Geno was just wondering exactly which part Crooks was going to get fixed. What was normally ugly for his species and what was a defect?

“So, uh, what are you going to—” An absolutely seething warning flooded Geno’s thoughts from Axe’s direction, and he realized how rude of a question it was. Crooks was still looking at him with a curiously tilted head, so he quickly thought of some other way to finish. “—do to celebrate?”

The threats from Axe died down, and Geno breathed a silent sigh of relief.

“Oh. Well, I hadn’t thought of that yet. I suppose something will be in order.”

“Oh, obviously, we gotta have a party,” Axe showed off his slightly off-putting smile. “Since yer gettin’ yer teeth fixed, ya should try all da foods ya couldn’t eat b’fore.”

Geno thanked Axe in his mind for the exposition and was surprised when the mershark briefly met eyes with him. Had he heard that? Geno hoped he hadn’t been unintentionally broadcasting his thoughts. He didn’t have the first idea how these “instincts” worked.

“That’s not a bad idea,” Crooks nodded, apparently oblivious to the private exchange. “There are plenty of things I’ve been wanting to try.”

“S’ fine ta take yer time n’ think about it. We got awhile.”

Axe had already asked Red to go along with Crooks to the surface. As deadly as Axe was, he could only protect Crooks so much outside of the ocean. The inability to breathe air or teleport was a big obstacle there. Luckily, Red covered all those weaknesses, and he could sympathize with Axe’s overprotectiveness.

It wasn’t easy for Axe to send his brother to the surface. Safe to say he wouldn’t chance it if this wasn’t something so important to Crooks. If it didn’t go smoothly, Hit was never going to get another boat on the water.
Meanwhile, over the next few weeks, Hit worked to make sure everything *would* go smoothly. Now that his mermonster friend’s appointment was coming up, he stopped by a certain workshop to check in on the final form of one of the things necessary for the whole ordeal. Hit knocked on a metal door with several antisocial signs and posters pinned to it.

“Hey, Alph,” he called pleasantly. “C’mon out. I gotcha some flowers.”

The door creaked open to reveal a cramped room, lit by numerous computer monitor lights, and a yellow lizard monster’s face. She had bags under her painted eyes that looked like she’d been working overtime and nights since the crucifixion of Jesus, and her eyes shot death lasers up at the grinning skeleton.

“You’d better not have, or I’ll stuff them in your eye sockets.”

Alpha was allergic to flowers, and pollen, and probably everything else associated with the outdoors. She was also a raging lesbian, which was the only reason Hit dared to flirt with her when he already had Dolly.

Hit just smiled wider and shoved a bundle of female porn magazines through the door crack. Some fucking bouquette alright. Well, they *were* flowers in a sense.

Alpha tossed the stack onto her desk and begrudgingly came out of her office, straightening out the red and black horizontal pinstriped blouse, trailing black mermaid skirt, and white lab coat she’d probably been wearing for at least a week.

“You came to check on those custom fish tanks, right?”

Hit nodded. “Figured I oughta. I’m sure you handled everything though.”

“Of course I did,” Alpha snorted, twisting her painted red lips into a frown. “I handle every mess you throw at me.”

Her heels clacked on the ground as she led Hit deeper into the workshop. Lined up among various other vehicles and contraptions were two large, glass tanks on wheels. The design looked simple, but a lot of technology was necessary to make something meant to hold *that* much water portable.

The tanks were partnered with a modified truck that had a long ramp stuck with many holes.

“It’s easy,” she explained, “even those meatbrains you usually drag around can handle it. Just back up onto the shore, lower the ramp into the water, and flip this switch to extend the cable that attaches to the tanks. The tanks slide into the water, seawater fills it up, and your shark creatures climb in. Flip the switch back to drag the tanks back in. When you’re ready to wheel them around by hand, twist this to release the cable.”

“It ain’t gonna tip over or nothin when we’re pullin’ it outta the water, right?”

Alpha rolled her eyes. “I didn’t build them with ramen noodles for axles, but it kind of depends on where you deploy them. Just hold it steady if it starts to sink into the sand. I can’t account for poor terraforming.”
“Lazy,” Hit chuckled. “Ya done shit like that before.”

“You gave me three weeks, asshole. For a portable fish tank! Forgive me if I didn’t feel like bringing my A game.”

“Yeah, I know, but it was important.” Hit sighed lightly. “Ya did a great job, Alph.”

“If you think so,” the lizard grinned dangerously, “I’m testing some new steroids, and I could use some living monster test subjects~”

Hit glanced down at the mad scientist who’d started panting dangerously, and he tipped his hat over his eyes so he wouldn’t have to look.

He didn’t exactly like the lizard’s personal projects, but she did great work, and it was important to keep her satisfied.

That being said, Hit really hated people-trading—that was more Styles’ thing—but he wouldn’t hand Alpha over to Styles if he could help it.

“Oh hell. Fine.”

Most of the rival gang members he’d tortured had died or been incorporated into their group by now, but a few were still recovering. He could use those for now.

“I’ll have them shipped over by the end of the week.”

“Pleasure doing business with you,” Alpha’s lips curled smugly.

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Crooks paced up and down the shore, wringing his hands nervously. Except for Asgore who was guarding the den and Geno who wanted nothing to do with the surface, everybody else had gathered to see Crooks off and give him a little encouragement before his appointment.

Red glanced at Axe who was staring unblinkingly at his brother. The meroctopus asked quietly, “Ya sure ya ain’t comin’?”

“‘Course I want to,” he replied.

Depending on how they decided to move Crooks, Axe might not be able to follow. And even if he could, he wouldn’t be able to help much.

They were in a more secluded spot than usual, a few miles away from the port town where Edge and Papyrus lived. Everybody assumed it was so that Crooks and Axe wouldn’t be spotted, so they didn’t question it.

There was a road here that led directly to the beach, and the shore was pretty smooth. A truck backed onto it while everybody quickly wished Crooks good luck.

The truck backed up until its wheels touched the water, and Hit and some guys got out. The guys got to work letting down the ramp, and Hit noticed the gathering going on in the water. He tipped his hat and offered a smile when they stuck their heads up.
“Nice ta meet the rest of the family,” he said pleasantly. He quickly picked Red and Sans out of the crowd, “And thanks. Edge would be dead if it weren’t for you two.”

“Do you know each other?” Sans asked.

“He’s my cousin,” Hit smiled.

“Oh!” Sans pressed down a comment about Edge never having mentioned a cousin.

This was Sans’s first time meeting Hit, and he got a pretty familiar feeling from him: a similar dangerous but friendly vibe to the kind he got from Red. He hoped it meant that Axe had made a reliable friend on the surface.

Hit’s people had rolled two large glass tubs into the ocean, and Crooks carefully climbed into one once it had filled with water. Axe looked at the second one, then looked at Hit.

“What?” The gangster grinned. “You wanna come and support your bro, don’tcha?”

Surprisingly, Hit was pretty considerate. Axe nodded and climbed into the second tank.

“Thanks.”

“No problem.”

“Red’s comin’ too.”

“Hm?” Hit looked at the giant meroctopus. His first thought was that the shark brothers wanted a bodyguard—someone they trusted who could get around independently on land. He had no reason to refuse a third passenger, so he agreed without dwelling much on it. “Sure, that’s fine.”

Red took his cue to give Sans a shy goodbye kiss and climbed up onto the shore. He stood face to face with Hit. The meroctopus was a little surprised to find himself looking up to meet eyes with the land skeleton. Obviously, it was because he was essentially sitting, and it wasn’t much of a difference, but still, Hit was a big guy for a land monster.

The mobster smiled subtly and drew in a slow, smoke-filled breath, exhaling the plume just as unhurriedly. Without breaking eye contact with Red, he nodded at the back of the truck. The tanks had just finished retracting.

“Welcome aboard, big guy.”

Red had nothing to reply to that, so he just nodded and got in the truck.

There were lights installed inside the truck. They were bright, and Crooks was squinting because of them. Red looked around and found a light switch, flipping it off.

“Oh!” Crooks blinked and rubbed his eyes. “That’s much better, thank you.”

“Wait, turn ‘em back on,” Axe ordered. Crooks lightly protested, but Red flipped the switch back on without much thought.

“Brother, why—” Before his eyes could adjust, the distinct sound of a camera shutter cut Crooks off. He frowned and blushed. “Axe…”

The brothers had snuck around deleting all the pictures that were taken of them. Without having to say anything, it was obvious Crooks wanted this one gone as well. But Axe shook his head and
held his phone close, peering at the screen with his one good eyelight.

“I need it.”

“You do not.”

Crooks felt that there would be no need for Axe to remember what his teeth used to look like after they got fixed, but Axe disagreed.

Feeling like a spectator to this siblings argument, Red awkwardly turned the lights back off and watched them from the corner.

“Why are you being difficult? Just delete it. We deleted all the others.”

“Dat was so Alphys or someone else wouldn’t accidentally post a picture wit’ us in it online. We don’t want surface people knowin’ ‘bout us ‘til we know how dey’ll react, remember?”

Crooks scratched his cheekbone and looked away, “Well, actually, Edge and Papyrus confirmed that for us a while ago. They said widespread internet fame would probably be bad for us and we should just take things slow.”

Axe stared at him quietly for a moment, “... Dis’s why I need a picture of ya.”

“Assuming I look better after getting my teeth fixed, I’d just as soon you forget how they look now.”

Axe stubbornly shook his head, and Crooks frowned.

“Fine, keep it then. But I’m not happy about it.”

They rode in silence for a while after that, and Red miserably wished he’d brought Sans along.

Chapter End Notes

Alpha = mafiafell!Alphys

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