(The Last of the) Real Ones

by Vesperchan

Summary

You had been raised to be a hero, to defend humanity against monsters if they should ever show, but when they do—there's no need for heroes and no need for you.

Years later you get summoned by your old boss to help with a problem that threatens the peace between monster and human kind. Someone you knew is tearing apart the fabric of reality and bringing boss monsters from alternative worlds to yours. You need to team up with the monster mascot and his boss brother plus their softer, alternative versions to track down the new arrivals and...make nice. But is that all?

Months (and a few skeleton brothers) later you've tasted the delights of domesticity and are willing to believe it might be for you. Maybe the world isn't as in need of saving as you were once led to believe. Maybe, this time around you can be happy.
Weekly Updates

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Sunshine Riptide 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The world tried to burn all the mercy out of me
But you know I wouldn't let it
It tried to teach me the hard way
I can't forget it

Sunshine Riptide
FallOutBoy

You get the notification in the middle of the night and wake up to read the scrawling message across your old pager. You half thought it was a dream, the way the archaic technology buzzed to life the first time in four…five years?

You’ve been summoned.

The dark persists endlessly above you but New Ebott never sleeps and that’s reflected in the dozens of neon signs and city lights that color the storefronts as you make your way across the vibrant district.

The Embassy stands devoid of color, tall, stark, and white with greek column that stretch up for more than just two stories and doors tall enough for even the tallest of monsters to get through without issue. But that’s just the front. The back of the building is devoid of marble, official seals, and guided banisters. The back of the building is all glass and metal.

You take the elevator and punch in the number of the floor you need to get to, watching the world as your glass box ascends. A dozen different nocturnal bodies drift through the streets and you can tell most of the time which ones are humans and which ones are monsters.

The television from the Embassy continues to play behind your head as the elevators continues to rise.

‘On this five year anniversary of the Mt. Ebott barrier collapse several noteworthy celebrities have shown up in attendance to show support and share in the love for our favorite new neighbors…’

You can see the reflection in the glass from the television as different photos slide across the screen from last spring’s celebration. You recognize some of the faces including the monster ambassadors and the ten year old human spokes person.

Your mouth tingles and it’s all sour and sharp so you dig in your pockets for something sweet to suck on. Suckers, mints, honey sticks, jawbreakers…

You find the wooden end of a packaged rock candy and rip the plastic off. The sugar helps ground you and you lean back, resting your shoulders against the glass and wait for the rest of the trip to finish.

More than five years since the barrier came down, that meant it had been four years since you were last here, four years since they last needed you. Funny how you never expected to hear back from your old boss. You figured after his business went dark he would pretend it never happened.
and canoodle with the monsters like the rest of the world.

You bite off a chunk of rock crystal and sigh. You don’t like being bitter and you wish you could help it better. You’ve made plenty of new monster friends and live a decent life, but…

The elevator dings and then stops. At the end of the hall you look at see how opposite elevator has an additional security pad that hadn’t been there four years ago. Your pager has the new code to open it and when you step in the cage is more mirror than glass.

You’re able to watch yourself as the ride starts anew. The base of your skull is all but bare as your undercut is still fresh and the rest of your hair is curled into a victory roll to keep it off your ears. Aside from the hair and maybe a faded scar over your left eye that cuts through your eyebrow, there’s nothing substantial to separate or differentiate you from most of the other humans.

You see the black skinny jeans, a denim jacket with patches and a dark muscle shirt underneath it all that makes your nordic rune pendent stand out. There’s also a thick pair of wireless headphones resting around your neck. It’s pretty standard fashion in a place as flamboyant as your city. Yesterday you ran into a monster who was still on fire and dressed in nothing more than a gold speedo. Just another day in the neighborhood.

The doors slide open to a clean hall with several glass walls and a few opaque ones. You expected it to be empty and quiet but you hear footsteps running around up ahead. They grow louder until someone rounds the bend and you have to step back to avoid a collision.

“I’M SO SORRY! I DIDN’T SEE YOU THERE WHEN I WAS RUNNING AROUND TRYING TO FIND THE WAY BACK-OH!”

The way he talks is familiar and even though it’s not a sound you can see, you feel like he’s talking in all caps, despite the relatively normal volume. It’s a monster thing. He’s a head or so shorter than you and dressed toe to tip in blue. His eyes…you see stars in his skeleton sockets.

He reminds you of one of the monster ambassadors.

You pull the rock candy out of your mouth and manage an easy smile, feeling something honest and soft around him. You’re one to trust your gut and it’s never let you down yet.

“No problem, hun. You looking for someplace?”

He stops to stare up at you and you watch as his skeletal face shifts into something close to slack interest. His cheeks are dusted with powder blue.

Cute.

“Hun?”

“YOU-Y-DO YOU WORK HERE?”

Loaded question.

“Nah, but I know the place pretty decently. Can I help you get somewhere?”

“YOU KNOW WHERE THERE ARE SOME VENDING MACHINES I CAN GET SOMETHING OUT OF?”
You know for a fact there are none on this floor and your face gives that fact away. The monster’s expression drops and your heart skitters. He looked too much like a kicked puppy.

“What did you need out of the vending machine?” You pat at your pockets. “I’ve got some spare candy. Nothing too fancy but…”

You let your words trail off as you pull out two handfuls of treats for him to inspect. He lights up and touches the honey sticks. “ARE THESE MADE OUT OF REAL HONEY?”

“You know how to get back?”

“You sure you don’t want anything else? That’s not a lot.”

“IT’S NOT FOR ME, BUT MY BROTHER NEEDED SOMETHING.”

“That’s…sweet.”

His eyes sparkle bit and he gasps, not quite believing you capable of making a pun. You shrug and replace the rest of the treats before reaching for your rock candy.

“You know how to get back?”

“YUP! ARE YOU HEADING ANYWHERE IN PARTICULAR YOURSELF?”

“Uh, just a briefing room to see an old boss man about some work I guess.” You blink down at the monster and then smile, offering him your hand and your name. “Nice to meet you by the way.”

His eyes are shinning in brilliant, blue star shapes again. “I AM NONE OTHER THAN THE MAGNIFICENT SA-BLUEBERRY! ALSO I AM GOING TO A BRIEFING ROOM WHERE I JUST LEFT SO MAYBE YOU ARE GOING TO THE SAME PLACE?”

“Maybe.”

You nod down the hall and walk with him, listening as he talks to you about some of his favorite candies and treats, then says they all are nothing in comparison to his famous friendship tacos. He’s delightful and the longer you stand beside him the softer your heart feels. Just standing beside him seemed to clean out the worry that had been darkening your soul.

You turn the last corner and the door on the other side is flanked with reflective glass and you falter, knowing that it’s the type that allows those inside to see out. The man inside knows you’re there. No going back.

Before you can reach the door it swings open on its own and a taller skeleton in orange paces out. “blue, we were worried about you. where did you go?” he exclaimed.

The way he talked grated at you momentarily before you realized why. It was more monster speak. It wasn’t something you could see, but if you could it would probably be a mess of words with nothing important enough to capitalize.
Monsters.

Honestly.

It would get better in a few days if you hung out with them long enough. It always did.

When you glanced up again you realized you had missed a part of their conversation and that Blue was handing the other skeleton his honey stick and pointing at you. Weakly, you lifted a single hand and waved two fingers.

“Hey.”

“THIS IS MY BROTHER, I MENTIONED HIM, AND HIS NAME IS STRETCH. BEHOLD HIS AWESOMENESS THAT IS NOT AS AWESOME AS MY AWESOMENESS BUT ALMOST!”

Stretch nodded in your direction and you mirrored the gesture, picking up on a new vibe from this monster. Soft…like Blue….but there was something stronger at the core that felt like power. And then…something else? Like a bulletproof vest he was holding onto but not wearing? A moment later you realized what the feeling meant. Protective…of his brother.

He must have just finished summarizing you as well as a slow grin spread across his face. You passed some sort of test as you feel a barrier come down.

“thanks for helping out blue and thanks for this too. name’s stretch.” He offered a hand and you took it, noticing his grip.

Decent but not threatening.

“I guess you’re here for the same thing maybe as you just came out of where I’m heading,” you say and then point to the room. All around you the walls are white or clear with mirrors and glass, but inside you know it’s dark with low lights and black walls that hide a dozen different cameras.

Stretch grinned and then bowed over his arm and gestured for the both of you to head in first. Blue called out to follow him and you let the smaller monster grab your wrist without flinching so that he could drag you along.

You follow Blueberry in and it’s as you remembered it from the last time you were in the conference room with the long long table with the glass top and twenty different plush seats pushed up around it. There are four other people inside waiting for you and the two you recognize stand while the two you remember only have to turn.

Hightower and Whitely look like they haven’t aged a day and maybe they haven’t, as Hightower still has the same number of subtle wrinkles around his salt and pepper hair while Whitely looks like he came straight out the building with a noble profile and marble white skin lightly veined and thin.

The other two are unmistakable though you’ve never been allowed to be so close.

Sans and Papyrus, two monster celebrities that took up a lot of social feed early on before fading to the background to let newer, flashier monsters take center stage. Still, they rank highly in the King’s court and you don’t understand what they’re doing in such a place.

Or what you’re there for.

You look to Hightower, knowing Whitely won’t speak or offer anything verbally. Hightower is the
one who pulls he strings after all.

And the one who cuts them.

“Ah, SevenA, so good of you to finally join us, and I see you brought one of wayward guests back to us. Such a noble shepard.”

Your smile almost slips into something manic at the sound of your old name. Not that it really counted as a name. It was a title. A rank. Something they branded you with years ago before the barrier came down and before the world learned how harmless the monsters really were. It hurt to hear the name again but you don’t dare start shit in front of celebrities.

You glance at the two skeleton brothers and force back a panicked chuckle.

“Just trying to be helpful, sir. You said you wanted to see me?”

He gestured to Sans and Papyrus and introduced the two of them with fancy titles and official names that you’ve heard a hundred times before. You hardly hear him as you get caught in San’s stare. It’s…forever. Both are looking at you but you can feel the depth of Sans’ more profoundly and it makes you sweat. He’s a monster in every sense of the word, but there’s nothing vile about him. He’s a powerhouse and you knew that but had never felt it before.

You force your gaze to shift to Papyrus and it’s like tearing metal away from a magnet. He’s… bright and as shining as the tvs made him out to be. Honest, clear, true, noble, good….yeah. You force yourself to wave and in a voice that sounds far off you say your name before adding, “But some people still call me by my old name I guess.”

“HELLO HUMAN, IT IS FANTASTIC TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE AT LONG LAST AS I UNDERSTAND YOU ARE QUITE A FRIENDLY FIGURE IN THIS CITY WITH LOTS OF FRIENDS AND I HOPE TO BE ONE!”

Papyrus rounds the table and you reach out for a handshake but he surprises you by reaching down and scooping you up into a bone crushing hug. You crunch a chunk of rock candy off the stick into your mouth and flush at the friendliness. His soul is shining and you want to shield away from it, but also warm yourself in it?

“‘sup, you seem cool,” Sans said from behind Papyrus. He waves but keeps his distance and you wonder if that’s a bad or good thing.

“Thanks, good to meet the both of you.” Papyrus still has you in a hug that rocks you from side to side but he starts to let you down once he hears you speaking. He takes a step back and with your hands free you reach up to remove the rock candy from your mouth and smile. “It’s like meeting celebrities.”

“NYEH HEH HEH! INDEED IT IS JUST SO, AS I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS HAVE BECOME A SKELETON WITH MANY FRIENDS AND POPULARITY WITHOUT NEEDING THE ROYAL GUARD. ARE YOU OVERWHELMED?”

“A bit,” you admit, causing him to laugh some more. It was unique but there was something about the way he was speaking that made you feel off, like you had heard it before. Funny.

“As pleasantries are over, we can begin,” The man named Hightower said, interrupting you. He snapped and the echo made the door shut on its own and several of the lights in the room grow dim. “Please take your seats and we can begin. I’m sure some of you will have questions.”
“or some of us are questions…” Stretch cryptically muttered under his breath.

Everyone took a seat and the lights dimmed further. The table blinked and the glass surface started to come alive with different lights. A control panel flashed closest to Hightower and he interacted with it to manipulate the table into projecting prepared images.

Maps, readings, charts.

Then there was a list of names you recognized.

“I’ll be brief so we can get a move on. We have a situation. Last month we were alerted to the existence of a pair of abnormals in our reality.”

On the other side of the table you could feel both Blueberry and his brother stiffen and something in your heart throbbed.

Hightower went on. “Later on we were able to bring in the pair of abnormalities and ascertain the nature of their situation. Both Blueberry and Stretch, as we are calling them now, are alternative versions of Sans and Papyrus from another world, one we have dubbed ‘Underswap’ for the time being.”

The images shifted to show photos of both sets of brothers parallel. Side by side you could see how similar they were. You had assumed it to be a skeleton thing, but the similarities were striking when compared side by side.

You roll what is left of your rock candy around in your mouth and look back to Hightower before the images flash to photos of an alternative world where…things look similar but different.

“We are aware of the other world but can not interact with it with our limited resources,” Hightower explained. “The reason for this abnormality comes from FourB.”

Your heart drops as an old photo comes up on the screen. The boy with sad eyes and a face full of baby fat is from years and years ago and you wonder why they haven’t updated it. Surly they have a newer version. The though goes through your brain before Hightower flicks to several newer photos all on his own, showing the way the human child with sad eyes grew up into what should have been a man about your age.

“What about him?” you force yourself to ask, feeling ants under your skin and an itch behind your eyes. You’re using all the self control you have to stay calm and not freak or show the mania you hold back.

“He was the one who caused the rifts.”

You pop the candy out and glance around the room, seeing as how this information was known to everyone but you. Sans, Papyrus, Blueberry, and Stretch were all watching you. Hightower went on but their gazes didn’t abate except momentariellyt to watch new photos manifest in the air.

“All abnormality all on his own, FourB is a human who is able to use low levels of magic and until recently this was beyond his abilities.”

“funny story, doc,” Sans laughed. “i’ve never heard of a case where a human could use magic. that’s just…mystifying news.”

Hightower waved San’s suspicious smile away along with the poor pun. “All humans have magic but it is only utilized when we die, as such our souls are everlasting beyond the mortal coil. In rare
cases humans have been known to learn how to tap into that magic.”

For a price.

“and now this guy can use magic to do things monsters never could, like tear a hold in the fabric of reality and pluck characters out of it like this,” Stretch sighed, gesturing to himself and his brother. “and it gets better…”

You glance back at the table and follow the lights to see a projection of two new skeletons. Another Sans and Papyrus set, only this set was a bit darker and edgier. The Sans was a bit thicker with fangs and a gold tooth that flashed with his leering and the Papyrus beside him was taller with his own fangs and a spiked leather jacket and a mean scowl. He also sported a scar running from his right eye.

“We’ve dubbed them Red and Edge respectively,” Hightower stated, "based on social media chatter."

“They look…friendly?”

From across the table Stretch snorted and Blueberry groaned. One of the two understood sarcasm it seemed.

“Their universe has been dubbed Underfell. It appears to be harsher and more brutal than the previous universe these two came from. The personalities and demeanors of these individuals is currently unknown.”

“i don’t know, if you ask me, it looks like the two of those might have a bone to pick,” Sans chuckled, causing Papyrus to gasp in horror and look to you and then his brother before covering his face with his hands and sinking in his seat while Sans continued to chuckle.

“That’s the summary of current events so far. We need assistance in locating and capturing FourB as well as the renegade Sans and Papyrus for the security of the rest of the world. They have not sworn an oath to the King or Queen and can not be trusted to run free like Blueberry and Stretch here.” Hightower motioned to the two brothers and they in turn smiled or shot two thumbs way up in the air.

“WE’RE LEGIT!”

“In addition, more information on FourB’s actions this past month would be helpful as well. As it stands he’s successfully managed to bypass our security and stayed off radar. That’s where you come in, SevenA.” The room’s attention turned back to you. “You were close with FourB. You’ll be able to track him down and find the two renegades while you’re out. We’re prepared to pay you a month’s wages upfront as an incentive bonus, and then salary will continue as stated in a Level A contractor agreement for the company.”

Your blood ran cold.

“That’s a lot of money,” you laugh nervously before the paper is even in front of you.

But there’s no paper, only a digital file that lights up on the table in front of you, visible only to the person directly in front of it. It’s not short, either, and you know if you studied it long enough you’d find the snakes hiding in between the words and lines.

So you do.
You read as fast as possible and the room grows tense around you in the meanwhile. You hear hushed whispers and the beeps of different hands manipulating the touch screen and projections.

Your eyes caught a couple of lines you highlighted with a virtual tool before moving on. You finished reading all three pages in record time and then went back to the second page to look over the highlighted parts.

*Contingency guidelines for the apprehension of subject FourB…*

*Should subject prove unresponsive to nonlethal persuasion… *

*Class S*

*Lethal*

*Coexistence*

*Subjects A1&2, B1&2, C1&2*

*Unstable Variables*

You dismiss the entire document unsigned and stand up. The room goes still enough to hear the crack of your molars breaking off the last of your rock candy. Hightower levels a look in your direction that should have sent you to your knees, but he stopped being your boss four years ago when he threw you out and that was fine.

You weren’t going to be that person again.

“I’ll help but I’m no good with contacts,” you lie through your teeth. “Consider this a favor.”

Hightower has you pinned and it is pissing him off to see you still standing. You feel your heart racing and bite on the wooden stick of your finished treat to keep the manic grin off your face.

“…You won’t be financially compensated.”

“No big deal.”

“This will constitute a substantial loss of income if it persists for more than a couple of weeks.”

“I’ve got savings.”

Hightower’s eyes narrow behind his rimless glasses and then he shifts back, the glare making his eyes unreadable behind the white light’s reflection. “Very well then. You are familiar with the common rooms for employees I assume. Whitely, show our guests there while transportation arrangements are made.”

“We’re leaving tonight?” Blueberry exclaimed, looking caught between excitement and apprehension.

The table lit up with a map. “The Underfell brothers have been located in this general area.” A marker popped up on the map. “And once you are near enough SevenA will be able to pick up on more exact locations.”

“I will?” you echo. “I’ve never met these two before.”

Hightower gestured to Sans and Papyrus. “That won’t be an issue. They read the same as theses
two when searching. Same could be said for Blueberry and Stretch. In addition to that, you’ll also be locating FourB as you are the only one who has encountered him before.”

He tapped something on the table and the images flickered before going out. The room lights brightened and the door to outside opened on its own. Whitely, who had been silent and dull the entire time, ushered everyone else out of the room but lightly pushed you back when you tried to leave, eyeing Hightower just once before following the brothers outside.

You tense as the door shuts behind the last person and you feel Hightower behind you. You don’t turn around but he places a smartphone into your hand. You glance back over your shoulder and his glare is still there.

“The contract is on the device for when you change your mind. Remember who you are dealing with, child. Don’t try to be a hero.”

“I’ve not been a child in a long time, sir,” you bit out. But you pocket the phone and stomp out, yanking the door back and turning down the hallway with memorized steps.

Behind you the room goes dark once more.

The common rooms for employees were….empty. Your fingers itch for another piece of rock candy but the barren stick from the first one is still in your mouth and it tastes sweet enough to nervously chew. The sour tingle in your mouth isn’t too bad. You’ll be fine.

With a deep inhale you pull up a Map using magic. It’s bright and made out of neon white lights that made a picture in your head to see by. You zoom into it looking up and seeing the layout of the floor, where everyplace you’ve ever been is clear. It’s been a while since you last used location magic, because that had been one of the main issues for living indecently like a normal human in the city. Also, out of all the things you could do, location magic was some of the least impressive.

Like Hightower said, both sets of brothers showed up on the screen as labeled dots. One Sans was a dark navy blue while the other was brighter and vibrant. One Papyrus is gold and the other orange.

They’re nowhere near you.

Where was Whitely?

You found his gray dot on the map somewhere else, drifting at his usual slow pace and you wonder what could have happened to remove him from the rest of the group. But then you recognize the room the boys are in front of and it becomes more clear. No doubt someone had gotten distracted and left the common area.

Your money was on Blue. He seemed the type.

You dismissed the map, knowing no one else but you could see it even if they were sensitive to you using some form of magic. It was still magic and humans using magic was supposed to be a secret.

Not like there were a ton of you or whatnot.
You take a familiar turn down the hall and there are short stairs leading down to the first level entrance of the training grounds, but when you push open the door, the interior is nothing like you remember it.

The sand pits are gone, along with the obstacles and reflective lights. Now the floors are wooden and pained with the boundary lines for a basketball court to match the nets on either side. The far wall is lined with different colored balls, and another wall has a pair of water coolers between two benches. The upper level entrance filters out to a handful of spectator seats and for a hot minute you remember what those had been used for.

You hear your name being called and its sudden enough to make you bite through the wood in your mouth, splintering the end of your rock candy stick. Wincing at the taste, you pull it out and toss into a nearby trash can.

Blue is running across the field with a yellow dodgeball in hand while in the background Papyrus is furiously trying to nail either Stretch or Sans with the collection of balls he’s amassed. Sans and Stretch look like the laziest bodies in the room but move like experts, wasting no energy.

“Hey, it looks like you found the….gym.”

“That other guy said it would be okay if we wondered off. Are you really good at finding people or was that just something he said? I’m sorry if you were startled by our absence but isn’t this place better?”

“It’s no problem. I’m…used to this place and figured you might be down here. What are you doing?”

Blue held up his ball and smiled brightly. “WATCH!”

He then launched the dodgeball straight across the room and you watch as Stretch sees it coming barely get hit as he dramatically tried to make a show out of running away. Sans, in the same moment, takes a hit from Papyrus and goes down just as flat.

“You’re the coolest, bro,” Stretch coughs from the ground while Sans just lifts a single thumb up in the air to praise his brother.

Blue puffs himself up and seems to swell a inch or two taller with pride from his brother’s compliment and you can’t help but think how cute he seems. His soul echoes like a warm light and when it brushes up against yours you can feel-oh, it almost feels like running your face and hands across a really plush, thick carpet or blanket or maybe a meadow with soft grasses. It had been a while since you let yourself linger on the reverberations of another’s soul.

“So, what were you going to do when they came to fetch you later on?”

You didn’t miss how Stretch and Papyrus had started heading your way while Sans hung back, distracted with a cherry red squish ball that he turned over and over.

“That would not have been a problem as you are very good at finding us so it would only make sense that they would eventually find us all as well,” Blue answered easily. Then he snapped his fingers. “Speaking of which, do you know enough to give us a tour of this place?”

At that Sans lifted his head and over the shoulders of the other two the light of his eye lights pin you in place. You’re cold all the way down to your bones and rooted to the spot and as frightening
as the experience is, what’s more memorable is the look of surprise on his face when you don’t flinch or back down. Maybe he can tell you’re shaken, but you’re not shaken enough to show it outwardly.

There’s no sugar or rock candy in your mouth to mask the swell of sour tang flooding your taste buds.

Magic.

“a tour would be nice,” Sans called out, dropping the ball along with the overwhelming sense of his magic, rolling off him in waves that you’re sure the others are aware of, but not bothered by.

Papyrus at least turns back to look at his brother and fists his hands over his hips, his expression dour. “BROTHER, YOU SHOULD BE MORE CAREFUL AROUND YOUR HUMAN FRIENDS AND NOT FORGET YOU CAN BE OVERWHELMING AFTER EXERCISE. SHOW OFF YOUR BETTER POINTS INSTEAD.”

Papyrus’ voice rings inside your head the same way Blue’s voice did, like it was a sound in all caps without the volume being turned all the way up. Loud, but not loud. It would give you a headache eventually but you hoped that before the migrant you’d adapt to their speaking patterns.

“….that shouldn’t be too hard,” Sans chuckled, “you could say…”

Please don’t be a pun, please don’t be a pun, please don’t be a pun, please don’t be a pun—

“…i’m a knife guy with plenty of sharp points.”

Blue and Papyrus groan with one voice while you just shut your eyes and pray to any higher power that bothers to listen that you don’t fall back into your bad habits.

“sans, that’s enough of your cutting remarks,” Stretch chastised.

Blue’s eyes went wide and his mouth hung open in blank horror, too stunned to say anything while Papyrus covered his face with his hands.

Sans eyed the slouching Papyrus copy and grinned, recognizing something. “hey stretch, don’t cut in with your mediocre puns thinking you’re sharper than me. i’m a cut above the rest.”

“hey, I don’t mean to be confrontational with you, there’s no point to it.”

“Please,” you sigh with fingers pinching the bridge of your nose like that would help. You’re talking before you even know what you’re saying and it’s only after the words are out of your mouth, “cut it out,” that your realize what you’ve done.

Your eyes go wide and instead of pinching the bridge of your nose your hands slap to your face while Sans and Stretch both turn to you with wide grins. It’s better than San’s overwhelming aura from earlier, but you’re so upset with yourself for giving in and slipping up it doesn’t matter as much as it should.

Punning.

It’s such a bad habit.

“A tour,” you finally manage to say. “You wanted a tour, right?”

“sure, it’d be knife,” Sans said, stuffing his hands into the blue jacket lined with white fur. He
shoots Stretch a sideways look that Stretch doesn’t have any problem ignoring.

Blue jumps in-between you and Sans, waving his arms for attention. “A TOUR, YES! A TOUR AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. CAN WE LEAVE NOW?”

“Su-sure. It’s not going to be a long tour, I don’t remember everything and they changed plenty since I was last here, but it’s something I guess.”

“Well, CAN WE START WITH WHAT YOUR FAVORITE PLACE WAS? OR WOULD IT BE BETTER FOR YOU IF WE JUST DID THE THINGS THAT ARE CLOSEST TO HERE. OH, DID YOU HAVE A BEDROOM IN THIS BUILDING I CAN SEE?”

“No bedroom, nothing like that anymore, but we got plenty of dorms somewhere around here. Favorite place would probably be the mess hall but I don’t know if it even has food stocked in it anymore since…ah, well, we can go check it out at least.”

That seems to encourage Papyrus to start on a tangent about his world famous friendship spaghetti, a dish you had seen on a youtube how-to where he partnered up with several celebrity chefs and made it in front of an audience. It was a meal plenty of monster restaurants served as the trend caught on and peaked a couple years back before other monster meals and foods took over.

It was a bit surreal to be standing in front of a figure that had been on stage alongside singers, actors, and talk show hosts for years. Second only to the ‘robot with a soul’ Papyrus’ media presence was nothing to scoff at. If you thought about it too much, he seemed larger than life and yet….

His soul was like Blueberry’s but brighter or bolder. Yes, there as softness there as well, but even if they were alternate versions or swapped versions of one another, each monster was his own unique individual with quirks and details exclusive to him and him alone. Papyrus was like…sunshine and beaches and lemonade and…oh yeah, that feeling of driving down a long open road with a clear sky and the wind rushing past you. A moment of pure elation.

You blinked at the sound of your name being called. The tang of something sour dulled in your mouth.

“The mess hall?” you echo, realizing what it was Blue had been trying to say to you. “Sure, I know the way.”

You turn to lead them out but don’t miss how only three of the four trail behind you. Sans is gone and you know well enough that he’s taken a ‘shortcut’ somewhere else. You could track him down if you wanted to, since you’ve met him once and know the building’s layout extensively, but it almost feels better without his presence.

“So,” you begin to say, taking the stairs up two at a time. “How long have the three-er-four of you been getting to know one another?” You look back at Papyrus. “I mean, when were you and your brother dragged on board?”

“A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO! I WAS SO SURPRISED WHEN SANS WAS CONTACTED BY THIS PLACE SO SUDDENLY. WE WERE SUPPOSED TO BE ON A WORK HIATUS AND IT WAS THE FIRST TIME IN WEEKS WE WERE TOGETHER FOR MORE THAN A DAY.” Something in Papyrus’ voice changed, pitching higher. “I’M GLAD IT WAS WORK FOR THE BOTH OF US AS HE SO RARELY GOES ALONG WITH ME TO PLACES I VISIT.”

That makes sense. Sans never struck you as the media personality. Even after meeting in person,
you didn’t believe he was the type of monster to enjoy being looked at by people he couldn’t look back at. Other monsters like Papyrus and Mettaton seemed to enjoy the stardom better.

And yet.

“It must have been hard to be separated from your brother for so long when you’re as close as you are,” you said in a tone you hoped came off as casual. You know what a sensitive subject is when you see it. Fame wasn’t always the blessing it seemed to be.

“SORRY TO BE CONSIDERED WORK,” Blue pouted, crossing his arms as he walked up behind you.

Papyrus flustered. “NOT WORK LIKE THAT! YOUR COMPANIONSHIP HAS BEEN NOTHING BUT DELIGHTFUL, AND I WOULDN’T CONSIDER IT ANYTHING LESS FOR A MILLISECOND. I AM ALWAYS EAGER TO MAKE A NEW FRIEND. IT’S BEEN AGES SINCE I LAST MADE A NEW ONE.”

“s’okay, blue understands that, don’t ya, blue?” Stretch interjected.

And for some odd reason Blue looks at you before replying. “I SUPPOSE YOU ARE RIGHT, BROTHER.” Blue shifted his focus to you, brightening considerably. “WE’VE BEEN HERE ON THE ABOVEGROUND SIDE OF THIS WORLD FOR FIVE WEEKS FOUR DAYS, BUT WE’VE ONLY BEEN ALLOWED OUT TWO WEEKS AGO AND THAT’S WHEN WE ALL MET UP AND GET TOGETHER.”

“The Embassy let you go outside? Where did you guys end up going?”

Blue rushed to answer first. “WE GOT TO TRAVEL TO SOME REALLY NICE PARKS AND WE VISITED A LAKE AND STAYED OUT UNTIL PAST MIDNIGHT TO SEE THE STARS AND SPENT THE NIGHT AT AN OBSERVATORY. WE EVEN WENT SHOPPING FOR CLOTHING IN THE NEXT TOWN OVER OUTSIDE OF THE CITY BUT THAT’S IT. WE’RE STAYING AT THE GOVERNMENT HOUSING PROJECTS JUST NEXT DOOR, THE ONES ON THE SAME CITY BLOCK AS THE EMBASSY. DO YOU KNOW THEM?”

His words came out as a rush but you listened to them all, nodding in time and humming when appropriate.

“Yeah, I used to live there for a while after I got-after leaving here.” You don’t miss how Stretch’s attention shift subtly, a reaction to your words but you do ignore it. “It was my first time on my own and an added bonus of the projects is that they have social workers who can help people and monsters acclimate to society and learn stuff like how to establish credit to be considered for a tenant in a complex. They’re good people there.”

“The Mister Hightower mentioned your community involvement.”

You guided them around the bend in the hallway and up to a set of push doors with long metal handles running across the front. They didn’t protest other than with a bit of squeaking when he leaned into them.

“Yeah,” you said while opening the door. “I guess I shouldn’t be surprised the old fart keeps tabs on his old kids. It would be weird if he didn’t.” The room was dark but the wall switches weren’t far and you found them without problem.

The room came into focus and for a flash of a second, the room was filled with bodies. A dozen different kids and teenagers arguing at the plastic tables and metal chairs about the awful high
protein diets and vitamin milkshakes that still tasted like chalk even with chocolate. Someone threw their food on purpose and a girl screamed about it landing in her hair. The light flickered. Then the bodies were gone.

“fancy digs you got here.”

You glance to the side but Stretch isn’t looking at the room. His eyesights are on you, watching your face fill back up with the color that had drained only moments ago. You stare back and then look away first. Something against the far wall catches your attention.

“Blue, looks like I was wrong. They added those after I left I think.”

Blue gasps at the different vending machines stocked up with monster and human foods as well as drinks. He rushes off to one and Papyrus goes on to check out the kitchen and see if there is anything ‘he can use’ for food making you presume.

“PAPS, LOOK AT THIS!” Blueberry exclaimed in front of the Monster Munchies vending machine. “THEY HAVE CHOCO-TACOS!”

Before his brother moves Blue is already pulling out his money to buy the human treat turned monster delicacy. With the number of silver dollars he inserts you don’t doubt he’s buying multiples for him and his brother.

“so, this place look all that different or more of the same?” Stretch asked, stepping up alongside you. “….everything in this building feels the same to me but…you knew it before it was like this, didn’t you?”

“Before?” you echoed.

Stretch shrugged and then shuffled in his pockets for something. He pulled out a lighter and then glanced your way before replacing it and shuffling his feet awkwardly. “that sans already suspected it from earlier, and I guess I just noticed it late, but this place was….refurbished? the gym for example.”

You felt yourself nod. The motion is slow and halted, almost robotic. Half of your mind is scattered and the other half whirrs too fast to catch. You want to wear your headphones and just wait until everyone in the room leaves, but you know better. There are times when you can cope with your problems and times when you face them.

This is one of those ‘face them’ moments.

“Yeah, there used to be a sandpit in the gym and no basketball nets. This place, it looks almost the same except for the monster additions.” You point to the oversized chairs and monster food dispenser. “And there were more people in here when I remember it.”

“friends?”

“Something like that.”

“people like you?”

“We had plenty to bond over I guess.”

You turn to look pointedly at Blue while Stretch watches you. And, unlike Sans, Stretch lets a little of his magic ebb out, tentative and hesitant, checking you out. Humans aren’t supposed to know
they’re being sized up so you don’t react, letting him explore to an extent that satisfied him. Unlike monsters, you couldn’t read stats the way they could, but you picked up on other things.

Stretch had a steady soul, thick and healthy like honey and honesty and a warm bed with plenty of blankets and pillows all soft and fuzzy. It made you want to run your hands through the magic of his soul and feel the texture of it.

Blue dashed out of the kitchen laughing loudly to himself with a number of items in his hands. Papyrus follows him to the edge with something in his hands you hear him shout about. Blueberry’s beeline is straight for you and his brother and he stops short, just in time for Stretch to pull his magic back and pretend he wasn’t being nosey without a nose.

Damn puns.

“WHAT WERE YOU TALKING ABOUT?”

It was easy to smile at the sight of Blueberry. “Nothing super important. What do you got there?”

Blue’s smile makes his eyes spin with white stars in delight. “THE NEXT BEST THING TO FRIENDSHIP TACOS, AN ALMOST HOMEMADE FRIENDSHIP CHOCO TACO. HERE, PASTRETCH.”

Papyrus left the edge of the kitchen with a choco taco in one hand and cell phone in the next, looking confused. “IT IS NOT FRIENDSHIP SPAGHETTI SO I DON’T KNOW IF IT WAS MADE WITH LOVE.”

Blueberry handed his brother a wrapped up choco taco from the vending machine and then turned your way. His smile stretched and a soft powder blue color flared up under his eyes, almost like a blush. He still had two more choco tacos but he took one and held it up hesitantly.

“I DIDN’T MAKE IT MYSELF B-BUT,” the color on his face darkened. “BUT HERE, I WANT TO SHARE A FRIENDSHIP TACO WITH YOU. WILL YOU…WILL YOU HAVE ONE WITH ME?”

It almost hurt when your heart throbbed at the sound of his voice combined with his expression. He was so cute and soft and vulnerable. He bought you a choco taco and asked with his eyes so full of pleading. It was like a puppy begging for pets and it made your heart warm.

“Of course.” You couldn’t help but laugh through your smile. You took the packaged wrapper from his hand and nodded to the table. “I’d love to share this with you.”

And it was just as easy as that. The three of you shuffled over to a table and sat down together to eat the melting treat. Blueberry took a seat next to you and scooted it close while Stretch sat across from his brother, next to Papyrus. Stretch asked Papyrus where Sans was and then the conversation turned into predicting where Sans ended up lost, followed by questions for you about your time at the embassy and how different it was. Those were questions you danced around, saying the things Hightower taught you to say and diverting to other topics.

The choco tacos were gone but the conversation still carried until a crackling sound overhead made you all stop. Then the intercom came on.

“Would SevenA please come to Adjunct media room 1, SevenA please report to the Adjunct media room 1,” the robotic voice echoed before shutting off.

You picked up a spare napkin to wipe at your face with and stand, stopping only when Blueberry
stands to follow you.

“I’ll be right back I think. You don’t have to follow.”

“you also weren’t called up, blue. lets just wait here for now,” Stretch said. “papyrus was just going to tell us about spider doughnuts.”

Papyrus looked up from his phone, surprised and clearly not planning on going into a conversation about spider doughnuts, but shut his mouth fast thanks to a look from Stretch. Blue still looked to you, expression torn, but you waved and left before he could say or do anything to convince you to bring him along.

You had a feeling where you were going wasn’t somewhere he wanted to be.

The media rooms were scattered on each floor but the first one was on a level above you, so that meant an elevator ride requiring your old employee identification code to go anywhere.

The media room’s door was unlocked and left partway open. When you stepped inside you saw the control panel and then the two dozen different sized monitors mounted overhead. Half of them were on only to static while the others flickered through different video feeds scattered throughout the building.

One last one stood out from the rest.

You recognize the old clip from nearly six years ago, before the monsters surfaced, before the secret was public knowledge, before the embassy was open and friendly. The boy uses his blue magic to tear apart a pig carcass dangling from the ceiling.

San turned around in the plush lab chair with the tall back, facing you as the door behind you closes with his blue magic.

“hey sport, fancy meeting you here.” His grin was almost as manic as yours.

The video from six years ago ran out and an error message came up sending the rest of the cameras into a panic. Sans frowned as all the feeds cut out and a firewall kicked him in. He made a dissatisfied sound before fixing his eye lights back on you, watching the way you shiver.

“its nothing I didn’t already know. heh, you know that a part of the peace treaty included turning over information about anti-monster units that may or may not have been funded by local and federal governments?”

You don’t move. Your insides are cold as more of his magic leaks out but you don’t move.

“your name wasn’t on our list, but this place was….it made me curious. couldn’t dig much more than this but you’ll be honest with me, won’t you, pal?”

And you feel it.

Other monsters call it an ‘encounter’ and it’s something you were trained a long time ago to recognize. Sans’ magic is tugging you apart and there is nothing you can do at this proximity to stop it. The door behind you is closed and his magic swells to new heights. There is a flicker of light as your soul emerges from your chest, open and exposed.

In the background the error messages flash red and then yellow, but San’s eyes are black voids.
“you’re gonna have a bad time.”

Chapter End Notes

Behold my self indulgent, wish fulfillment, monster romance story. Reader in this fic started out being as a 'blank' reader insert, but I couldn't keep it that way. I just wanted to write something and have fun with it, so I poured a lot of my self indulgent wishes into this fic. I blame my partner in crime Jaylene for leading me down this path. I just wanted to write fluffy things and emotional hurt/comfort but I wouldn't have gotten so far without her encouragement. (So if you end up enjoying it blame/thank her.)

If you have any questions feel free to ask, otherwise, read, enjoy, and lurk to your heart’s content. Hope you have fun. You can find me on tumblr at: https://vesperlionheart.tumblr.com/ but it's all sorta just random stuff.
When you were younger the magic had colors. You were young enough to see what the adults couldn't. As you grew older you lost your ability to distinguish magic by its color like all children at the Embassy.

'I can't see them anymore! I can't see their souls! Why can't I see them anymore?'

But you weren’t left blind.

Instead, you developed a new way to sense magic and understand it.

As a child you lacked experience and exposure to the world, but as you grew older you began to associate different stimuli with the colors and shades of a soul, seeing past just one distinguishing trait. When you lost the ability to see souls or ‘auras’ as Hightower called them, you felt them in new ways.

Red is DETERMINATION,
Orange is BRAVERY,
Yellow is JUSTICE,
Green is KINDNESS,
Cyan is PATIENCE,
Blue is INTEGRITY and
Purple is PERSEVERANCE….

Red felt like a brick house in a thunderstorm.

Orange was a roaring lion

Yellow was a lighthouse on the ocean during a storm with bobbing waters and frothing waves, as bad as it got, yellow was a lighthouse that never wavered

Green was a grass field filled with flowers

Cyan was a bed of soft pillows on a cold day, or a dog with long fur that curled up next to your side for pets

Blue is…. a harder one for you to pin down, as so few had it around you, but….integrity was food, pilfered rations, rest, and the echo of someone telling you, ‘you don’t deserve this’

Perseverance is the comfortable sting that follows a long run or workout as well as the sunrise you managed to see after climbing the mountain in time

You remember brushing up against different auras and souls, eager to learn their secrets before your youth ran out and you were no longer able to learn. Back then, no matter how hard it had been, it never kept you down. You were needed. You were necessary. If someone needed you, it was so much easier to keep going.

‘You know what we’re doing here. We can’t be fair in an unfair world.’
'One day humanity will need you to be its hero.'

'Stand up. Take it again. You need to be stronger, there are monsters under our feet…'

The tang of bitterness in your mouth grounds you and brings you back to the present. You can’t afford to drift off in such a volatile situation, hence the adaptation. You swallow and it’s like drinking tart lemonade.

“Questions?” you ask, forcing your voice to remain passive, to stay neutral, to run like an even river of sound that didn’t betray anything of what was going on in your heart. Never mind he could probably tell with just his magic, you weren’t about to give Sans the easy satisfaction.

The room flashes with the colors from the error message all around you. Sans remained unmoving, watching you from where he stood.

“yeah, I got plenty of them so feel free to speak up whenever, like for when I ask, do ‘ya got magic like us or just-thwip-the skills?”

It wasn’t a real question because the attack came before he was even finished speaking. Your body moves before you even know what you should do. Bones come out of nowhere and then wink out of existence before they can hit the back wall, but you’ve vaulted over them all before they got close enough to hurt your heart.

Soul.

Monsters attack the soul.

One of the monitors behind Sans breaks free from the flashes and plays an old video of the same boy from before, slashing through the pig with his magic only for the scientists to measure the depth of the cuts and berate him for it.

‘You can’t protect anyone with just this,’ the man in the video chastises. There’s no audio and the lips are too grainy to read, but you know.

“well, there’s skill at least, but what if I did this?” sans hummed.

You wasted your turn on the video and there’s another barrage of attacks, bones at odd angles you have to launch yourself through instead of running from. The opening nearly closes up before your ankles clear and you roll onto the floor only to spring up again, popping onto your feet and falling into a sway.

“This isn’t the best way to make friends, bud,” you laugh, trying to keep your voice from warbling. “Why don’t we share a taco or something?”

“not the type.”

And instead of bones there is a face, skeletal and horrifying. It opens its mouth and the beam comes next, passing harmlessly through your arm but your soul shivers from the proximity.

You duck and roll away before the third, fourth, and fifth beams can land a hit. You stumble, bracing againsts the control panel as Sans turned towards you again. There was a pause between his attacks where he had to ‘give you a turn’ or ready his next move. It felt too much like a video game or something you would train against and you can’t help but feel a rush.

You’ve never been in a real encounter with a monster before, (just the for fun flirty types) and out
of all of them, was there someone more formidable than the king’s Judge?

“You don’t sound like you’re interested in asking questions any more than you are in hearing the answers. Weren’t you curious?” you pant, more breathless from the thrill than the physical labor of moving so fast.

He chuckled. “I’m getting plenty of info out of you this way too.”

And he was. Another barrage of bones came your way, impossible to dodge completely unless you knew what to avoid and what the let pass over you. Half were illusions and half were dangerous. Sans watched and learned what you knew through the attack then braced once it was your turn.

“You really planning on beating me here? What will you tell your brother and the others?”

The Gaster Blasters come out again with their awful faces, more unsettling than the actual beam attack. You stared into the mouth and then ducked under it before the beam could launch. You were fast, but not even you were faster than light.

“That’s not really what you should be worrying about right now, buddy,” he said.

“Then why are you doing this? At least tell me that,” you snapped back before the next wave of bone attacks came your way. You practically had to run up the wall to avoid them this time. Sans’s magic swelled thicker around you, mounting.

“That’s a silly question since you know I know what you are, ya know, he he.” The monitor behind him loops and the boy is back, cutting through the pig. “…a great defender of humanity aren’t ‘cha….or just a monster hunter?”

And you have nothing to say to that because, yeah, that’s exactly it. Sans knew about this place and after seeing the way you had moved there was no way he wouldn’t be able to put two and two together.

*One day humanity will need you to be its hero….*

*You need to be stronger, there are monsters under our feet…*

From OneA to SevenB, all the kids Hightower could get his hands on…. FourB, SixA, ThreeD, the names you could only whisper, all of them had been born, broken, and bred the same way.

To be humanity’s hero.

This time when Sans attacked it wasn’t with bones or blasters, but his eyes flashed with magic and the whole room shifted. Stray pens and a coffee mug, long abandoned on the dash, lifted into the air along with you. Sans hand was in the air and then his eye flashed once more. You came crashing down with all the force of a warped moment of gravity. Unlike the other attacks, you took damage when a bone attack took advantage of your distraction and immobility.

"You're wrong about me," you shouted out. "I'm not an enemy and I'm not a monster hunter. That's all in the past and I'd never hurt a monster."

“you think I would expose my brother to such a risk? he likes humanity. he trusts most of ya and doesn’t need to know about this place and yeah, humans can be plenty swell, but don’t mean I trust every tim dick and terry."

And even though your body was bruised and your heart-soul was a little damaged, it was his words
that make you want to snap more than anything.

You remember watching the video feed along with all the other kids. You remember the fear and the excitement that filled the room. You could open your mouth and taste it, the tension was so thick.

This was it.

This was what you’ve been training so hard so long for.

Finally

But then the human ambassador Frisk came out and spoke of peace. None of you believed it at first, but then the monsters followed, kind, polite, and goofy. So many of them comically weak it made your gut roll. There were no dragons or demons or troll sized behemoths with blood and baby limbs in their teeth. Their were… dog monsters that had short term memory problems and monster families, monsters in love, monsters who were afraid, and monsters who were brave.

You saw the humanity that you were supposed to be defending come crawling up out of the broken barrier and it was…

‘A trick,’ someone had said behind you, and then the whole room was agreeing with one mind.

FourB caught your eye and his face was a pale color as his eyes glazed with angry tears. His hands were fists and he wasn’t the only one.

You waited as one for the other shoe to drop, but it never did. You watched the reels and listened to the interviews. Podcasts and internet videos never ran out. The complete account, unedited, was made available to you all, for tactical purposes, but you got caught in the details and the dialogue more than the strategies and stats.

A ten year old kid that had once been no different than you or anyone else, had done something impossible. Not with magic, not with weapons, not with prowess, or Olympic worthy agility….just…

‘A trick, it’s just a trick. These are all lies.’

One day humanity will need you to be its hero….

If it wasn’t a trick then what was the point of it all. What had you endured all that for? Instead of being a hero you were a what? A…waste? A mistake?

Worse.

Unnecessary.

You tasted lemons in your mouth, stronger and meaner than before. It was enough to pull you out of your memories and face Sans once more.

“Yeah, pal, I know all about it, so don’t look like you’re offended.” Sans shook his head. "it’s clever for them to have hidden away a sleeper ages or two, since you and that other bud never showed up during the treaty talks. I had to go digging a little deeper on my own.”

“I’m not a sleeper agent and I’m not someone who wants to hurt you guys, or any monsters,” you take your turn to shout back. “I’m just trying to help.”
A moment more and then Sans has his blasters out and you make your body move just enough.

“i can’t take that risk. that creep hightower can pick up your dust himself just to teach him to go behind our backs. we’ll handle the rest.”

“How does that make you any better?” you snarl before you reach for the chair that’s close and use it to get the height you need. The bone attacks sweep harmlessly through your knees and ankles as you fall down from your high.

“i don’t need to be better, I just need to keep my brother alive, no hard feelings,” Sans answered, breathing heavier. He reached up to wipe at excess magic on his face, shining blue like sweat. “sides, its the same for you guys too, we saw plenty of vides and read plenty of transcripts. i can’t blame you. how else were you supposed to turn out? we get it, you couldn’t help it.”

But that wasn’t all you were.

Did that really matter to someone as paranoid as Sans?

Yes, you had been broken and molded out of your bodily ruins into something new. Hightower had crafted you alongside the others with the singular purpose of being a defense against the monsters and it hadn’t been so terrible that you had wanted to give up along the way. You had believed him when he said you were going to be a hero. It wasn’t like you were going to ever go into the underground to invade it and kill the monsters in their beds.

You weren’t a murderer.

You were a hero.

Humanity’s hero....or you were supposed to be.

Another gravity attack had you slamming up against the ceiling harshly, before dropping onto the floor. You recovered with only enough time to roll away from another bone attack. He watched the way you moved and saw your own magic following you, protecting and shielding you from the worst of his attacks.

“i’m curious how you managed that,” he said while pointing at the burning magic around your hands. “i’ve not ever actually seen a human use it before. though it was a myth ‘till the peace treaty and even then, videos don’t do it justice. heh do something else.”

You tried to reach the door but it was still sealed shut with blue magic.

"I don't want to fight you, Sans," you shouted.

“why not? i’m giving you what you’ve always wanted, a monster to attack and go all out against, you would just be defending yourself if you attacked now, come on, be a hero,” Sans called.

The goading made you grimace, but you force you back to straighten. When you don’t move San’s face falls. The grin is gone and his hands drop out of his pockets to hang loose at his sides. He couldn’t be an easier target.

“not gonna do it? how….noble, or maybe you’re just lacking determination.”

He was wrong.

You felt your heart and all the magic you once called aura surge around you, swelling up to meet
his, maybe not as extensive, but just as resolute. You hadn’t missed how the tingle in your mouth had dulled. He was running out. The sweat was another clue.

Four different blasters came up fast and went off at the same time, and then another four at different angles. You watched without moving, feeling the damage they did to your heart as you refused to move.

Determination lacking?

You?

A dozen different bones all passed through you, some hitting, others missing as you stood firm in your place. A third attack barely connected but you took the full force of it.

“…heh…you….giving up then, didn’t take long.”

The next blast clearly missed and it was so transparent you didn’t even dignify it with a flinch. His attacks were slower. He was telegraphing more. The patterns were becoming less complex. Was that because of his decision or because he was running low on reserves of magic?

Your soul was battered but it didn’t take any more damage from another gravity shift or the bones or the blasters. Your body hit the ceiling then the floor, hard enough that you knew there would be bruises in the morning. You pushed yourself up onto your hands and then your feet, pulling your magic with you in a surge of warmth. You faced Sans without flinching once more and dared him with all the power of a look, to try it again.

His eye lights were back, white and small. “you’re going to be dust at this rate, kid… just, do whatever you want now, you’re beaten up enough for it…this is what they want you to do.”

You took a step and then another. Sans lashed out with another attack and it connected, hurting as your soul takes the damage.

Sans seemed startled that it actually hurt you at all, or maybe he was startled that you didn’t make a move to avoid it. There’s more sweat on his skull and it’s hard to be frightened of him anymore. His magic was thin and you don’t hate him cause yeah, years ago all you were living for was a chance to be a hero through the blood sweat and tears of a lie.

You stop close enough to touch Sans, but you keep yourself from reaching for him. You move for something in your pocket with your turn and he flinches, but you just pull out another stick of rock candy and rip off the wrapper. You twist it into your mouth and purposefully ignore the tang that told you, you were in danger from magic.

He didn’t know the significance behind the candy but he didn’t miss the meaning of the nonchalant stance you took in front of him. Most of your body’s weight shifts onto one hip and you tilt your chin up to stare down your nose at him, daring him to take out the rest of your HP points or whatever it was the monsters called it.

It was his turn and he just watches you. You feel his magic swell over and then through you, searching you, learning about you and you let him. No more barriers around your soul, there’s nothing he can’t see.

“…and here i was thinking you would be difficult to take down, didn’t know this is the reason i’d break a sweat, or are you just waiting to look your best for an attack you can’t miss with?”

Your throat is full of words and your eyes hurt but you force your mouth to move and punctuate
each word with a swell of your own magic.

“I am not what they made me. I’m whatever the hell I want to be and I don’t want to be a killer.”

You take that last step, going toe to toe with Sans, staring down at him as he’s only hair shorter than you when he slouches.

“And you can’t make me one.”

The magic is gone, like it was sucked out of the room. The door behind you is released from the blue magic keeping it shut and you hear it swing open all on its own. The sugar taste in your mouth is stronger as all the sour tingles dissipate.

“ok.”

You take a step back, realizing the encounter as over. “What?” you echo, feeling numb from the magical whiplash. There’s no magic left in the room and Sans isn’t sweating anymore. He looks bored if anything.

“ok,” he repeats for your benefit. “i guess that’s how it is then.”

He slid his hands into his pockets and shuffled towards the open door, turning his back to you, unguarded and open. You watch him go, barely realizing what it all means. He hadn’t wanted to kill you? Did he trust you now? What did that ok mean?

The light from the doorway was a bright white that his form cut into as Sans shuffled out. You take the steps to reach him, yanking the door back all the way only to freeze when you see Hightower there, hands clasps behind his back, glasses glaring in the bright overhead lights. His expression is as smooth as still water and just as unreadable as ever.

Hightower inclined his head in San’s direction and smiled politely, like it was a calculated emotion. (Knowing Hightower, it likely was.)

“If you are lost, sir, we can offer you a map. I assume you were able to right yourself thanks to our former employee’s efforts.”

A serpent under a flower. His voice was like the hiss of a snake.

“…yeah, something like that,” Sans mumbled, sounding bored.

Hightower nodded. “Then I hope you have a restful evening. Unfortunately, our transportation issues have multiplied and it will be another several hours before a replacement can be procured. You’ll set out in five to seven hours. I suggest you return to your temporary lodging.”

Sans shrugged. “that’s fine.”

Sans took a step around Hightower and continued on down the rest of the hallway. There was a flicker of magic as soon as his back was to Hightower, but that was it-only a flicker.

The sight of San’s back makes your hackles rise. He just gets to walk away, after all that?

“H-hey, wait a second. We’re not done here,” you exclaim, stepping forward. You weren’t satisfied with a simple ‘ok’ after all that.

But as soon as you’re close enough Hightower reaches out and grabs your elbow. You felt his fingers dig and you’re jerked back. Glancing over your shoulder you can see his eyes from behind
the glasses, peering back at you with a hard look—a look that you’ve been bucking for years.

“Where do you think you’re going with your health so low?”

“Let go of me, old man.”

You shook hard and he let go of your elbow, but it’s not by choice. You catch the grimace on his face and it makes your heart throb a bit with vindictive pride. His days of holding you back are over.

When you turn back you see the look on San’s face for only an instant before he’s gone. With a simple shortcut he’s gone, leaving you with an impression and too many questions.

“Uck”

“SevenA.”

You turned back but didn’t let Hightower reach for you again. He didn’t move, already knowing which one of you was the stronger force.

“You’re in no state to stand in front of the others. Go sleep it off.”

“You telling me what to do?”

“Don’t embarrass yourself. You’re one encounter away from dropping.”

It’s been years since he last saw you in action, but it’s not been long enough for either of you to forget.

Your voice comes out low, each word enunciated with purpose. “I’m only dropping if I want to.”

There was a comment on his tongue but he swallowed it back and held it behind his teeth. You watched Hightower study you for a moment more like one predator watching another.

“Then so be it. Do as you wish.”

Breaking off first, Hightower turned back around and headed off into the media room to see to all the red and yellow error messages left flashing.

With your soul burning inside your chest you ran down the end of the hall and turned sharply into the stairwell leading up to the tower’s uppermost levels. The elevators only went so far, but you knew the stairs would take you there, to where you needed to go.

The door to outside slammed open and you stumbled out onto the roof, feeling the sting of early morning wind on your face. It ripped your hair out of its curl and sent it dancing. It tasted sweet.

The morning was a blue so dark it was nearly black, but then the sky cracked open like the yoke of an egg and brilliant yellow light bled into the sky. Reds and yellows chased away the purple dawn as the sunrise turned blinding in the sky.

You felt the moisture on your face and taste the rock candy left in your mouth. The wind made your hair dance.

No one can hear you breath, no one can hear you inhale, no one can hear you think so far up in the
sky. Thirty stories up in the air, no one else was around you.

*One day humanity will need you to be its hero*.

*this is what they want you to do*

*a monster to attack and go all out against*.... *come on, be a hero.*

You grab the railing and pull yourself up, leaning over the edge as far as you dare. When you scream into the wind your voice is swallowed right up, but your souls still swells in a hurricane of emotions that leaves you laughing.

“I’m whatever the hell I want to be and I’m going to be good, goddamn it! I’m going to be good!”

---

Sans stalled in the hallway outside their rooms and Stretch froze the same way. The two of them looked like mirrored deer caught in the headlights of oncoming traffic. Sans was the one who moved first, since he had instigated the deer-stare off.

“hey.”

Stretch nodded back. “hey.”

The tone was painfully similar even if the voice was a little different.

Sans glanced to the dorm room doors where the rest of the monsters were staying while at the Embassy. If Stretch’s Blue was anything like Sans’ Papyrus it would be a safe guess to assume the energetic battery of vigor was recharging.

For a moment Sans wondered if Stretch read to his brother, or if it was the other way around. The pair of them were the opposite, with flipper personalities and powers, but not flipped ages. Blue was the older brother to Stretch just like how Sans was the older brother to Papyrus.

“you were missed,” Stretch said, sounding only mildly convincing. Sans doubted he cared.

Sans answered with a shrug first. “‘was busy.”

“huh.”

Stretch nodded and then turned away, heading towards his room. When he turned Sans could see the book tucked under his arm. It wasn’t a science text or book on theory. There was something cute and childlike on the cover that suited Stretch as much as a topcoat suited a watermelon.

A minute later and Sans heard the door click in to place behind Stretch. From inside Blue started to speak, sounding as energetic as ever.

Maybe Papyrus was still awake.

Sans found the door and tried for the handle. It wasn’t locked, which made Sans frown. He let himself in and paused only once he heard the snores from in the dark. He looked until he saw the longer bed in the back where his brother lay, tangled in his sheets and loudly sleeping.

On the bedside table his phone was plugged into the wall to charge, but every so often it lit up with an alert or notification. His brother was so cool. Of course he had a ton of fans and friends.
Sans closes the door behind him and locked it before taking a shortcut straight back to his bedroom. He wobbled a little and then fell backwards, lightheaded from the rush of magic while still burning fumes.

Absently he played with the drawstring to his hoodie while he waited for his head to settle. He had spent more of himself on flashy tricks and hadn’t realized how much that took out of him. It had been a long time since he last had to try.

He wondered if Stretch would have done any better if their roles had been swapped.

“…probably knot,” Sans muttered to himself while staring at the knot he had made at the end of his hoodie drawstring. He laughed to himself, but there was no one to hear it.

Whatever.

Tomorrow was a new day and he needed to sleep.

Sans tied another knot at the end of his other drawstring and compared it to the first string, then undid both of them before re-knotting them, one after the other.

He was tired.

Sans climbed onto the edge of his bed and turned around to toe of his slippers before reaching for his phone. Papyrus had uploaded another story Sans hadn’t seen. There were some other photos too.

He needed to sleep.

Sans played the movie, even as the lights in his room turned off from their timer and the clock ticked on. One minute turned into two, and one movie turned into three.

He really needed to sleep.

'Just one more photo set.'

_Nyahahah, look at this magnificent taco I got to eat today-what's that? You don't think it's a taco? Clever human, you are right. It is indeed no mere taco but in fact a legendary friendship taco! Behold the magnificence of the chocolate. Taste the friendship!_

Chapter End Notes

It's up! I had meant t publish this last night but didn't get home until waaaaay late, so I did it first thing this morning. Typically, I want to be publish weekly updates on Friday night/Saturday morning.

A Sans chapter. I'm curious who thinks his actions are justified and who thinks they aren't. You get a bit more insight into reader/MC too and what it would say if you checked their stats. The first draft didn't have San's reaction after the encounter but I thought it was important to show where he is coming from and what he is dealing with. He's been topside for over five years with his brother and they've changed a bit. (There is a reason one of the 'relationship' tags is GEN because these boys need to bond more.)
Hope you enjoyed!
Sans finally decided to join the others down in the parking garage ten minutes after the first announcement had gone out. Everyone else, including lazybones Papy-er Stretch, managed to make it to the parking garage within five minutes, but it was obvious Sans had meandered, considering his obvious love of shortcut magic.

Even Hightower and his assistant, the guy who never talked, (what was his name?) were downstairs and ready. The only one missing was….

“IS SHE COMING DOWN SOON?” Blueberry asked, as soon as Hightower finished with his customary morning greetings.

“Ah, SevenA will be joining us momentarily. She had an eventful early morning and a physician needed to sign her off,” Hightower replied in an off the cuff tone. His eyes were focused on the screen of his touch phone, idly scrolling with his thumb to read more of the virtual document. He glanced up to gauge Blue’s expression before adding, “It’s standard procedure for the humans, nothing to worry about.”

“IF YOU SAY SO.”

Hightower stepped away to make a call that removed him several paces from the group and the tour grade bus that had been repaired in time for the group’s use.

While it was oversized and cumbersome, the bus had won out over the smaller shuttle due to the nebulous time frame of their tasks. If it was a job assured to be over in a week, the van would be fine, but the timeline for tracking down renegade brothers from different universes as well as the human rift creator was indeterminate.

Papyrus was excited to share the tour bus with his new friends, recounting for each of them the other busses he had visited and used when on his goodwill tours or when he dropped in to see celebrities. The bus would have more than enough room for all five of them, plus the new brothers whenever they were picked up.

“….worried?”

Blueberry almost jumped at the sound of his brother’s voice, but merely flinched. “TH-THERE IS NOTHING I SHOULD BE WORRIED ABOUT. WE FINALLY HAVE OUR TRANSPORTATION. WHY DO YOU ASK IF I’M WORRIED?”

“…because I know you. it’s the girl from yesterday, yeah?”

“SH-SHE HAS A NAME,” Blue stuttered, turning a light shade of blue under his eye sockets thanks to the slip on his magic. He was flustered and even people who weren’t his brother could tell probably. “BUT I-I’M NOT WORRIED JUST…I DON’T KNOW WHY BUT I FEEL NERVOUS. NO I’M ANXIOUS! I’M JUST ANXIOUS TO GET THIS TRIP STARTED…WITH HER. SPECIFICALLY WITH HER I THINK AND-OH, UH, PLEASE DON’T LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT, PAPS. I DON’T KNOW WHAT IT IS EITHER.”
“you don’t think I don’t recognize what’s going on here?”

“OF COURSE YOU DO, I JUST TOLD YOU I WAS ANXIOUS TO GET STARTED.”

Stretch tilted his head at an angle and watched his brother openly, encouraging Blueberry’s blush to grow darker. “…if you say so.”

“I DO SAY SO. MWEH HEH HE.” It was a nervous laugh bit Pa- Stretch smiled easy and then reached into his pockets for a cigarette and lighter.

When Sans arrived he hung out for only a couple of minutes before ducking inside the bus to scope out the sleeping arrangements and claim one for himself. His HP was fine but his magic was lower than it normal was after a couple of shortcuts.

Papyrus’ voice was loud and booming as he climbed up the steps, boasting about his inside knowledge on the best bunks on a bus for monsters and humans. Stretch didn’t go far, but he rounded the back end of the bus to duck out of sight while he smoked, knowing that humans were still sensitive to things that monsters weren’t.

Blue shuffled from one foot to the next, waiting like it was the only thing left for him to do. He didn’t have friends like this world’s Papyrus or know people like this world’s Sans knew people. Stretch didn’t seem to mind the solitude and the humans who were managing their stay in this weird backwards world were…stiff and unapproachable. Blue might have been willing to extend his friendship to the both of them at first purely for the fact that they were doing so much for him and his brother, but Hightower and White…whatever his name was, the both of them were pretty closed off even by normal human standards. The people at the restaurants and museums were nice enough but… ah, it was starting to get lonely.

There was a sound from the elevator and then you were there, stepping out alongside another woman dressed in all white with the red cross patch on her shirt pocket. Blue noticed that second to the scowl on your face. You were listening to the nurse looking lady berate you on something.

Before he knew what he was doing Blue started to jog over to you, calling out your name. When you recognize him the scowl softens into an honest smile and it’s almost enough to make Blue trip.

In addition to that soft smile your hair was poofier, not as curled, and you were wearing aviators. Oh, and instead of the clothes from yesterday, well, maybe they were the same, Blue didn’t really remember that well, but instead of a jacket you had a big, soft looking, green sweater tucked into the front of your black jeans. It looked soft to the touch and that was really the only, ONLY, reason Blue was tempted to-to…to…???

“Good morning Blueberry.” You pushed up your shades and Blue saw the way the corners of your eyes creased the go along with your smile. A perfect match.

“GOOD MORNING TO YOU TO. DID YOU HAVE A GOOD REST LAST NIGHT. HUMANS NEED PLENTY OF SLEEP, EVEN MORE SO THAN MONSTERS I’VE BEEN TOLD.”

“Oh yeah, I forgot you mentioned in your timeline there were no human visits in the underground. But yeah, I had a great sleep, a little cold, but good enough for me.”

The nurse beside you made a frustrated sound that only cause you to laugh and scratch at your cheek with your free hand. The other hand carried a small duffle.

“Falling asleep on the sky deck shouldn’t be considered a ‘good sleep,’” the nurse lady quipped.
“Thanks for that information, Julie. I’ll remember it for next time.”

When you glanced back over at the nurse she only huffed again and then trust out a paper bag, marked with messy black sharpie notes. “Don’t forget to take these until those bruises fade. Don’t skip meals.”

“You got it doc,” you sigh, taking the bag and nodding towards the bus. “I’m heading out now. You gonna give me a clean bill of health or not?”

“I can’t hold you back-”

“Great!” you interrupt, smiling and reaching to throw an arm around Blueberry’s shoulders. “I’m checking out with my friend then, bye!”

He can feel the texture of your sweater right away and it was, really, just as soft and warm as he thought. You’re not much taller than him, and that’s likely in part due to the heels on your boots, but he has a hard time looking up at your face, knowing you’re laughing so close to him.

“I slept great last night, no matter what she says, by the way. But what about you? You and your brother get settled alright?”

Blue can’t smell nearly as well as a human can, but thanks to magic he has that sense, if a bit muted, and the smoke and soap smell from your sweater is almost as comfortable as the touch.

“WE SLEPT GREAT, BUT THAT IS NOT NEW NEWS AS WE ALWAYS SLEEP GREAT. I AM MOST EXCITED TO SET OUT ON THIS ROAD TRIP ADVENTURE. I WAS ON THE INTERNET LAST NIGHT AND PA-EH STRETCH AND I FOUND SOME GAMES WE COULD TRY DEPENDING ON WHO DRIVES. HAVE YOU SEEN THE INSIDE OF A PARTY BUS BEFORE?”

You laugh again, and it’s so stinking cute, especially with the smile and matching eye crease that Blue just can’t get enough of. It’s almost enough to trip his heart into a friendly encounter, but one of the first things monsters who lived among humans had to learn was the importance of consent with encounters. Humans couldn’t trigger them without their own magic, and since monster are all made with magic, encounters were naturally just another part of their culture for all things ranging from fights to fl-fi-flirting . But consent was needed before an encounter and to ignore that is considered just straight up rude.

“Yeah, Blue, I’ve seen the inside of a party bus before, but it wasn’t anything to write home about. It was around New Years and my friends and I were all pretty sloshed. Fun times, but the hangover was not my favorite. Is it really a party bus or is it supposed to be a tour bus?”

“I…I DON’T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.”

“Tour busses are better for sleeping in and living while on the road. Party busses have st-” Your eyes go wide enough for him to catch the way you stop your own words and then self correct. “They have lots of open space to dance and party, but not sleep or relax.”

“I LIKE DANCING! CAN WE STILL DANCE ON A NORMAL TOUR BUS?”

“Yeah, you can probably dance wherever you want to, but yeah I’m sure there’s enough room to move a little bit.”

“You’re here.”
Blue and You look up like one to see Hightower walking over with his phone still in the air. Blue doesn’t miss the way your arm over his shoulders goes a little tense, like a bowstring being stretched and readied. But your face is smooth and natural, hiding your discomfort. Somehow knowing that you weren’t friends with Hightower made Blue feel better about not wanting to be friends with the human.

“Checking in for the morning I guess, boss man. You need me for anything else?”

“Considering you’ve managed to get the last of your affairs in order, the rest of your compatriots are ready to set out. Sans and Papyrus already know where they need to go first, but you’ll be taking point on guiding them with more specifics and details as they are made available,” Hightower said, pocketing his phone to give you his full attention.

To Blue it looked less like respect and more like caution, the way someone watched something dangerous but not volatile.

“I know that much.”

“Sans and Papyrus know this as well, but to remind you, when you encounter the subject Red and Edge you’ll have final call on integrating them to help with finding FourB or bringing them back here to debrief.”

You whistle low and tilt your chin up. “You trusting me with that call?”

“If you make the wrong one the onboard computer system can alert us in case of emergencies. We don’t need daily updates but once a week, minimum, we would appreciate the contact as well as any updates on the situation regarding other potential versions of the brothers.”

“Yeah, I’m sure. If that’s all, we can head out.” You tug and Blue follows without encouragement, happy to still be in contact.

From the back of the bus Stretch emerged, dropping the burned down but of his cigarette onto the concrete. You watched him grind it with his heel before slipping your arm off Blue and gesture to the stairs leading up. Blue is proud about how he keeps his complains to himself once he feels the loss of your contact.

“You first.”

Blue glanced back at his brother, dragging his heels like a lazybones and huffed. It wouldn’t make any sense to wait up for Stretch and you were right behind him, so Blue pulled himself up via the railings and hopped up the last few steps.

“OH WOWZERS, THIS IS PRETTY NEAT. LOOK AT ALL THIS ROOM.” He turned back around to look down the stairs at you climbing up with Stretch bringing up the rear.

Sans was in the driver’s seat, but his heels were up on the dash and the chair was stretched out like a recliner. Papyrus looked up when he heard Blue and pulled open several cabinets around the kitchenette. There were a couple cake mix boxes left out on the counter next to the microwave.

“Looks like they don’t expect us to live off the fast food.”

“such a shame,” Stretch sighed, rubbing at his jaw. “I could go for some greasy fast food right about now. Surface food taste so much fresher, don’t think I’ll get tired of it.”

“WE WILL NEED TO RESTOCK SOMETIME SOON IF WE ALL PLAN ON EATING
“TOGETHER. THERE ISN’T A LOT OF FOOD PACKAGED AND READY FOR SO MANY PEOPLE.” Papyrus explained.

“Did you all eat?” you called out, looking around at everyone while the door shut behind Stretch who had finally climbed up the stairs.

The lights under the dash started to blink on their own and the wheel rotated the same moment the engine turned on. Sans blinked one eye open, watching the onboard AI computer Hightower had mentioned begin to take over. From the dashboard a small monitor popped up with a pre programmed GPS route, highlighted in red, leading out of the city New Ebott.

“There’s not a lot left for us to do it seems,” Stretch commented around a yawn.

The monitor blinked with a message: BEGIN TRIP? SELECT YES - NO

Stretch leaned over to touch the YES with his finger but glanced back over his shoulder at the rest of the cabin. “…this okay?” he asked, seemingly unsure.

You stepped up, placing one hand on the back of Stretch’s chair and nodded. “The sooner we get started the sooner we can take a break for burgers. There’s a couple of pretty good places along this route we can pause at.”

“IT WILL LET US PAUSE OR…OR CHANGE THE COURSE?” Blue asked, taking a side step closer to your side.

You leaned closer to the screen and push YES before Stretch and then the bus starts to rumble as the wheel turned on its own, pointing it out as it inched forward. While the bus moved on its own you clicked a few things and the brothers watched you select a few option. Whenever you made a course correction it would ask for a confirmation but nothing more.

“I’ll be able to edit our trip, yeah. But for now it’s locked in and I know even with the lighter morning traffic, it’ll be a couple hours before we’re out of the city, maybe more considering how big this thing is,” you say. “But aside from keeping an eye on the road for a good stop, I think we’re free to do as we please. Has anyone picked out their bunk?”

“…bunk?” Stretch dully echoed.

“IT IS WHAT I WAS TELLING YOU ABOUT, OTHER ME,” Papyrus exclaimed, jumping away from the cake mix and jogging down the center hallway before turning around and spreading his arms out, gesturing to the two rows of beds built into the walls. “BEHOLD THE ULTIMATE BONDING EXPERIENCE. THERE ARE SIX BEDS FOR EACH OF US, THREE ON THIS SIDE, THREE ON THAT SIDE. AND LOOK HOW THEY ARE MONSTER SIZED FOR EACH OF US.”

San’s loud snore punctuated the silence once Papyrus finished speaking.

“THAT BROTHER OF MINE!” Papyrus exclaimed, flushing lightly in embarrassment for his brother.

Stretch grinned, looking on the exchange fondly. It almost reminded Blue of something that might have happened between them, but with Stretch being the one that dozes off instead of Sans.

“Let him have his nap,” you interject in a neutral tone of voice less friendly than when you had been talking to them about the gps. “He sounds like he tired himself out last night.”
Sans’ snores went on uninterrupted.

Papyrus let out a forced breath and crossed his arms over his ribs, nodding thoughtfully. “BROTHER DID COME BACK TO HIS ROOM EARLIER THAN USUAL, THOUGH I NOTICED HIS MAGIC WAS ALMOST DEPLETED. MAYBE HE SPENT TOO MUCH OF IT RUNNING AROUND THE CITY AND TIRED HIMSELF OUT WITHOUT MEANING TO.”

“Taking shortcuts can tire your brother out that much?” you asked with an even flatter, dryer voice. It almost sounded disbelieving.

“MY BROTHER IS FAIRLY COMPETENT WHEN HE WANTS TO BE, BUT THAT IS UNUSUAL. WHEN HE IS AWAKE I CAN ASK HIM ABOUT IT, BUT YOU ARE RIGHT ABOUT LETTING HIM SLEEP. I WILL LET HIS LAZINESS SLIDE THIS ONCE.” Papyrus uncrossed his arms and dropped them to his sides as a new idea made him smile. “INSTEAD, WE SHOULD ALL TAKE THIS TIME TO FORMALLY EXCHANGE CONTACT INFORMATION, WHICH WE WERE NOT ABLE TO DO WITH YOU LAST NIGHT AFTER TACOS, Y/N.”

Blue yanked his phone out first, screen already at the NEW CONTACTS page with a blinking icon waiting for new information to be typed in. You smiled at Blue while Papyrus shuffled through his pockets looking for his own phone before coming over.

When you handed you phone back to Blue it was with a wink that made his fingers numb and clumsy around his phone. He knew his brother was watching but he didn’t care. He had to step aside so Papyrus could hand over his phone to you, but he stayed as close as possible, too sensitive to your scent and your soul’s vibrations to stray too far.

Last night, well before tacos, when he had found you in the hallway Blue had been surprised by your kindness and casual kindness, but more than that, the echo of your soul that met his was… nice. It wasn’t an encounter so he couldn’t tell, but it was almost like meeting another monster with magic that wore a lot of their personality on their sleeve. He had been able to pick up on a number of things, no doubt like his brother had. (Stretch was a notorious snoop when it came to new people.)

Nice.

He wished there was a better word for it and he blamed himself, not a good enough vocabulary. But Nice…nice…yeah. Just nice in spite of so much. You were sweet and easy going. You were generous and honest in wanting to help him with his silly little problem. And dang if you weren’t terribly cute for a human.

Blue remembered your arm on his shoulder, the warmth and the scent, and he felt his soul throb a little faster. **Really** cute!

It was such a nice feeling and he didn’t have many friends in this new surface world, but he knew he had wanted to make you one of them as soon as possible. Taking with you over tacos had been his favorite activity since surfacing in this dimension. He hadn’t wanted it to end.

Something in his hands shook and he glanced down to see a new text message under his notifications highlighted in blue. He clicked and it unfolded open with a small **pip** sound.

You: Glad to get connected ;)

He blinked and then looked up, knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that there was color on his
You were looking over at him and winked once more before dropping your phone into your pocket.

“Stretch, I don’t have your number yet,” you say, looking away. By the time Stretch gets his phone out and turns it on Blueberry thinks his face is back to normal and almost everyone is connected. You didn’t ask Sans for his information, but since he was asleep that wasn’t surprising.

“So, now that we’re mostly connected, you guys up for a team meeting?” you ask. Your thumbs were hooked into the belt loops of your jeans.

“TEAM MEETING, LIKE WITH SUPERHEROES OR-OR A SPACE STATION CREW?” Papyrus exclaimed.

“Well, we are sorta a team, aren’t we?”

“WITH A TEAM NAME?” Blue asked.

“I mean, we can bring that up and decide on it later, but…we can just be a team without a name for now if you don’t mind. Seeing as how we don’t have to worry about driving, there’s nothing to stop us from getting some things out in the open.”

“SHOULDN’T WE WAIT UNTIL SANS IS AWAKE TO INCLUDE HIM?” Papyrus asked.

You shrugged. “If you wanna do that it’s fine, but we already had a chat about it last night and I mostly just wanted to catch the rest of you up to speed.”

You…and Sans had a chat last night? What had you talked about. When had that been? Was he there in the media room when you got that call? Did Sans send out that request or was he just there by chance?

“IF WE NEED TO WE CAN JUST REPEAT IT FOR SANS LATER. I SAY WE HAVE THE MEETING. AND LOOK, THERE IS EVEN A TABLE NEXT TO THIS COUCH FOR US TO USE FOR IMPORTANT BUSINESS MEETING TALKS!”

If Blue sounds nervous its only a coincidence.

Papyrus glances back at his brother, asleep at the wheel and then slowly nods. “IF YOU SAY SO. I AM, AFTER ALL, AN EXCELLENT NOTE TAKER AND THE PERFECT PERSON TO CATCH MY BROTHER UP SHOULD HE MISS ANYTHING. YOU CAN COUNT ON THE GREAT PAPYRUS FOR THAT!”

That somehow makes you laugh even though it wasn’t even that funny. He didn’t even strike a complimentary pose, just puffed his chest out a little. Lazy styling if ever Blue saw it.

“Stretch?” you asked.

You looked back over your shoulder before heading towards the table Papyrus was already seated at. He got up and followed you and Blue to the table, squeezing in next to Papyrus so the two tallest skeletons were against the window wall.

“PERFECT FOR A MEETING,” Papyrus laughed, tapping his hands against the side of the table. “WHEN DO WE BEGIN?”

“I guess we can start now,” you say with another easy smile. You reached up to remove your sunglasses and fold them over the collar of your sweater. “Let me first just start with asking you
guys about what you already know about the Embassy, specifically what it used to be before the peace treaty with the monsters and humans.”

Blue and Stretch shared a look. Neither of them knew anything beyond what they had been told that first week, about it being a place that helped monster integrate into human society.

“WASN’T IT …USED TO HELP HUMANS FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD INTEGRATE TO LOCAL SOCIETY? THERE ARE OTHER EMBASSIES IN OTHER COUNTRIES AS WELL THAT STILL DO THAT.”

“Yeah, and that was a really convenient cover, but I guess Sans was the only one who had access to those old documents because of his position. Um, so yeah, a long time ago, before the barrier came down you might have heard that humans didn’t know monsters were even real.”

Blueberry shared another look with his brother, nodding along. He felt a little left out of the loop seeing the easy way Papyrus nodded along, understanding better than the two of them.

“Yeah, that was true for almost everyone but not exactly. Hightower ran a project that was basically a domestic defense against sub terrestrials, or a…a project to help defend against another monster war or invasion.”

Papyrus snapped his finger and gasped. “I HEARD RUMORS ABOUT THAT, AND IT WOULD MAKE SENSE. YOUR ANCESTORS WERE AT WAR WITH THE MONSTERS. I ALWAYS THOUGHT IT WAS ODD HOW FAST YOU FORGOT AND FORGAVE. SANS WOULD BE THE ONE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THIS SIDE OF THINGS, LAZY AS HE IS.”

“…what does that have to do with you, or were you really a part of the defense squad back then?” Stretch asked.

You wince. “Yeah, that was me. I, along with several other children, were raised and trained for the possibility of another monster invasion. We were supposed to be the first line of defense or something like that.”

“you look a little ashamed of that,” Stretch said. “but you were just doing what you thought was right to protect people, wen’t you?”

Blue watched as the tense line of your shoulders lowered, easing up.

“You’re not mad or….or angry that this was a secret?”

“THE KING AND QUEEN, SEPARATED AS THEY MAY BE, BOTH HAVE PLENTY OF THEIR OWN SECRETS THAT THEY KEEP FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR PEOPLE’S SAFETY, I’M SURE,” Papyrus said. “A HUMAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE NO DIFFERENT. I CAN TELL YOU’RE NOT A BAD PERSON WHO WANTS TO HURT MONSTER.”

You almost slipped in your seat, dropping your hands onto the table top and leaning low over it, a shocked expression pulled at your face. “Wh-what? That’s it? Just like that?”

“IT ALSO MAKES SENSE WHY YOU WOULD BE ADDED TO THIS JOB IF YOU WERE TRAINED TO DEFEND AGAINST THE MONSTER KIND. BLUE AND STRETCH ARE EXCELLENT FRIENDS, BUT I DON’T KNOW ABOUT THIS EDGE OR RED GUY. THEY COULD BE DANGEROUS. I’M GLAD YOU ARE ON MY SIDE.”

“…yeah, can’t say I understand everything about this world, but that sounds about right. You don’t hate monsters or anything, do you?”
“No!” you say before anyone could worry. “Of course not.”

Stretch shrugged. “then its all fine, isn’t it?”

“You’re really just okay with hearing that? You trust that easily?”

“OF COURSE WE DO,” Blue exclaimed, nearly standing on his seat as he pushed up on the table. “WE SHARED FRIENDSHIP TACOS AND YOU HELPED ME FIND CANDY FOR MY BROTHER. YOU’RE NOT A BAD PERSON AND I TRUST YOU 100%.”

You glanced between the three of them, reading one expression after another, seemingly unnerved by the honesty and confession. You had been braced for less pleasant news, but that didn’t make sense to Blue. Who would be stupid enough to miss how good your soul was? That person would have to be blind or paranoid.

“…was that it?” Stretch asked after another moment of silence.

“I mean…uh, mostly, yeah. That was the main thing, but let me finish real quick. Uh, um…yeah, hang on. There’s something else. I’m not like you guys exactly, but the kids who got labels from Hightower, FourB, SevenA, it meant that we would use magic, not to the extent that you monsters can, but we can tap into it.”

“YOU CAN USE MAGIC?!” Blue exclaimed, lighting up in delight.

You turned his way and managed a weak smile. “It’s how I know where to go to find the other Sans and Papyrus as well as anyone else I’ve met before. But there are some limitations, like I can’t use shortcut magic, since my body isn’t made from magic like yours. I can’t trigger an encounter either, but I’ve been in a few before, none of them more serious than just the friendly type.”

You frowned and glanced back at Sans but Blue was distracted with the idea that maybe…you wouldn’t be opposed to a friendly encounter with him sometime later. You were friends so you could ask later.

“…you willing to answer some other questions we might have about you or that place, later on?” Stretch asked. He covered his mouth to yawn and nodded.

“Of course. I’m not opposed to that.”

“then I’m going to join the lazy guy up there for a nap and I guess we can talk later.”

Blue huffed. “BROTHER YOU HAD PLENTY OF SLEEP LAST NIGHT. I SWEAR YOU ARE SUCH A LA-AH, UH…UHHHH…..” Blueberry’s face colored with magic and he could feel the sweat droplets as he caught himself. He glanced your way while Stretch and Papyrus watched on.

You raised a single brow, seemingly unaware by his almost slip up.

“A lazy bones?” you supplied, voice level.

Blue blushed and he saw his brother color as well. Papyrus chuckled and looked away, finding the curtains fascinating while you just blinked, expression unaware.

“Ah…maybe….um, maybe not say that to a skeleton,” Stretch chuckled, rubbing at the back of his head.
“Oh shoot, sorry. Was that rude?” you asked, sounding worried.

“not rude exactly,” Stretch explained.

Papyrus shuffled closer and whispered loud enough to hear in your ear, ‘it’s sometimes considered lewd to say.”

But your face didn’t flush. You just nodded once and apologized before sliding out, letting Blue and Papyrus get out themselves.

Stretch hung around a moment longer while Blueberry and Papyrus decided to explore the video games that were set up in front of the master bed in the back. Blue turned to you and tugged at your wrist, inviting you along and you obediently follow.

It was hours later when you emerged again, leaving the pair of loud skeletons to their own devices on the excuse that you needed to use the bathroom. So wrapped up in his game Blue never noticed how long you stayed gone, or how after the bathroom you drifted up to the front of the bus to watch Stretch play Tetris on his phone.

“So….sorry about what I said earlier, didn’t know that was actually a thing.”

“oh, it’s not, not really.”

“Oh-what?” Your voice was a little tight at being seemingly tricked and it was enough to make Stretch chuckle. “Then why did Papyrus say that to me then? Everyone else got flustered at it.”

“well it’s not exactly a lie. It is end, but not on its own.” Stretched leaned up over the seat and met your eyes unflinchingly. “it’s only lewd when you say it.”

“Oh, why is that?”

“cause you’re you, and a, uh… you .”

You blink once and don’t move for a minute more before leaning over, closer so that there was no way for Stretch to miss the direction of your stare. You held his gaze a moment longer before speaking.

“La-zy bones.”

Chapter End Notes

The boys have a bunch of bone related nicknames and insults for each other, but once a cutie starts using those names it turns lewd. And honestly, HONESTLY, if you knew that flustered them, wouldn't you want to rattle their bones a bit more? be honest.

And for real, writing a chapter from Blue's POV is just the most fun, he's such a sweetheart and I love him to the moon and back. He's (gonna be) a good datemate. I'm not saying I have a favorite so far...

Hope you enjoyed the chapter! (For the month of October I'll be rolling along with the biweekly updates...as in two updates every week.)
You don’t remember napping, but you wake up on the bed behind Blueberry and Papyrus playing their video game, so you doubt you were asleep for long. The time on your phone confirms it. You get up again and stretch, sliding off the edge of the bed.

At the sound, Blueberry lets his character die so he can turn around and face you. “ARE YOU HUNGRY?” he asked.

“Famished,” you admitted ahead of another yawn. “I could go for something greasy right now. Are the others ready for lunch-er, I mean dinner? It’s still a little early but by the time we find a place to stop and order it should be fine.”

“IF FOR NO OTHER REASON I SHOULD LIKE TO STOP AND STRETCH MY LEGS A BIT. I THINK THE OTHERS WOULD APPRECIATE THE DETOR AS WELL. WE’VE MADE GOOD TIME ACCORDING TO THE GPS,” Papyrus added, properly pausing the video game instead of letting his character perish.

You stood and rubbed at your stomach through your sweater, feeling the familiar burn of hunger. Thanks to your nap you had missed lunch, but if the instant macaroni smell was anything to go by, it seems several of the brothers had fed themselves.

When you stepped into the hallway you could see straight up to the front where the driver’s seat was empty. Stretch was still playing a game in the passenger’s seat but Sans was missing.

There weren’t a ton of places on the bus for him to hide, but the bathroom was empty and so were all the beds. There were steps up to the roof and the hatch was left cracked partway. You could smell the wind as your bus rolled on down the winding road off the mountain city.

You updated the GPS, inputting your destination for a grease trap burger joint and found something that suited your tastes. It updated your projected arrival time, setting it back an hour, but you didn’t plan on staying that long.

Beside you, Stretched watched you make the changes and caught your frowning. “I think it’s fine if we stay late. There’s no rush.”

You glanced his way and there’s a subtle, almost unnoticeable stiffening to his shoulders as he remembers, no doubt, the last thing you said to him when you were by his chair. It’s enough to make you smirk and that set off another blush he hides by looking away. When Blueberry blushes the color is a light blue, but Stretch’s color is closer to yellow or orange if he’s blushing really hard.

“Oh,” you hummed, enjoying the way he watched you wearily. It was cute.

"Are all humans so brazen or just you?” he huffed, chancing another glance over his shoulder. “tibia honest I feel like you’re just being mean but that’s okay, it takes a lot more than that to get under my skin.”

“Don’t.”
“what? don’t tell me you can’t stomach a few jokes.” His grin smacked of sweet revenge. “you were the one who had a bone to pick with me first.”

“You’re not funny.”

“no, just humorous.”

You groaned loudly, hating how easy it was for the puns to just roll off the preverbal tongue for Stretch. They were just so bad and you, you…didn’t want to laugh. They were bad! They really were.

“and here i was thinking i’d be the one cracking up. didn’t mean to rattle your bones, sweetheart.”

“Stop!” you gasped, your face red no doubt. There was a laugh somewhere that wanted to be released, but you trapped it behind an angry expression. It only served to make Stretch’s smile grow. “You’re terrible. The worst.”

Stretch leaned closer to you and it seemed like he might be in a bit more forgiving move so you didn’t pull away. “you know what’s even better than a good pun?” he asked.

“I don’t think I want to know.”

His grin was downright mischievous. “It’s watching someone get upset and bluster out loud. you remember how Blue got last night? couldn’t ask for a better reaction.”

And wasn’t that just what you gave him?

“…Horrible. Utterly horrible,” you huffed, leaning back away and turning back towards the ladder leading to the roof. Behind you Stretch set down his phone and stood.

“I think the original is up there,” he called out to you.

“Good, I’ve been meaning to chew his ear off for something.”

“he don’t have ears, honey.”

When you flipped Stretch off over your shoulder it only made him laugh louder.

The stairs up to the roof are easy enough to scramble up. The hatch was left open ajar but still required a strong arm to push open the rest of the way. The hatch cuts into the wind draft and you’re reminded of the dawn on top of the Embassy building. Like before your hair is pulled apart and left a mess.

Whatever.

You saw Sans before you were even up, seemingly passed out with one arm over his eyes. It’s not enough to fool you. His magic is spilling and cautious around him like a nervous aura. He had been given plenty of time to think about what he wanted to say to you. This encounter was past due.

“I know you’re not sleeping.” You climbed the rest of the way up but don’t stand. Instead you get on your knees and crawl over until you’re close enough to swat at his skull. “Come on.”

Sans lifts one arm up over his eye sockets and you see the blue light before his arm drops again. “…i can hear ya just fine like this,” he grumbled. With the wind it was almost too soft for you to pick up.
With a scowl you reach for his jacket and yank hard enough for the rest of him to follow. You pulled him up in spite of his protests and turned him around before pushing him back. He catches himself on the heels of his hands and braces against the roof, watching you wearily.

“I’m not pulling you into a stupid encounter or anything,” you admit with a huff. “Don’t look so constipated.”

“…humans shouldn’t be able to initiate encounters.”

“I can hit you just fine without the formal ceremony, Sans, don’t try your luck.”

There’s color on his skull face blooming like blood under skin but it doesn’t match his blank expression. He’s not flustered but maybe you managed to embarrass him at least.

“what are you doing up here then?”

“We’re going to have a talk about what went down last night, if that wasn’t obvious.”

He blinked and the gesture seemed owlish with his purposefully neutral face. “i….don’t have anything to say.”

“Not even an apology you smug bastard?” you scoffed.

“Sorry.”

You bite back the worse of your frustrations. “That’s really it? Just a simple sorry and you think that’s it? Good lord no wonder you don’t have any human friends.”

He tried to level an unimpressed look in your direction but couldn’t meet your eyes for longer than two seconds without having to look away. “i have plenty of human friends.”

“Not enough, by the sounds of it. Aside from the obvious, who is in high school and busy as a bee, who else are you close with that isn’t a monster?”

It’s something to think about but he doesn’t dwell on it. “is that what we’re going to do up here then, just talk about me and my life choices or is there actually a point to this?”

“No, you’re right, lets go back to your attempts to dust me in a media room last night. I’m still somewhat sore about that, after all.”

As if to emphasize your point you pushed up the oversized sleeve of your sweater far enough for him to see the purple and blue bruises blooming up and down your forearm; all the evidence from when he had reversed gravity during the fight.

You didn’t expect to hear his chuckle.

“Not funny,” you snapped.

“it was a pun and you didn’t even notice it. good one.”

“No, that was a fact and what you’re doing is deflecting. You were seriously trying to kill me there at one point.” You drop your sleeve.

“and you’re going to blame me for that even though I told you why I was doing it?”

“You thought I was some secret sleeper agent that was going to dust you and your brother in your
sleep, but you checked me, I know you did. You saw my soul and everything.”

“and I let up, didn’t I? are we done now? that’s all there is to it.”

“Look, I’m not going to fixate on the whole tying to kill me bit because, honestly, that’s secondary to the goading.”

“that’s just battle banter, monsters say that sort of stuff all the time during an encounter, it’s traditional.”

a monster to attack and go all out against.... come on, be a hero.

The memory of his words made your gut roll again. It was too personal to let go of, and even with the shallow sleeps stolen in between waking hours, the words from that fight still echoed in your heart. They had come from Sans but they felt like something you innermost demons would taunt you with.

It hadn’t been an easy thing to get over. You had been in and out of therapy for years thanks to a lot of the trauma you tried to pack up and forget. Chief among those issues was your struggle with identity in the wake of the peace….a peace you hadn’t helped with. A peace that your very existence jeopardized.

There were others who took it worse, a lot worse.

Out of the twenty eight of you who made the cut, over nine of them had-

You inhaled sharply and fumble with the pockets of your pants for something. There’s no rock candy but you had a bag of sour patch kid gummies to tear into and start munching. As the sour sugar flavor spread through your mouth you’re equipped with an artificial clarity, the kind that the presence of magic was suppose to bring. There was no magic apart from Sans’ and he wasn’t exactly letting it roll in light of last night’s activities. You know better, but your body doesn’t and it’s been broken and remade too many times to fix without a bit of cheating.

The dark thoughts cleared.

For the moment.

“...you good?”

“Of course,” you scoffed, recovering like the panic attack wasn’t weird. “I was hungry.”

“...sure.” He didn’t sound like he believed you but he wasn’t going to press the issue.

You swallowed and threw a couple more candies into your mouth to suck clean. “You said something about being a hero. Do you remember that? You wanted me to hit you and you were giving me a reason for it.”

“like i said, it’s just battle banter.”

“Yeah, but your battle banter was real specific. You knew what would have the best shot of triggering me or tricking me into going apeshit on your sorry ass.”

“skeletons don’t have an ass.”
“No, you just are an ass,” you scoffed, stuffing the empty candy packaging back into your pockets. “Don’t be purposefully obtuse. You wanted me to hurt you.”

“nah, just wanted you to try.”

“Look buddy, I’ve been around enough depressed assholes to recognize a death wish when I see one.” Sans opened his mouth to refute you, maybe even with a joke, but you rushed to cover his words with yours. “You’re not that stupid, so don’t go off on me with anymore of your lies, bonehead. You knew what I was, even if I wasn’t an active agent. If a ten year old was able to do all that on their own in the underground, what do you think someone twice that old with a lifetime of experience and magic could do?”

The question hung out in the open between the two of you. The wind was still whipping your hair up and around, even as the bus started to turn off the highway, taking an exit towards the burger joint you had selected earlier.

Sans watched you and, to his credit, he didn’t shortcut out soon as it got hard. He didn’t look away either. You got the impression that maybe he had never considered the fact that what he had done really was suicidal…and not because he wasn’t a smart guy. It was something you had seen more than once.

When the barrier went down what happened to the monsters who built their whole life’s purpose around an ideal or job that was now….useless?

It would have been easier to hate him and see him as a villain, but just like Sans had looked into your soul and checked you out, you had done the same. And as much as you wanted to paint him the villain, you knew better.

Poor guy was more of a mess than even he knew.

Finally Sans said something.

“heh, you wouldn’t have dusted me, and if on the off chance you actually had, then the others would have discovered it and known what to do.”

“And you were willing to risk your life on that, weren’t you?”

He watched you, eye lights steady and unwavering. He wasn’t going to agree with you but he also wasn’t about to lie to you and refute it. His shoulders dropped and he leaned back on his hands even more, staring up at the open sky as the bus drove on.

“so, what about it, what ‘cha gonna do about it?” he asked.

Good question.

What did you want to do about it? You were still upset about the whole encounter, but…like the way a mother was upset about a child’s temper tantrum. Sans wasn’t a child. Whatever he was, he was still an adult and his actions had consequences that impacted you and others like you.

You weren’t ready to just…Forgive and forget, but you didn’t feel like holding a self righteous grudge for the heck of it. You were never going to be the person that set herself on fire just to keep someone else warm again, but you couldn’t ignore someone hurting if there was something you could do to help.

“Well, are you going to attack me in my sleep or pick a fight with me when you feel like it?” you
asked after enough time had passed.

His shoulders hiked and then dropped in a stilted sort of shrug. “hah, too much trouble. you don’t have to worry about me like this, i know where we stand.”

“I guess that’s a good place to start,” you sighed.

Glancing over the side of the bus you could see the colored roof tiles of the grease trap you were heading towards. The bus was slowing down and moving into the turning lane to the parking lot already.

“…a good place to start for what?” Sans asked.

Even with the turning, the bus was going slow enough for you to stand up on your own and not fall over. You leaned forward and offered Sans your hand to help him stand but he just stared at it, even as the bus went still and parked.

“Come one, it’s just a hand. I’m not saying we have to be best friends or bosom buddies, but at least for as long as we’re on this trip, wouldn’t you want to try making a new friend?”

“…you want to be my friend.”

You pulled your hand back a bit. “I want to try. I’m not gonna promise you anything, ‘cause like with any decent friendship, it should be something built mutually. If you want a friendship, then sure, I’m willing to try. But I’m not going to get butt-hurt if you say no.”

“Oh, well I only assumed you couldn’t get butt-hurt when working with a bone-afide ass, or was it the other way around?”

Sans reached for your hand the same moment you let out a frustrated groan. “I swear, if you’re going to be like this I’m ordering you a salad, stars help me.”

“Didn’t Stretch already warn you?” Sans asked, standing and lumbering around you to the edge of the bus and staring down. When he glanced back he wiggle his shoulders. “I’m just tryin ta rattle ya bones a bit, don’t get so cracked up over it.”

The he was gone with a shortcut. You jogged to the side of the bus and glared down over the side to see Sans smiling innocently up and waving.

“Stretch already used that joke!” you shouted down at him.

“It was my joke first. If you don’t wanna ketchup, you better scramble.”

Then he winked out of existence with another shortcut, likely taking him all the way into the burger joint, leaving you to scramble down the stairs the long way.

“Stupid numbskull throwing in an egg joke at a burger joint. Stupid, stupid…”

Downstairs the rest of the skeletons had elected to wait for you, (or they were either too lazy or too kind to leave without you). It sounded like they were eager to get out and stretch their legs almost more than eat. When you asked about ordering take out to get moving faster Stretch answered you.

“lets just enjoy the change of scenery.”

So that’s how you ended up at a table with four different skeletons and eight orders of burger or hotdog combo meals and just as many sides. The skeletons could eat almost as much as you and
that wasn’t news, considering what you knew about some monsters, but it was still impressive to witness.

At least with food in their mouths they didn’t pun as much.

“Hey, stretch, what do you call a cow with no legs?”

“SANS!”

“Ground beef.”

While Papyrus whiled in the background Stretched just picked up his hotdog and tisked loudly. “Really, I don’t relish having to do this with you.”

“PAPPY, NO,” Blueberry whined.

“but it’s no big dill, is it?” sans asked. As if to drive his point home he grabbed at the dill pickle with his teeth and swallowed it whole.

“soda you think you won?” Stretch scoffed before taking a drink while still holding up his hotdog.

“You’re the wurst,” you sigh, only to send both Blueberry and Papyrus off while Sans and Stretched just laughed at your accidental punning. Or maybe it was the look of horror on your face that made them both so elated.

Stupid puns!

Stupid!

As you were the one with the company card you stayed behind to pay the bill while the others went on ahead. Surprisingly, it was Stretch who insisted on hanging back and sticking close while you squared away the bill with a heavy tip that would come out of the Embassy’s pocket. It made you feel a little vindictive to know you were using their money after years of ‘frugal’ living.

“all good?” Stretch asked when you finished at the counter.

“Probably,” you answered easily, watching as he pulled the wrapper off a sucker that looked like the ones they offered to children at the hostess counter. “You got the short stick or something?”

“what?” he looked dup, eye sockets wide with curiosity.

“You’re hanging back, I just thought that meant you got the short stick or something.”

He chuckled like what you had said was something funny. “nah, nothing like that, just figured you wouldn’t mind the company.”

“Suuuuur.” Your voice came out in a lazy drawl. “And what was it you wanted out of the company?”

“why ya gotta think i want something?”

“Cause you’re not denying it.”
Stretch shrugged. “Not a fan of lying.”

He held the large, glass door open for you and you ducked under his arm to make it outside. Across the parking lot at the far end where all the spaces were empty, the bus sat parked and you could see the last of the boys climbing aboard. It seemed like Blue was the last one to make it on, and he glanced back once your way before hopping on.

“You could of fooled me. You seemed too easy going to be bad at lying.”

“i said i didn’t like it, never mentioned being bad at it honey.”

You whistled low and teasing, stuffing your hands into the back pockets of your pants as you walked side by side with the slower skeleton. Stretch seemed to be taking him time in crossing the parking lot.

“I’ll have to watch myself around you in the future.”

“doubtful.”

You’re not sure what he means by that so you just show Stretch a look that causes him to chuckle.

“don’t sweat it, sweets, its just…i ain’t planning on putting you through your paces or anything. i’ve got more sense than that.”

You almost missed a step but caught yourself before Stretch could notice. Did he know about Sans? Did he suspect? Were you reading too much into it? Stretch was the alternate universe’s version of Sans, with the same lazy disposition and easy going outward appearance. You hadn’t see it for yourself, but you were willing to bet that Stretch’s powers looked a lot more like Sans’ too.

With your luck they shared the same tight paranoia, too.

“Please don’t put me through any of my paces. I’m all paced out.”

“well if you ask so nicely, i guess i got no choice.”

Stretch slowed down just outside the door to the bus. Inside you could hear Blue and Papyrus cheering about something together. The two of them got along like a house on fire at least.

You reached for the door handle and tugged but paused before heading inside. Stretch stood watching you with the lights from his eye sockets burning dimly in the evening gloom of a rapidly dimming twilight. For a heartbeat in time you thought he might attack you like Sans had, but then the fear spills out of you, replaced with something else. Stretch’s stare means something, you just can’t figure out what.

“You look like you’re thinking about something,” you said, hoping it was a vague enough comment to spark a conversation. You didn’t want to be wary of him. If that-

“-you don’t have ta be scared of me and my bro no more.” His words cut off your thoughts.

“Why would I be scared?” wondering if he could read minds as one of his powers.

“cause anyone should of been. we can be scary pals, but not to our friends.” Stretch’s smile curved and the stick of his sucker bobbed in between this teeth. “i mean, you’re pretty scary too, but not anymore and not ‘ta me.”

Stretch moved past you, opening the door and climbing up the stairs first. He paused at the top and
You hesitated for only a split second before grabbing the railing and pulling yourself up the stairs. “Sure thing.”

You woke with a twing in your back. When you shifted in the bed the shoot of pain jumped from one bruise to the next and you had to bite back the grunt of discomfort. The day after getting hit by a car was when it really started to bother a person, and Sans’ gravity attack was just as bad.

Outside the sky was dark and still, as regional laws prohibited AI drivers to operate after dark without someone behind the wheel you were grounded until dawn. You had found a nice place to pull off and park before claiming bunks and turning in for the night.

You shuffled out your phone and checked the time from behind the curtain that was supposed to be giving you privacy. It was nearly 5 in the morning, still too early for the others to be awake. Most of them would be too dead asleep to hear you if you decided to get up.

You were grateful for the ground level bunk that made it easy to roll out without too much noise. Now all you needed to do was find that medicine you had forgotten to take last night. Where had you put it again? It had been stored away along with your duffle in the closet….

You were able to find the paper bag with only a bit of muted searching. The bus is still and utterly silent, enough so that when you twist the cap off the medicine each crank of the lid sounded like the pop of a gunshot.

You manage to procure two salmon pink pills for yourself and swallowed them dry.

Stupid move.

You nearly choked and cursed yourself out in your head for being such an idiot. Taking meds dry sucked and you would probably never learn you lesson no matter how many times you suffered from your mistake. At some point you were supposed to learn, but that day wasn’t today.

You took a bottle of water off the counter and tip toed out past the beds and down the steps that led outside. The door rolled open without much of a sound, making it easier to slip away.

You had expected to be alone. You hadn’t counted the drawn curtains, and hadn’t noticed any empty bunks with rumpled sheets, but sure enough, Papyrus was standing outside by himself. By his feet was a taller water bottle and a towel draped over the cap. His phone was shut off and in the dirt next to his things.

“Oh,” you breathed, freezing like a deer in the headlights when he turned back to see you. In the dark of the early morning you could only barely make out the glow of his eye lights. “Shoot, Papyrus, I didn’t know you were out here already. I thought I was being sneaky. What are you doing out here anyway?”

“I ALSO THOUGHT I WAS BEING SNEAKY, BUT EVEN THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS MATCHED WITH A WORTHY RIVAL IN THINGS. YOU SEE, I WAS OUT HERE EARLY TO GET IN MY DAILY WORKOUT BEFORE BEING TRAPPED ON THE BUS AGAIN.”

“That sounds like a smart idea. A few days are fine on that thing, but I don’t know how I’m going to feel a week from now. We still have another half day of travel before we’re in the town where Red and Edge were last spotted. The traffic yesterday morning really set us back.”
“OH, DO YOU ALSO ENJOY A ROBUST MORNING ROUTINE?” he asked, addressing you with a gleam in his eye.

“I’ve slacked off a ton from how I used to be, but I still try and keep limber,” you chuckle. “I’m sure I’m nowhere near as impressive as you. A monster’s stamina is no joke.”

“YES, BUT WE MONSTERS ALSO HAVE OUR LIMITS AND WE SHOULD ALL STRIVE TO PUSH BEYOND THOSE LIMITS AND INCREASE OUR POTENTIAL TO ITS MAXIMUM. THAT IS WHY I RUN EVERY MORNING BEFORE THE SUNRISE AND PRACTICE LIKE I WOULD WHEN I STILL WANTED TO BE PART OF THE ROYAL GUARD.”

Papyrus then went on to explain exactly what his typical morning routine consisted of and how long it lasted for. He worked out for at least an hour, while some days he devoted three or four such hours to perfect his skull, or skill, with a spear or improve his aim with different projectiles. As an example he manifest a bone to throw before summoning one more to hurl at the first, striking it out of mid air. In response you clapped and listened to him describe the rest.

“Sounds intense, Papyrus. I don’t think I could keep up.”

“NYAH HA HA, NEVER FEAR MY HUMAN FRIEND. I PLAN ON INVITING YOU OUT ON A MUCH Milder ROUTINE THAT YOU ARE SURE TO BENEFIT FROM. PLEASE TELL ME YOU ARE UP FOR A SIMPLE JOG WITH STRETCHES.”

His sincerity spilled forth and it was enough to make you smile. Papyrus wasn’t the ambassador to human kind on behalf of all the monsters for nothing. Most of the monsters you met were friendly (Sans not included) but Papyrus was something else. It was almost ... overwhelming how nice he seemed. You could tell without even having to check that he was a good guy.

But old habits die hard, and you did end up checking him real fast. It’s not the same way monsters check others, but you can use your magic to give you a read on others. Most of them never noticed and the vibes you got weren’t anywhere near as clear as theirs, but it was the best you had.

There is an echo of kind and comforting words lined with truth, ‘you didn’t deserve that,’ and then the feeling of food in your belly. Papyrus oozed integrity more than anything, but it was an integrity driven by honor, duty, and kindness.

You pulled back before he could notice.

“Only if I get to stretch first, so I don’t accidentally pull a muscle or something while running,” you called out.

“OF COURSE, SAFETY IS A NUMBER ONE PRIORITY, FOLLOWED BY THE NUMBER TWO PRIORITY, WHICH IS TO HAVE FUN.”

You bend down and do a couple of toe touches before stretching back and pulling at a few more places to help you loosen up before a run.

“What about priority number three?” you asked.

“OBVIOUSLY TO IMPROVE YOURSELF. AFTER THAT THERE ARE NO MORE PRIORITIES, ONLY GUIDELINES.”

“So, you don’t mind if I join you?” you asked over your shoulder, arm extended as far as it would go.
"OF COURSE NOT, WHY WOULD I WHEN EVERYONE KNOWS THAT A JOG IS SO MUCH MORE ENJOYABLE WITH A FRIEND. LET US STRENGTHEN OUR BONDS AS WELL AS IMPROVE OUR BODIES. NYAH, HUH!"

And then Papyrus launched, taking off with an energy that made you tired just by watching. Man, years ago you would have been able to keep up no problem, but you really had let yourself go. Shoot. Maybe he won’t notice?

You scrambled to catch up and then match his pace, following the natural dip of a trail running along the side of the road. Right away you miss the absence of your music. Without the distraction you’re all too aware of every strain and burn in your body, as well as the pain from your healing injuries.

You realized very early on that Papyrus’ definition of a light workout was not what you would consider light…like….at all. There was no pacing himself. He would start off running and just….keep running. He didn’t slow down to jog, (though with his leg length that would still have meant you needed to run just to keep up,) he just….kept….going.

Monsters had limits just like humans. He would need to rest or take a break eventually. And he did….when the van was a near non existent blip in the distance over your shoulder. Nearly twenty minutes of straight running. That was fine. Just…fine.

“WHAT AN EXCELLENT WARM UP FOR THE MORNING!” Papyrus exclaimed, hands resting on his hips as he turned to face the direction you both had run up. “I WILL BE BETTER ABLE TO ENDURE THE REST OF THE TRIP TRAPPED INSIDE. HOW ABOUT YOURSELF?”

“Just…..fine….ah, ha, hahhh ;” you gasp, hands on your knees.

So much for being able to hide it.

It’s more the sound of your voice that seizes Papyrus’ attention and he falters, hands falling away as he shifts from one foot to the next, looking panicked. You heard him call out your name in alarm and looked up. “YOU ARE CHOKING ON YOUR OWN AIR.”

“I’m…. fine, Paps….” You forced a deep breath out and then in, standing straighter. “See, just a bit... out of shape. I’ve not run that far that long in a while. Sorry for startling you.”

“YOU…YOU WERE NOT USING MAGIC, WERE YOU?”

That was an odd sort of question. Yeah, Papyrus knew you were able to use magic, he had asked you so many questions about it during your ’SKELETON RANGERS STAR MEETING’ yesterday. You searched your brain for something that would help you understand what he was getting at with his question.

“What? No. What did you think I was supposed to use magic for?”

“TO TRAVERSE AT ACCELERATED SPEEDS OF COURSE. NOT ALL MONSTERS KNOW HOW TO DO IT, BUT THAT IS A PART OF TRAINING. WERE YOU…WERE YOU REALLY ONLY USING YOUR FLESH BODY TO RUN WITH?”

You almost snort at his use of ‘flesh body’ to describe yourself. Of course a skeleton would come up with that sort of nickname for it. “Yeah, Paps, I mean that’s what I normally use, unless someone lends me their scooter,” you joked.
You didn’t expect Papyrus’ whole expression to fall or for him to grab at his head in panic. “NO WONDER YOU LOOKED TO BE IN SUCH PAIN! THAT WAS TERRIBLY UNFAIR OF ME. I SHOULD HAVE…SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER. I ONLY THOUGHT…I-I THOUGHT THAT EARLIER YOU…” His face started to flush with color, darker than Stretch’s orange yellow blush, Papyrus colored a soft pink hue. “YOU BRUSHED ME WITH YOUR MAGIC AS MEANING…AH….”

Now it was your turn to flush.

Ugh, of course someone like Papyrus would notice that. He was a lot more in touch with his senses than the lizard man who ran a from-home appliance repair shop. Shoot, did Papyrus think you were rude? Would he be offended if you told him the truth? What if you admitted what you felt when you brushed up against him? You hadn’t meant anything bad by it, but that still wasn’t an excuse.

“So sorry,” you rushed to exclaim, feeling the heat on your face grow. “That was my fault. I hadn’t meant for you to—to feel that as something to interpret. I was being rude.”

“IT IS NOT RUDE TO RADIATE MAGICAL ENERGIES, UNLESS YOU DO IT LIKE MY BROTHER DOES AND ACT UNFRIENDLY ABOUT IT.”

“M-maybe for monsters I get how that would be a thing, but when I do it I…I use it to sort of feel the souls of people around me, not…not unlike when you monsters check someone during an encounter.”

You watch as Papyrus’ dark eye lights begin to wobble in his sockets. “YOU CAN DO THAT? YOU CAN SEE A PERSON’S SOUL OUTSIDE OF AN ENCOUNTER?”

“Not exactly. I haven’t been able to see a soul since I was a child, and none of the others at the Embassy could after they grew into teenagers, but I can feel the soul, like with a different sense.”

“How does that work?”

So you tell him.

You explain how each major heart or soul color feels to you, mentioning how it was different for the other kids who you grew up alongside. Red felt like a brick house in a thunderstorm, Orange was a roaring lion, Yellow was lighthouse, Green was a grass field filled with flowers and Cyan was a bed of soft pillows on a cold day, or a dog with long fur that curled up next to your side in love while Perseverance is the sting after a long run and the sight from the top of a mountain at sunrise you managed to climb in time.

“And blue is the hardest one for me to make sense out of, but, it feels like food that fills your stomach and someone telling me something true that I need to hear. But different blue colored souls all have slight differences in their feelings, like with yours.”

“MINE?”

Papyrus’ expression is dumbstruck but at least he wasn’t angry.

“Yeah, when I brushed my magic up against you earlier, when you thought I was indicating my intent to use it, I was…just…feeling your soul and it…felt like that.”

The dumbstruck look persists and it’s a moment more before Papyrus can force the words out. “BUT, MONSTERS DO NOT HAVE SOULS WITH COLOR.”
You try to ignore the heat on your face or how it makes the back of your neck itch. Papyrus isn’t angry at you, and that made you feel confident enough to try and explain away his confusion.

“Well, I couldn’t see a color to it, but it felt like a blue soul to me. I’ve heard that people claim monsters don’t have colors to their souls, but it’s just a little harder to feel them under all that magic. All humans have their magic stored up, locked inside their souls while monsters use it throughout their entire bodies. But, I don’t know anything for sure… it’s just my perspective.”

When Papyrus speaks again he sounds near breathless. “BUT…YOU COULD… FEEL MY SOUL, A…SOUL WITH A COLOR?”

“Yeah, it felt nice.”

The color spreads all across Papyrus’ face but whatever feeling that causes it isn’t something that flusters him. Instead there’s a soft sort of content happiness that makes your heart hurt in your chest. His eyes don’t fill with tears, but you almost suspect they’re close to it by the way his voice sounds when he speaks to you next.

“NICE? COULD YOU... TELL ME...WHAT IT FELT LIKE, IF THAT’S NOT TOO MUCH FOR YOU?”

It’s the softest you’ve ever heard him and it makes your heart pinch painfully in your chest.

“It’s a blue soul, it means integrity, right? Um, when I brushed up against you I felt like someone was telling me something I needed to hear and then I felt full, like the way you feel after going whole days without eating only to have the best meal in the world. It…I know it doesn’t make much sense because my sense is all messed up. More than anything I think I’m worst when it comes to blue souls cause that doesn’t really sound like integrity, does it?”

“It SOUNDS…GOOD.”

His voice is still soft and it still makes your heart hurt.

“Yeah, it’s one of my favorites. It makes me feel like I’ll be okay. A long time ago the person who helped me shape my sense of ‘integrity’ was someone who…fed me when I was starving and comforted me by saying things that were true, things I needed to hear.” To keep from crying you laughed and it came out sounding like a warble. “Another kid felt like he was surrounded by superheroes when he brushed up against a blue soul. It was different for each of us.”

“It’S A GOOD FEELING ISN’T IT, THEN?” Papyrus laughs. He straightened and then fisted his hands over his hips and you almost miss the moisture on his face. “AND IT IS A GOOD COLOR TO HAVE. I AM PROUD TO BE SOMEONE WHO COULD MAKE YOU HAPPY MERELY WITH THE PRESENCE OF MY SOUL.”

It made you laugh and that only encourages Papyrus’ smile all the more. You didn’t know how, but it stretches across his face and makes his eye lights dance.

“FEEL FREE TO COME TO ME IF EVER YOU WANT TO BE COMFORTED BY A BLUE SOUL. I WILL ALWAYS BE WILLING TO PROVIDE MY SERVICES FREE OF CHARGE ON BEHALF OF ALL MONSTER KIND AS ITS AMBASSADOR.”

“How about just on behalf of Papyrus being my friend?” you joked, nearly missing the way his blush nearly doubles.

Maybe it was a bit too forward of you. Papyrus really seemed proud of his position, but he was
more than just his job. You remember just the number of hours he put in as a media spokesperson during the first year. It hardly seemed like he had a free minute to himself. How often had he been able to get out and go on a run?

“THAT IS ALSO AN EXCELLENT SUGGESTION. YES, I, THE GREAT PAPYRUS, WOULD BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO PROVIDE YOU ANY BLUE COLORED COMFORT AS YOUR FRIEND. NYAH HA HA.”

“Yeah, right back at you buddy. If you need anything just give me a ring or a shout. What are friends for?”

Papyrus opened his mouth to respond but then the blush won out and he just dissolved into a jumble of ‘nyah’ type giggles you thought were utterly adorable. If you could do something to make him laugh like that again you wouldn’t mind putting in the extra effort. Even if that meant another twenty minute straight run, (please, stars no.)

“Should we get back soon? Dawn is just a few minutes away and I’m sure the others would appreciate it if we didn’t delay them from reaching our destination any longer than the traffic from yesterday already has.”

“YES, THAT SOUNDS LIKE THE BEST CHOICE TO MAKE, HOWEVER, MAYBE NOT AT THE PACE SET TO GET HERE. IF YOU LIKE WE COULD JUST…WALK BACK.” Papyrus rubbed the back of his skull. “YOU’RE NOT INJURED, ARE YOU?”

“Nah,” you answered without thinking of the bruises his brother left you with. “I’m good. I can even use my magic to run back with you if that’s what you want. I mean, honestly, I don’t know what I’m worse with, working out or using magic? I could stand to grow in both categories.”

There was a reason your rank was only seven out of eight, but hey, you liked naps. It was easy to let yourself go once you could. No one in their right mind would continue to put themselves through what the Embassy put you and the other kids through on a daily basis.

“THAT WOULD NOT STRAIN YOUR BODY?” Papyrus asked, worry evident in his tone and expression.

“I mean, it’s only a short distance. It should be fine, and I don’t…hate running real fast. It’s the afterburn I have trouble with.” You rubbed at the back of your neck and chanced a glance up into Papyrus’ eye lights before saying anything more. “But speaking of magic, I had one more question before we head back, um, since I already got a read on you, um….”

Why was it so hard to just make words in your mouth. When Papyrus turned the fullness of his attention towards you, shifting his body to point towards you, it just felt so much harder to make sentences out of words and words out of sounds.

“Did you want to check me, to-to make it fair??” you rushed.

“YOU MEAN AS IN A FRIENDLY ENCOUNTER?” Papyrus lights up at the suggestion. “YOU WOULD BE COMFORTABLE WITH IT?”

“Yeah, we’re friends like that and, um it would only be fair. I’d like you to if that doesn’t make you feel uncomfortable. So-so don’t feel like you need to. If not that’s cool to!”

Papyrus practically beams. “I WOULD LOVE TO. I HAVEN’T ENTERED AN ENCOUNTER WITH A HUMAN SINCE MY FRIEND FRISK, SO OF COURSE THIS WOULD NOT MAKE ME UNCOMFORTABLE! THANK YOU FOR SHARING YOUR VULNERABILITY WITH
“Since Frisk?” you echoed dully. “I’m the only other one?”

“MOST HUMANS ARE MORE RESERVED AND EVEN IF THEY ARE COMFORTABLE WITH IT. AS AMBASSADOR OF MONSTER KIND I NEED TO SET AN EXAMPLE AND PUT THE COMFORT AND CARE OF ALL HUMANKIND ABOVE MY OWN NEEDS. ONLY, A GREAT MONSTER SUCH AS MYSELF CAN HANDLE SUCH HIGH EXPECTATIONS, DON’T YOU AGREE?”

“Isn’t that sort of lonely?”

Papyrus almost faltered.

Almost.

“NO, NOT AT ALL. I STILL HAVE MY BROTHER AND FRISK AND MY FRIENDS FROM SNOWDEN AND MANY OTHER HUMAN FRIENDS. AN ENCOUNTER ISN’T NECESSARY TO BUILDING A FRIENDSHIP, THOUGH IT IS NICE.”

For as kind as Papyrus was, you could easily see him being the sort of person that never mentioned wanting anything if he so much as suspected it might be rude or intrusive. He was too much of a sweetheart for that.

“Well, I can’t initiate an encounter, but I’d be more than happy to participate in a friendly one. I don’t mind them at all.”

Papyrus beams openly at you, wringing his hands in nervous excitement before shifting the weight of his body from one foot to the other.

“ALRIGHT, IF YOU ARE READY, I WILL BEGIN THE ENCOUNTER. ARE YOU PREPARED FOR IT, MY HUMAN FRIEND.”

With a smile and a snort you flashed him a pair of thumbs up in the air and nod. That’s all Papyrus needs before the world shifts and shimmers around you, a product of Papyrus expanding his magic in a way that locks you into something more intimate. You recognize it right away and the sour taste of magic in your mouth isn’t a bad taste this time around. Papyrus’ encounter was so much thinner than Sans and there was nothing angry about it.

“FIRST MOVE TO YOU,” Papyrus calls out.

And you know it’s probably not what he expected, but you have a compliment option for a reason, so you take advantage of it. You almost make it sound flirty, but that might be too much for his first encounter with you.

“I think you’re a fantastic monster friend, Papyrus!” you cheer in encouragement.

It made him laugh but then the shift in magic reminds you the turn is over. Papyrus uses his magic to wash over you and you wonder what it exposed to him. It’s something that makes him smile wide with pink color flushing across his skull.

When the turn comes back to you it’s a simple thing to dismiss the whole thing, as Papyrus is more than willing to let it drop. When the magic falls away there’s a shimmer in the world around you before the first rays of dawn’s sunlight break over the horizon and color his face in shades of hot orange glow.
It’s a beautiful sunrise but you can’t look at it directly, so you settle for what you can see of it on his face. With the warm dawn light and the soft smiles Papyrus looked like a monster made for the movies.

“See something you liked?” you asked, hoping your voice didn’t sound as nervous as you felt.

Papyrus’ familiar laughter made your insides all warm and fuzzy.

You don’t say anything more, but take up his suggestion to use magic and race him back. He’s too fast for you even with your magic, but you give him a challenge that leaves you both a bit winded as soon as you skid to a halt in front of the bus and sneak back on.

While Papyrus returned to his bed you gathered a number of your things and slid into the bathroom to shower and change. Once refreshed, you climbed back into bed with a book and turned on the overhead light to see by until you heard the others start to rouse.

It was only an hour after dawn, but once you rolled out of bed and saw Papyrus across the hallway, it felt like years since the first day you met; like he was a friend you had been close with for longer than just a couple of days. And maybe, judging by the smile he spared for you, maybe he felt like that too.

The heat in your heart didn’t abate even after he looked away.

Chapter End Notes

Papyrus is best boi, honestly.

More information about souls and my own twist on world building for this story. It was one of my favorite scenes to write the reader's encounter with Papyrus and have that part where she can feel his soul and tells him all about it. I've got opinions about all the bois and what color their souls are, but you'll have to wait for those chapters/scenes to find out exactly. Feel free to guess.

This was an extra long chapter that used to be two chapters before I mashed them together so I'm not the most pleased with how disjointed and sectional it feels, but trust me this was an improvement from the scrap of a chapter it used to be. The length isn't too overwhelming, right?

Next chapter should be out late on Friday/Saturday
With a closer proximity to the target, the GPS began to blink.

“it looks like it is asking for an update from the navigator,” Stretch explained, sparing you a pointed look.

You can hear Papyrus and Blueberry in the backroom on the bed, watching old anime reruns together. From what you can hear it’s another one with super heroes or ninjas, or maybe pirates. Someone on the screen is screaming and using their power in an overly dramatic fight sequence. You had stuck around for the first few episodes but when you started to doze off you knew you needed to get some carbs.

Even if it was considered gross for breakfast you wanted a burger…a big, *juicy* burger with extra meat and a tray full of fries that refilled as soon as you emptied it. But no. You were stuck with…energy bars that tasted like sawdust. The one in your hand was half finished.

No more magic use for a while. It tired you out too much and it’s not worth the food bill. When you had been a kid and using your powers regularly on top of your intense work out routines you ate like an olympic swimmer.

“you’re eating again?” Stretch asked with a sly grin.

“Hungry,” was all you said before punching in new coordinates.

Since you last checked your map the two rouge Sans and Papyrus dots hadn’t moved much since last night. It was likely they were staying put, wherever they were.

“Are those buildings? What are they for?”

Stretch pointed to the area on the GPS where you had uploaded a new destination pin. Before you can answer him he has his phone up, checking his own internet for the map with more details. When he finds something he turns it towards you and holds it up.

‘At Whiskey Stops we provide a unique country rich atmosphere that blends dining, drinking, dancing, and other fun nightclub vibes into one undeniably memorable experience for any patron!’

“Whiskey Stops sounds…exactly like the sort of place I’d like to not find these two yahoos. Ugh, just great, they have line dances.”

Stretch made a sound that was similar to a snort. “whats so bad about dancing in a line?”

“Young than I’m willing to admit to.”

You don’t mean to but you wince when you pass the phone back over to Stretch. His eye lights flicker to your arm and shoulder before looking up at you. There’s a question in his expression but you don’t stick around to answer it.

“We’ll be there in seventy minutes that’s just a little over an hour. Maybe we can stop for food while discussing strategy. We’ll need one if we want to keep it neat in a civilian area.”
“you sure you just don’t want to stop to eat because you want it?”

“It’s called hitting two birds with one stone. I want to do both.”

“why would you want to kill birds with stones? i don’t get you humans sometimes. so cold hearted, or you could say that’s just-”

“I swear if you finish that sentence-”

“-stone cold.

Like last time, Stretch’s smile grew at the sight of you exasperation. And you wish you could help it, but he got exactly what he wanted out of you when you turned sharply on your heel and left on an exasperated huff. You could hear his chuckles over your shoulder as you exited.

You must not have done a good enough job of masking your displeasure since both Blueberry and Papyrus noticed it when you walked in on them. There was a bag of nearly empty popcorn between them but only Blueberry had butter stains around his mouth.

“SOMETHING WRONG?” Blueberry asked at once, scrambling over to the side of the bed. There were a number of pillows in the way he batted aside.

“No, nothing’s wrong, why ya asking?”

Behind you the episode kept playing but you kept your back to it in favor of reaching for what was left of the popcorn and grabbing a handful. Even after the energy bar you were still hungry.

“YOU LOOK LIKE YOU’RE TIRED-LIKE MORE TIRED THAN YOU WERE WHEN YOU WENT UP TO FIX THE GPS, BUT NOT LIKE SUPER TIRED. STILL GOOD EVEN IF YOU’RE TIRED BUT-” Blueberry’s words tumbled into each other as a new blush rose up across his skull, a soft and honest blue color.

The sight is enough to ease out the hard lines of your face. “I’m just hungry. Sorry, I sometimes get cranky when I’m hungry. It’s been a while since I’ve used magic and it burns energy just like my body does. Unlike monsters, I can only get energy from the food I eat. I really envy you guys who can refuel all on your own to make magic.”

“WE STILL NEED FOOD TO LIVE, AND LIFE IS BAD IF WE’RE FORCED TO STARVE, BUT OUR MAGIC IS A PART OF US SO IT’S A LITTLE DIFFERENT. DO YOU NEED MORE FOOD? WE HAVE PLENTY OF MORE SNACKS.”

Papyrus pushed the popcorn bag into your hands with a concerned expression, watching for you to eat what was left.

“AND TO THINK THAT YOU WERE STRAINING YOURSELF ON BOTH FRONTS THIS MORNING. A ROBUST WORKOUT AND THEN USING YOUR MAGIC FOR ALL THOSE THINGS... WILL YOU NEED MORE FOOD?” Papyrus asked. He only seemed to relax after you flipped him a pair of thumbs up.

“WH-WHAT DO YOU MEAN ALL THAT MAGIC? WHAT DID YOU NEED TO USE MAGIC FOR?” Blueberry asked.

You dragged your thumb over your teeth, sucking off the extra butter while Papyrus moved to answer.
“IN ADDITION TO CONSTANTLY UPDATE THE MAPS WE WENT RUNNING THIS MORNING, SO SHE USED MAGIC TO TRAVERSE AT ACCELERATED SPEEDS, AND THEN THERE WAS OUR FRIENDLY ENCOUNTER-”

“ENCOUNTER?!?”

Blueberry’s high pitch exclamation made both you and Papyrus pause and look up with mirrored expressions of confusion. Blueberry’s blush was back and he was flustered. Maybe he thought it was dangerous. He was still getting used to the surface world and back underground when a human would fall through, every once in a blue moon, encounters would be used to fight with the visiting humans. Everyone knew the story of the six souls that the monster king collected before Frisk came through to shatter the barrier on their own. Maybe in Blueberry’s world the encounters were all the dangerous kind, when a human was involved.

Though, even if it had been a dangerous encounter, Papyrus wouldn’t have done enough damage to warrant such concern. He was too sweet to be as cutthroat as his brother and while his attack and defense were greater, his control of magic wasn’t as extensive as Sans’ by a long shot.

“It’s fine,” you say before Papyrus can speak. “It wasn’t a dangerous one, we weren’t fighting.”

Papyrus nodded along. “YES, ENCOUNTERS ON THE SURFACE ARE RARELY, IF EVER, VIOLENT. THE FEW INSTANCES OF ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN MONSTERS AND HUMANS ARE ALMOST ALWAYS FRIENDLY. WE USE THESE ENCOUNTERS TO….LEARN MORE ABOUT ONE ANOTHER AND STRENGTHEN OUR… BONDS.”

Papyrus’ cheeks were back to being dusted with color. He smiled wide and then chuckled, averting his eyes by ducking his head. “THEY WAS ALSO ABLE TO USE THEIR MAGIC TO SEE-ER FEEL, SORRY, TO FEEL MY SOUL AND EVEN TOLD ME WHAT IT FELT LIKE!”

“FE-FELT LIKE?” Blueberry’s voice was little more than a squeak. He glanced back and forth between Papyrus and you, seemingly unable to focus on a single point. It was starting to make your heart hurt, to see him spazz out so bad. “YOU AL-ALREADY HAD AN…ENCOUNTER? B- BUT YOU JUST MET PAPYRUS TWO DAYS AGO! ISN’T THAT A BIT FAST?”

His reaction made you wonder if encounters meant something different in his world, if they were more of a formal function, something intimate or private maybe? The distress in his expression was evident.

“It wasn’t too fast. I mean, it’s true I’ve only been in a couple other friendly encounters with monsters in my life, but I never felt like I was in any danger around Papyrus, and to me that’s the number one thing I need before agreeing to an encounter. For other humans they might have different priorities or reservations regarding encounters. Is it different for you from where you come from?”

“NO, NOT THAT DIFFERENT, JUST…I…THOUGHT YOU WOULDN’T H-HAVE AN ENCOUNTER SO SOON INTO THE TRIP. IT WAS FAST, WASN’T IT?” Blueberry asked in a strained voice.

“NYEH HEH HEH, MAYBE SO, BUT THE GREAT PAPYRUS IS AN EXPERT AT MAKING FRIENDSHIPS AND I WAS ESPECIALLY EAGER TO BECOME THEIR FRIEND. THERE IS NO HESITATING WHEN IT COMES TO THE MANUEL ON ALL THINGS REGARDING HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS.”

Why did it look like Blueberry was about to cry?
“AH, ALSO,” Papyrus began, turning his attention to you and addressing you by name, "IF YOU ARE FEELING DOWN YOU MAY USE YOUR MAGIC TO FEEL MY SOUL SINCE YOU SAID IT WAS SO COMFORTING,” Papyrus said.

You opened your mouth to say something, but stopped. Blueberry looked up, smiling again. You saw the blush on his face fading. The smile didn’t reach his eye lights and did little to convince you he was feeling genuine.

“THAT SOUNDS SO COOL. I GUESS I HADN’T REALIZED THE BOTH OF YOU WERE SO CLOSE. I WAS JUST GONNA, UM I’M GOING TO GO GET SOME MORE AIR. YOU GUYS CAN KEEP WATCHING WITHOUT ME.”

Blueberry waved the pair of you off and then hopped from the edge of the bed to scurry out into the hallway. You turned to watch him leave and then glanced back at Papyrus. The taller Skeleton had been able to tell something was off with Blueberry, but Papyrus looked confused as to what it could possibly be.

“COULD BLUEBERRY BE FEELING UNWELL? I THOUGHT HE WANTED TO WATCH MORE OF THIS HERO ANIME WITH ME. I DON’T WANT TO SEE THE REST WITHOUT HIM.”

Out in the hall you could hear the hatch to the roof squeak open and then closed again, clueing you in on where Blueberry probably went. Sans was asleep in his bed (again) and Stretch was up at the front. On the bus there weren’t a lot of places one could run away to if they were feeling antisocial.

You also needed to have a ‘team’ meeting with the others before arriving at the historic district of the upcoming town and the clock was ticking down. It felt wrong to leave Blue feeling like a plastic bag.

“You think he was upset?”

Papyrus fiddled with his gloves. “DID I MAYBE SAY SOMETHING TO UPSET HIM. MAYBE HE… MAYBE HE DIDN’T LIKE THE FACT THAT I AND YOU, THAT WE SHARED AN ENCOUNTER.” Papyrus’ eye sockets went wide. “BUT THAT DOESN’T MEAN I REGRET IT! IT WAS MY FAVORITE ENCOUNTER EVER, EVEN AFTER FLIRTING WITH FRISK. I WOULDN’T HAVE TRADED IT FOR ANYTHING. I DON’T THINK IT WAS GROSS.”

“Is that what some other monsters think about encounters with humans?”

Papyrus shrugged. “THERE’S ALWAYS A MONSTER OR TWO OUT THERE WHO THINKS ODD THOUGHTS. I JUST WISH I KNEW WHAT BLUEBERRY WAS THINKING. I HOPE HE DOESN’T THINK POORLY OF ME.”

Something about sad skeletons made your brain instantly associate the image with those of kicked animals or puppies specifically. You reached out to catch Papyrus’ jaw in your palm and tilted it up. You could feel the heat from when his skull colored but you ignored it.

“He doesn’t think poorly of you, how could he? I’m glad to hear you’re not ashamed of me. I also enjoyed our encounter and was glad I got to meet such an amazing monster and make him my friend.”

Papyrus’ eye lights went fuzzy at the edges. He tilted his skull, the way he would sometimes when listening intently, and it turns his face further into your palm. Absently you brushed your thumb across his jaw. He was taller and bigger and louder than you, but when you held him in your hand,
Papyrus felt like he could fit inside your heart if you tried to fold him up and put him there. He was soft and gentle with you, in a way that made you melt.

Such a sweetheart.

When he spoke his voice was little more than a whisper. “I WOULD NEVER BE ASHAMED OF YOU. NEVER. NOT IN A MILION AND ONE YEARS.”

His face was warm and you felt content just being in contact with him, but there was something left undone that you needed to see to. Blueberry was also your friend and right now there was something you could do to help… at least you hoped there was something you could do to help.

Slowly, you tugged your hand back to your side. Papyrus let you go, but you hadn’t missed the way his face followed the pull of your palm, like he had wanted to stay like that until the very end. You grabbed the empty pop corn bag and tossed it into the garbage before leaving the bed.

“I’m going to go see if there is something I can do to help him feel better.”

There was still a soft blush on his face and when he spoke his words sounded wobbled, but he didn’t stutter when he called out after you. “A KIND AND NOBLE GESTURE FROM A KIND AND NOBLE FRIEND,”

“Hey Paps,” You smiled back over you shoulder at Papyrus, emboldened by his enthusiasm. “… for what you said, thanks Papyrus.”

“NYEH HE HEH, OF COURSE.”

The hunger pains weren’t terrible, but you knew they would only get worse if you tried using you magic any more, so you grabbed a handful of energy bars to stuff into your pockets.

You moved towards the ladder leading up to the bus roof and climbed. The hatch didn’t squeak as bad when you slipped out, but it was loud enough for Blueberry to hear and flinch from. He was sitting with his back to you, knees pulled up to his chest and face tucked into his knees.

The wind wasn’t as bad as it had been yesterday when you confronted Sans in almost the same spot, but you still felt your hair tugged out of it’s pinned back curl. It was a nice clean breeze that helped you breath easy.

On hands and knees you crawled over to where Blueberry was sitting and then moved around him so that your were sitting directly in front of him, legs crossed over each other like a pretzel. Blueberry peeked up from between his knees, you could see the light from his eye, but didn’t lift his head.

That was fine.

You reached into your pocket and pulled out the first energy bar, ripping down the packaging and taking a bite to chew and swallow. You bit off another larger chunk and finished the bar off before the minute was over. Tucking the trash wrapper into your opposite pocket you pulled out another bar and repeated the process, and then a third.

“Stars, these things taste disgusting when you go one right after the other. Yuck. I don’t miss this part of the training one bit. I mean, yeah the running was terrible but the food was the worst.”

You chewed off another chunk of the lemon flavored energy meal bar. Blueberry’s eyesight was on you, watching from the shadows between his knees. He didn’t lift his head when he finally chose
“WHAT ARE YOU DOING?” he asked.

“I’m eating so using magic doesn’t exhaust me. I mean a little bit of magic ain’t that bad but I’m so out of shape and I’ll admit I was use to eating like two meals a day when I bothered to remember. I’m the worst, but at least I know what I need to do to stay standing. I should be good after this.”

“GOOD FOR WHAT?” His voice was still soft, but curious.

“An encounter.”

“AN ENCOUNTER?!” Blueberry’s head shot up and his knees fell to the side as he only gaped at you, blue eyes blown wide. “WH-WHA-WHAT ARE, WHAT DO YOU MEAN FOR AN ENCOUNTER? WITH WHO ARE YOU PLANNING TO-AH, IS IT PAPYRUS?”

“Come on Blue, you’re smarter than that,” you laughed, using his nickname with fondness. “Isn’t that why you were upset and left? I shared an encounter with Papyrus and hearing that made you feel weird.”

Blue pouted and looked away. “WHY WOULD I SAY THAT? THERE’S NO REASON TO FEEL WEIRD.”

“It’s actually not that uncommon in friendships, to feel weird or upset when something happens without you. I’m sorry for being insensitive to it and I’m really sorry if I’m wrong about all this, but you had wanted to share an encounter with me, didn’t you?”

Blue didn’t respond, but he looked up and held you gaze and you felt like that was as close to a confirmation as you were going to get out of Blueberry while he still felt weird off his jealousy. It wasn’t the easiest thing to admit to, but you knew plenty of friendships and groups where something similar happened.

You got the feeling that Blueberry felt left out, and that was the reason he left. Maybe you were wrong, maybe there was something more to it that you just weren’t aware of, but you didn’t think you missed the mark completely.

“I… AM HAPPY THAT YOU AND PAPYRUS ARE SUCH GOOD FRIENDS. YOU WERE ABLE TO HAVE A HEALTHY AND FUN ENCOUNTER THAT BROUGHT YOU CLOSER TOGETHER….CLOSER THAN FRIENDSHIPS TAOCS.”

Oh, you felt that last comment in your heart. Blueberry looked more like a kicked bunny than ever before.

“Oh, no, sweetie that’s not it. Oh, I’m sorry, please don’t be mad at me.”

“I’M NOT MAD,” Blueberry hiccuped, sounding like he was close to crying. “I DON’T… I DON’T EVEN KNOW WHY I FEEL WEIRD. I DON’T KNOW WHY I JUST…DON’T FEEL LIKE I SHOULD BE DOWN THERE.”

You

Felt

Terrible
Forgetting about wanting to give Blue his space you reached forward and grabbed him up into a hug, wrapping your arms as far around his back as you could before squeezing him against your chest. You buried your head into his shoulder and squeezed him again once you felt the hesitant touch of his arms slowly reaching behind you back to complete the hug. Blueberry ducked his head into you opposite shoulder and hid his face.

“Blue, Blue, Blue don’t feel weird. I’m sorry you don’t know what to feel right now. It’s a new experience for you and it’s probably unsettling to feel something you don’t understand. Don’t let it upset you though. I care about you and that hasn’t changed.”

You felt his hands around you shiver and you try to pull him closer to you. He didn’t respond but made a sound that let you know he heard you. Without thinking you brush your lips up against the side of his skull and then let your magic spill.

You can tell when Blue notices the presence of your magic as he tenses up right away, but then eases a bit once he realized.

“THAT’S YOU?”

“That’s my magic yeah, do you mind?”

Blueberry shook his head, brushing up against your shoulder. “NOT IF IT IS YOU. YOU CAN TOUCH ME WITH IT.”

“Blue, lemme be clear real quick, my magic is a bit different. I can’t force or trigger an encounter, but I can use my magic outside of an encounter to learn about a person. I can’t see souls or their colors or anything like that, but I learn things through feelings. I’d be learning about you if you let me…..”

Blue pulled back enough to look you in the face and nod, expression set with determination. “GO AHEAD. I WANT YOU TO IF THAT’S WHAT YOU REALLY WANT.”

You closed your eyes instead of replying. It was easier to concentrate and feel with your eyes shut. Like a slow rolling wave, you pulled your magic over Blue and let it settled, seeping past his soul and feeling the echoes of it.

His soul isn’t as direct as Papyrus’ and you get the feeling that he might have been a bit of more than one color. There’s warmth and light there, a kindness that’s strong and surging, but then there is comfort. The feeling of Blueberry’s souls is like getting wrapped up in an extra soft blanket that lasts forever. As young and energetic as he can be, his soul is one that puts others ahead of him, almost like a cyan soul, but not….not exactly patience…

You felt sunlight. There was nothing you could see but the sensation painted a picture in your mind.

The world is open and wide. The sky looks so close you could reach out and touch it if only your fingers could just trench a little further. The clouds were fuller and thicker with white over the grass fields. There are wild flowers scattered and growing in every color.

You’re safe.

You pulled your magic back and looked up, seeing Blueberry’s eye lights fixated on your face with an open expression.

“What DID YOU FEEL?” he asked.
“I felt your soul,” you answered. “It was warm like sunshine and soft like felt. You… you really love your brother, don’t you?”

“AND ALL OF MY FRIENDS TOO, BUT YES, I ESPECIALLY LOVE MY BROTHER. I TAKE CARE OF HIM.”

You don’t bother to hold back the smile. “It’s a wonderful soul, Blue, you should be proud.”

The blush was powdery blue and fast spreading. Blueberry turned his face away, but not by much. “MWEH HEH HEH, I NEVER THOUGHT I’D HEAR SOMEONE TALK TO ME ABOUT MY SOUL, OR THAT I’D EVEN HAVE A SOUL THEY COULD DESCRIBE. I’M GLAD YOU LIKED IT.”

“I loved it.”

Blueberry’s blush spread dark and fast across even more of his face as he dissolved into even more chuckles, laughs, and giggles. He rolled away from you onto his side a bit and you let him leave your arms.

“Hey, Blue, you good?” you laughed once his own chuckles seemed to fade out.

“I AM THE MOST GOOD. NEVER FEAR!”

“That’s great, so you want to return the favor?” At his confused expression you scooted back and then gestured to the space between you. “Didn’t you want to have an encounter so you could see my soul?”

And you half expected him to jump at the offer, so when he didn’t move you assume he was just still processing. You opened your mouth to repeat your earlier words but he recovered first.

“NO THANK YOU, I’M GOOD.”


“YOU’RE ASKING MORE FROM OBLIGATION THAN DESIRE, AREN’T YOU? IF I HADN’T LEFT UPSET LIKE THAT YOU WOULDN’T HAVE OFFERED. I-DON’T GET ME WRONG, I WOULD LOVE TO SHARE AN ENCOUNTER WITH YOU AND I HOPE THAT ONE DAY I CAN, BUT I WANT YOU TO WANT IT FOR YOUR SAKE, NOT JUST MINE. I DON’T WANT TO BE AN OBLIGATION.”

And his words left you feeling a little off kilter. You had misjudged Blue after all. You had assumed he would be cheerful and loud and energetic when you asked to share an encounter. You hadn’t thought he would say anything but yes.

“That’s, a real selfless thing to say,” you admit in a tone that, you hope, helps Blueberry see how much you respect him for it. It was easy to write him off just as another friend/kid-type monster, but he was more than that.

Blueberry’s blush was back. “I WAS GUESSING YOU HADN’T HAD MORE THAN A HANDFUL OF ENCOUNTERS YOURSELF BEFORE YOU SAID SOMETHING, SO SORRY IF IT SOUNDS RUDE OF ME TO REFUSE, BUT I REALLY WANT TO CHERISH IT WHEN IT DOES HAPPEN.”

“Oh,” you say, not knowing what else to say. You’re a bit off balance and don’t know what else to feel. Your face was a little warm too.
“I’VE NEVER HAD AN ENCOUNTER WITH A HUMAN BEFORE. NONE WERE AROUND BACK IN OUR WORLD IN THE UNDERGROUND AND ONCE WE GOT TOPSIDE THE HUMANS AROUND US WERE NICE BUT NOT…NOT LIKE YOU. YOU’RE MY FRIEND AND I WANNA DO IT RIGHT BY YOU.”

“Thank you for explaining it to me,” you say, still impressed with his maturity. “I look forward to getting to know you even better. My offer still stands. When you’re ready and when…I guess when the time is right, we’ll do this sometime, someday.”

The lights in his eye sockets danced a little, shining bright, almost like stars that spun. “OF COURSE! I’M LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.”

A knocking from the hatch almost made you jump. You leaned out around Blueberry while he turned to see Stretch halfway through the hatch, waving for attention.

“hey you two, we’re going to get together and talk about our abc plans now. sans is up and papyrus has the table set up for our…i’m not sure what he called it, but something about rangers and stars.” Stretch stared to defend again but paused to glance back once more. “ah, also the gps needs to get updated again since we’re only a half hour out now.”

“COMING BROTHER,” Blueberry exclaimed, popping up and taking a handful of steps before stopping to turn back in your direction and sheepishly reach out, extending his hand for you to take. “WANNA GO DOWN TOGETHER?”

You grabbed for his hand and moved out of your sitting position onto your knees. The speed wasn’t enough for you to need to worry about but you still decided it was safest to hobble after Blueberry on your knees while you were on the roof of a moving bus.

“I’m right behind you, Blue,” you called.

He waited by the hatch for you to swing your legs over first but his hand on your shoulder stopped you from going further.

“Yeah?”

“EARLIER WHEN WE WERE TALKING ABOUT ENCOUNTERS YOU MENTIONED, AND MAYBE I MISHEARD THIS, BUT YOU SAID THAT MOST OF THEM WERE FRIENDLY. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN IN AN UNFRIENDLY ENCOUNTER?”

The reminder of Sans’ encounter made you want to smirk, but you kept that look off your face. “It wasn’t anything I couldn’t handle, don’t worry about it. I trust you not to hurt me, but even so I’m pretty good at taking care of myself.”

“YOU SHOULDN’T NEED TO BE.”

His concern makes you feel almost-guilty so you just laugh and wink his way, knowing he’ll flush. “Don’t worry about me, Blue. You’re too sweet for your own good.”

Before he can say anything more you slipped down the hatch and caught the ladder’s sides with the insides of your shoes, sliding it down to the end.

At the base, closest to you, Sans doesn’t flinch when you drop alongside him and you meet his eye lights with a your own unwavering gaze, unwilling to be the first to look away.

“Ready to get this meeting started, boss?” you teased.
You know that tag about encounters being a metaphor. I meant it. Blue is the fastest burn of all the Skeletons. Some take longer than others, but not Blue! I love writing about him. He's so sweet and pure and good. Makes me happy.

Who do you think knows about her unfriendly encounter or who do you think will learn about it first? I'm curious to hear what you might say. I've been over the moon and loving all your comments so far. I'm so glad I decided to share this.

Getting this update out a little early due to the site being down tomorrow during prime posting time :0 I'll see you again for the next chapter coming out Monday! We're almost half done with the first arch and I'm super excited.
You finally meet one of the 'Fell brothers. But the encounter isn't what you expected.

See the end of the chapter for notes.

“SKELETON RANGER STARS.”

“but we’re not all skeletons,” Stretch lamely corrected before both he and Blue looked over the table to where you were by the GPS, resetting the coordinates.

“so, like a mascot then?” Sans asked.

“i don’t know, she seems more like the leader than you,” Stretch muttered under his breath.

He was chewing on something plastic between his teeth. It was another honey stick he had asked you for after learning about your candy stash. You had been hoping he would lay off the bad puns when you were around after being nice to him, but if anything the gifts only seemed to embolden him.

He even made it a point to watch you while he ate your candy, as if that was his way of taunting you. ‘Look how not even your snacks can get me to behave.’ What did he think he was, a child?

“Names aside, the two subjects haven’t converged yet,” you called out. “The one we’re calling Edge is further out, moving along the boarder while the one we’re calling Red is stationary. They’re not together so we should talk about how we’re going to roll out our welcome mat.”

“WE HAVE A WELCOME MAT?” Papyrus exclaimed in surprise. Blueberry snickered beside the taller skeleton and then a look from his brother made him look away and go quiet.

“a figure of speech, bro,” Sans explained.

“Yeah, sorry about that. No literal welcome mat on this bus so we’re going to have to do our best with what we have left, namely ourselves. First up, should we split the party and confront each brother simultaneously or stick together and meet them one at a time?”

“THEY’RE NOT MORE POWERFUL THAN US ACCORDING TO WHAT WE KNOW SO IT SHOULD BE FINE IF ITS ONLY TWO OF US AGAINST ONE OF THEM,” Blue pointed out.

Sans and Stretch nodded while Papyrus nervously wrung his hands before nodding in agreement.

“That just leaves us with deciding how to split the party. We have an odd number of people here. I’d be third wheeling someone’s team.”

“or you could have three skellies in a team and not be a third wheel, just a suggestion,” Stretch offered.
“LOTS FOR A RANDOM DRAWING THEN?” Papyrus suggested.

“We don’t want to think about this a little more critically?” you asked, watching as Blue was already up and running to get a paper to write their names on and tear up for the drawing.

“We can figure that out once we have teams set up. One is stationary and the other moves around a lot, so…someone who can use shortcuts should be on the mover,” Stretch said.

“That’s you or Sans,” you guessed.

At one point you had been shown their files or whatever information the Embassy had on their powers and abilities. You hadn’t read through all of it, but you had skimmed the important bits. Stretch and Sans had nearly identical skill stats while Blue and Papyrus’ states were also mirrored. It would make sense to switch up those sets to help balance the teams.

“DONE!” Blue exclaimed, pouring the papers with all their names on it into a brown paper baggy he had found instead of a hat. “LET’S PULL OUT TWO NAMES FOR THE FIRST TEAM AND THEN THE THREE WHO ARE LEFT WILL BE ON THE OTHER TEAM TOGETHER. STRETCH, WHY DON’T YOU PULL THEM OUT, YOU’RE THE LAZIEST ONE HERE.”

Instead of sounding offended Stretch chuckled and move to do as his brother requested. There was a fondness in his eye lights as he pulled out a pair of papers and then turned to set them down without flipping them over. Blue tipped the bag upside down and let the last three pieces fell out on the opposite side of the table.

Being closer to Stretch you turned over the first two names: Sans and Blueberry

Blue’s excitement died down a notch as he turned the last three names over and held onto the piece of paper with your name on it. You were on a team with Stretch and Papyrus.

“Now we should figure out who goes after who,” you said.

“WE WILL GO AFTER THE WANDERER!” Blue volunteered before Sans could say anything. “SANS HAS SHORTCUT MAGIC BUT I’M VERY ENERGETIC AND I’LL BE ABLE TO COVER JUST AS MUCH GROUND.”

“You sure? It would make sense if the bigger team went out looking for this Edge guy.”

“I HAVE FAITH IN MY TRACKING ABILITIES.”

“IT SOUNDS LIKE A SOLID PLAN,” Papyrus exclaimed, clapping his hands together. “AND THIS WILL BE GOOD FOR MY LAZY BROTHER. HE DOESN’T MOVE NEARLY AS MUCH AS HE SHOULD.”

“bro, you throwing me under the bus now?” Sans joked.

You felt like it would have been better for you to go with the group tracking Edge, since him moving around wouldn’t be a problem to you as long as you had your map, but if you spoke up and said something you’d get stuck on a team with Sans, and you weren’t ready for that even if Blue was the sweetest of sweethearts.

“You all have your cellphones? If anything happens one of you on the team can call someone on the other team. Well be split up but the Heritage District isn’t so massive that we wouldn’t be able to reach each other in time if we needed a fast extraction.”
“THAT JUST LEAVES THE MATTER OF HOW WE SHOULD ADDRESS THESE TWO,” said Papyrus. “I DOUBT THEY WILL BE AS WILLING AS YOU AND YOUR BROTHER WERE TO JOIN US, BLUEBERRY. THEIR WORLD WAS A BIT HARSHER THAN EITHER YOURS OR MINE.”

“What exactly are you guys offering them that’s so different from what Blue and I took?” asked Stretch.

“First off, offer them your names and make a peaceful introduction, then we can offer some explanations about how they got here and why they won’t be able to go back anytime soon. There’s a rogue human on the run who has space and time bending magic that can now rip through the fabric of reality they might wanna be warned about,” you explained.

“And then step three, we make them leave with us. They can come willingly or in shackles. I’m sure there are some hiding around here somewhere just collecting dust,” Sans hummed sounding too lazy to be serious.

“Let’s not sound that careless when it’s the real deal. I’d like them to come willingly if that’s possible. We have the beds ready for them and everything.”

“Then we should hurry and make first contact,” Stretch said before pulling out the honey stick and yawning wide. Once he was done he replaced the treat between his teeth and bumped your shoulder on his way out from around the table. Blue was up and heading towards the exit while Papyrus took his time unfolding from the bench seat behind the table.

Stretch paused at the doors leading outside before looking back. “…or do we want to sit around here for something else?”

“We’re coming,” you called out. You reached for Papyrus’ hand and he grabbed for it without looking to help you out.

The three of you met up outside and waited to see Sans and Blue off with a last word of advice regarding Edge’s movements. Sans listened but didn’t look at you while Blueberry’s star colored eyes stayed fixed on your face as you relayed all you knew. When you were done speaking Sans nodded and moved away while Blue thanked you and jogged to catch up with the other monster.

From behind, there really wasn’t a lot of difference between the two.

“Now that we’re on our own, wanna scope at that whiskey place and see if it’s open at two in the afternoon?” Stretch asked.

“Maybe it’s not that sort of…bar,” you said.

You recalled a pitiful handful of bars that opened before four in the afternoon back in the city. They stayed open till three and four in the morning, but wouldn’t open until the afternoon shift of workplaces started to churn out their tired.

The Historic District looked nice and comfy with plenty of retired folks taking their time on strolls along the shopfronts while younger folks moved in and out, doing business and enjoying the pleasant weather. The town’s layout wasn’t complicated at all and easy to navigate.

It took you five minutes on foot to find the bar and not nearly that long to find out it really was locked and closed until four in the afternoon.

“Welp, we tried.” Stretched turned around and began walking off.
“Hey!” you reached for him and grabbed him by the hood of his orange hoodie. “Where do you think you’re going? We just got here.”

“is he still inside?”

You nodded.

“is the door still locked?”

You and Papyrus both nodded together.

“has that guy left that spot on the map since you began checking him this morning?”

Papyrus looked to you but you shook your head slowly. “No, he’s always been there. What are you getting at, Stretch?”

Stretch shrugged, seemingly unconcerned with your hold on his jacket. “It’s a nice place, there’s plenty of shops and stands to grab food…why not just hang out and wait until the right time to head on in and talk with the guy all casual like?”

“You could just blink yourself in there. You can see through the windows enough of the interior to use a shortcut.”

Stretch shrugged again. “you really think that’s gonna make the guy willing to talk to us with an open mind? i mean, if that’s your call we can play it that way, but if you want to keep this peaceful just let it slide, i say. we won’t go far.”

“What if he emerges while we are away?” Papyrus asked.

“if you want we could leave someone behind to watch over the place for just that happening, but it won’t matter much to a person who can see people on a map made out of magic.” Stretched fixed his lazy stare on you. “why not enjoy the time you have? you’re still hungry, aren’t ya?”

You were always hungry.

“I’ll be fine.”

“…for two hours?”

You could smell the fast food and meat from a nearby burger joint. One of the storefronts was selling oversized soft pretzels and another one was selling hot dogs on a stick. Inhaling meant you had to smell all the good things they were making.

And Stretch was right…you were hungry. Even after all those energy bars and not even being sucked into an encounter, the smell of an actual lunch was making her salivate.

“Fi-fine, but we shouldn’t go far, and only until this places opens,” you relent.

Stretch tugs out of your limp hold and flashes Papyrus a thumbs up.

“Then that begs the question where should we get food for ourselves?” Papyrus asked. “I don’t mind eating human foods, but it would be interesting to see how they prepared something for monsters all the way out here.”

You spared another glance around but apart from Papyrus and Stretch, you could only see humans
out and about. And while there were plenty of towns and small cities where the monsters didn’t make a significant population, the people in such towns usually gawked a lot more when a monster did eventually breeze through. No one in the Historic District seemed to mind either Stretch or Papyrus any more than you.

“we can look around at least and think about that while we walk.”

“Not too far.”

Stretch laughed and waved a hand up but didn’t stop or speak again.

As a unit the three of you chose a side of the street and went down, staring into the window displays and making comments about the interiors you saw. While there were plenty of places selling food there were just as many shops selling nicknacks and merchandise specific to a hobby or field.

Papyrus stopped in a small bookshop to chat with the lady behind the counter that had waved to him. While he talked Stretch browsed the shelves on one side while you wandered down the other. Through the gaps left by absent books, you could feel Stretch’s attention on your face.

The front door opened and a couple of teenagers ran in to stop next to Papyrus. You heard one of them mention ‘mascot’ and ‘fan’ before showing off the camera on her phone. Papyrus looked delighted to crouch between the boy and girl and say a few short words for one of their friends watching the live streamed video.

“he looks like he’s enjoying himself.” Stretch nodded at Papyrus. “mr. popularity over there.”

“He’s had a few years to make a name for himself. He enjoys it so don’t get sour about it.”

“sour?”

You stopped when Stretch rounded the book stack and stopped directly in your path. It was a secluded part of the bookshop, out of Papyrus’ visual range. Stretch had a look on his face that could only be called mischievous.

“Whaaaaaat?”

His eye lights were fixated on your mouth, watching as you worked the edge of you lower lip with you teeth, a nasty habit that came with agitation. His gaze reminded you of what he told you the previous day, about how his terrible jokes were only there to make you feel bad and spark a reaction. There was nothing you could see that would give him the reaction he wanted, but you kept quiet and waited for him to speak first.

Stretch looked like he was going to say something but stopped at the sound of his name.

“STRETCH, FRIEND, COME LOOK AT THIS AND TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK.”

With a pointed look at Stretch, you gave him another second to explain himself before you turned back to where Papyrus was. He had the teenager girl’s phone in his hand and was showing off the video that had a stream of multi colored hearts popping next to his face. He was pointing to the hearts and when the red ones popped he laughed.

“THEY ARE THE SAME COLOR AS YOUR SOUL.”

So freaking cute.
Stretch snickered behind you and it made the color on your face spread. Papyrus looked so proud and the teenagers looked over the moon to have been a part of whatever made Papyrus so happy, so there really wasn’t anything to be embarrassed about.

Just....

Stretch’s snickering made you think there was.

Was there?

The teenager retrieved their phone with Papyrus’ thanks and scampered off, chatting among themselves about how their friends were ‘gonna flip their lids’ when they showed off their video. Papyrus waved to them as they walked and the bookseller checked Stretch out while you went with Papyrus to wait at the door.

Stretch joined you a moment later with his book under his arm, tucked in such a way that the title was obscured.

“I didn’t know you were actually looking for something. What did you get?”

“Let’s find a place to eat first, i can show it off better at a table and you’re still starving. we can all hear your human belly rolling even if we’re too polite to react to it.”

“I’m not starving, I’m just hungry, there’s a difference.”

“LOOK, THERE ARE HUMANS WHO ARE EATING THERE, YOU LIKE THAT SORT OF GREASY FOOD, DON’T YOU?” Papyrus asked.

He was pointing to another fast food burger joint that wasn’t so different from the restaurant you stopped at previously. It was the sort of place he would normally try to talk his brother out of eating at, if their conversation about his eating habits were anything to go off of. You wondered why he was okay going to such a place if he told Sans he hated them?

“You okay with a place like that, Paps? We can look for something else that’s not fast food.”

“But you like fast food.” He said it like that was supposed to be the end of it, like that was all the explanation needed. He started jogging over that way and Stretch tugged on your long sleeve to drag you along.

Too sweet!

Inside there were mostly empty table and booths, as the lunch hour was two hours past, but a number of young people loitered at their table, keeping their trash neatly on their trays and their conversations quiet.

Much to your delight there is a monster menu that, admittedly isn’t as varied as the human menu, has enough items on it to make Papyrus happy. You all order, putting the items on the company card, then stand off to the side to wait while they put together your food.

The radio overhead was quiet just like the conversations and it was nice to just… pretend for a moment everything about you and this moment was normal. It was normal to be with a pair of monsters tracking down another pair of monsters that came from another dimension to an out of the way country type town.

Nothing unusual about that.
You startled when you felt something touch your lip. Stretch was there with one of the french fries taken from your basket. He grinned and pushed the fry into your mouth when he saw the opportunity. Never one to waste good food you bit down and yanked it free from his fingers.

"our order came," he explained, gesturing to the two trays Papyrus was carrying off to a set of tables.

You followed him easily and sat down across from the skeletons, noting once again how similar they appeared when next to one another. Stretch was a tad shorter but hunched too much for how own good and dressed like he didn’t care who saw him. Papyrus took a bit more pride in looking like his best version of himself with the bright colors he loved.

The three of you chatted absently about the food and each other’s orders. Papyrus had ordered purely from the monster menu while Stretch was a bit more adventurous about trying a mixture of both human and monster dishes. He seemed to like the french fries best of all.

Unexpectedly, both boys seemed to take a secret sort of delight in how much food you had ordered. A double cheeseburger with the ‘secret’ sauce and two orders of fries plus a extra large drink and min salad.

“What’s so funny about it?” you grumbled. The pair shared a look that made you feel uneasy. Since when had they gotten along so well?

“THERE IS NOTHING FUNNY ABOUT YOUR BURGER, IT’S NOT EVEN TELLING JOKES. IT’S JUST….”

“you.”

“Me?” You look to Papyrus, feeling betrayed. He was still grinning in a way that made the corners of his sockets crinkle. “What’s wrong with me?”

“NOTHING IS WRONG WITH YOU!” Papyrus rushed to explain.

“you’re just so tiny,” Stretch interjected before Papyrus could blubber anything else.

“I-tiny? I’m taller than Sans! You don’t laugh at him or Blueberry, do you?”

“they’re older brothers so we wouldn’t, but are you really taller or is that the reason you’re always wearing those shoes with the lifts-”

“They’re called heels and it’s fashion.”

“well then who am I to tell you, ya can’t per-shoe your own tastes, but you don’t have to step up just cause you’re a tatter-tot.” Stretch grinned and pulled out the book he had propped up against his side, showing off the title, ‘101 Modern Jokes and Puns for the Family Dad.’

“No.”

“gotta update with the times, honey.” He reached out and casually picked out one of your fries and made of show of chewing it down.”jokes are important, you could say they’re my whole platform.”

You really didn’t want to laugh. You pushed down the temptation and mustered up an annoyed expression that cracked only a little when he wiggled his brow bones at you.

“They’re so bad though!” you exclaimed. “It’s just low hanging fruit for a laugh and you know
they’re bad and you do it anyway, stop smirking at me. Papyrus, back me up.”

Papyrus nodded along. “THEY ARE PRETTY BAD, BUT NOT AS TERRIBLE AS SANS’.”

“Considering your footwear I thought your psyche would have been healed by now, sorry if it bothered you,” he answered easily, not at all sorry if his expression was anything to go by.

It was almost enough to laugh, but not because it was a funny joke, more so because it was just… so bad and he still kept going. It was all for the reaction.

You balled up the wrapper left behind from your burger and kept your comments to yourself as you compiled the trays, loading them up with the trash leftover from your finished meals. You almost stood to take it but Papyrus beat you to it, taking the plastic red trays from your hands and smiling in a way communicated without words he should be the one to do this.

That he would be happy to do it.

That he wanted to do it.

“Thanks Paps,” you sighed, relinquishing your hold on the trays.

“OF COURSE, IT’S A BO-GENTLEMAN’S PRIVILEGE.” He laughed a little louder and hurried off with the trash before the blush on his face could spread.

You sat back down in your seat across from Stretch, watching him play with the pages of his new book. His eye lights followed Papyrus over to the trash bins and then narrowed when a number of the young adults exclaimed in surprise, calling out to Papyrus by name. They had a phone with his video from earlier and were waving for him to join them. One of them was showing off an enamel pin with his face on it that they wore on the strap of their backpack.

“so, what you think that’s gonna be, five, ten minutes?” Stretch pushed his book to the side and rested his elbow on the table’s edge in its place. Jaw in his hand, he turned his eye lights to you. “my money is on it being double whatever that last group was.”

“You have money?”

Stretch grinned in a way that let you know he didn’t.

“either way, it’s fine like this. I was hoping to talk to you about something without prince charming overhearing. If he’s anything like my bro, he cares enough about his brother to not see things clearly.”

Sans?

“What is it?” you asked, feeling a small pit of dread in your stomach begin to mount.

“…eh, it’s, my bro’s real fond of you and I can’t say I don’t know why, so I may have been listening. You had an unfriendly encounter?” When you nodded he went on. “ya still taking those medicines for your bruises?”

“How did you know about that?”

“my bro was there when you got the stuff, it’s not a secret and i’m not stupid.”

“So you gonna make a point out of all this or you wanna just dance around the issue?” you grumbled.
“heh, if you got the dancing shoes for it, sure.” He only smirked at your withering look but then you feel it, the way he leaks his magic just enough for you to feel it and not enough for Papyrus to notice. “but I’ll get to the point if that’s what you want, what’s your beef with the mini prime lord? Ya didn’t roast him when you could.”

By mini prime lord you guessed you was talking about Sans.

“That’s tasteless,” you scoff, meeting his magic with your own, unwilling to let his subtle manipulations of the environment persist. You remember how Stretch is a swapped version of Sans and hope that doesn’t mean Stretch is angling for an unfriendly encounter of his own. “What went down was between two people and it’s not my business to air the dirty laundry for everyone to see. If I wanted you to know about it I would have brought it up.”

Then Stretch blinked, pulling back his magic and straightening. There was surprise in his eye lights. “you won?”

You almost slipped out of your seat from the shock in his voice. “What the hell is that look for?” you hissed, pulling yourself up. “What did you think, that he beat me up and then threatened me to keep quiet about it or something?” At the blank look on Stretch’s face you realize that’s exactly what Stretch was suspecting. “Seriously, Stretch? I look like that much of a pushover to you?”

“…you’re so tiny though, and you were hurt while he wasn’t.”

The magic has faded but the sour taste in your mouth still rolled, so you absently patted down your pockets looking for something to suck on. You found another cotton candy pink stick of rock candy and pulled it free from it’s wrapper. With the candy on your tongue you find it easier to hide your pout.

“I’m not small.”

“…tiny.”

“Shut up. I’m full sized for a human, you’re all just taller than average. And my height doesn’t have anything to do with my ability to hold my own. The guy just didn’t believe me when I said I wasn’t out to hurt him or his brother.”

“so the encounter…?”

“A few bruises are far from the worst thing I’ve ever had to endure in my life, and they’re a small price to pay if it gets us all on the same page. Don’t worry about it, I can hold my own when it comes to a fight. You remember what they said the Embassy was used for before the monsters came topside?”

Stretch huffed. “still, if Sans is anything like me, he’s not a pushover. he’s what we’d call boss level.”

With a laugh you popped the rock candy free and tapped it against your bottom lip. “I’m pretty sure I could also hold my own against you. It’s what they designed us for and I may be a bit rusty, but I’m far from the hopeless case you seem to see me as.”

Stretched just laughed, eye lights dropping to the rock candy on your lips, watching as you bounced it absently before sucking on it again. He tilted his head into his hand, leaning further across the table.

“i doubt that last bit, but I’ll let you keep your delusions, honey.”
“You think I’m hopeless?”

“utterly.”

With your back molars you broke off a chunk of candy, tasting the sugar as Stretch let his magic roll free once more. You didn’t miss how he had shifted in his seat and was leaning further across the table, shoulders set in a challenging angle.

“Don’t push it, buddy, you can’t intimidate me that easily.”

“who said I was trying to intimidate you?” he teased, leaning closer.

You push your magic against his, buffering his advance. Absently you twirled the candy in your mouth, playing with the wooden end before dragging it free so that when you enunciate your words they’re clear with no possibility of mistaking them.

“You can’t fool me, I can see right through you, Skeleton.”

And there’s a moment when you feel the swell of victory, you know you’ve won, because his magic pulls back and his face tints with a honey orange color to match his eye lights. He’s watching you, eyes on your teeth as you show them off in a smile that knows better.

But Stretch doesn’t pull back, he’s still too close and staring at you with his magic subdued but still present, and the victory is short lived as something hardens in his eye lights and he pulls his magic back, only for Papyrus to step in.

“PLAYING A NEW GAME? WHAT ARE YOU BOTH DOING?”

Papyrus is directly behind you and before you could look up or turn around he dropped his arms around your shoulder to lean over you, not so much that it’s uncomfortable, but enough that it distracts you from Stretch.

“Hey, I can’t see,” you laughed as his scarf fell down in front of your face.

You thought Papyrus would move right away but he lingered over you a moment more before pulling his arms back and stepping to the side, dragging his scarf with him. When you were able to look up at long last you expected to see his usual smile but this time around, the grin was a bit tighter and his eye lights were dimmer…at Stretch.

But maybe you imagined it because then he blink over at you and the grin was blinding. “I MADE SOME MORE NEW FRIENDS, SAID I WAS TRENDING. I WASN’T GONE TOO LONG WAS I?”

“Nah, course not, I’m glad you had a good time. You really brightened up their day.”

“speaking of day…” Stretch pointed absent like up at a wall clock. You double checked your phone and groaned.

“Still more than fifteen minutes to go.”

“WE CAN START HEADING OVER THAT WAY. DO YOU NEED TO DO ANYTHING ELSE BEFORE WE START HEADING OUT?”

You pocketed your phone and stood, shaking your legs out a bit before nodding. “I’ll use the bathroom and meet you back out here in like three minutes. Don’t leave without me.”
“WOULD NEVER DREAM OF IT!”

After using the bathroom you stepped outside, noticing Stretch and Papyrus standing on opposite sides of the door, and in Stretch’s mouth there was an unlit cigarette. He grinned when he caught you looking and shrugged.

“They wouldn’t let me have a lighter.”

“Good, those things are gross.”

“No lungs, honey.”

“I meant for everyone else who has to breath in the smoke. It’s bad for the rest of us.”

“Alright then, you got it, boss.”

With a half hearted eye roll you turned down the street with a skeleton on either side and made your way down to the bar. The sign said it was open even though it was still a couple of minutes before four. When you tried the door, it came open, unlocked.

Papyrus held it open for you while you pulled up your map, zooming in until all you could see was the layout of the building you were stepping into. The red Sans dot was close, so close….

“Hey there folks, just about ready to get serving if ya can give us a few spare minutes.”

You looked up, feeling something off about the voice and how it range low and thin in your mind. But then you saw him and realized why.

The Sans dubbed ‘Red’ was behind the bar, putting bottles away like it was a familiar chore. He straightened and you saw the thick cigar pinched between his teeth, the fur collar of his hooded jacket, and the red glow from his dancing eye lights.

And you didn’t know what to expect when he saw you, but you were still surprised.

His grin stretched wider at the sight of you all.

“Well, it took you guys long enough.”

Chapter End Notes

Stretch deserves to have his moments too. Someone might have picked up on his interest and not...appreciated it as much, but nothing they can say to that! Papyrus is a good egg, after all.

You thought I was excited about getting Blue and Papyrus to flirt then honey are you in for a storm with what's going to happen next. I'm giddy. Red is going to be a riot. I love writing him so much. He's too much fun.

Sorry this came out later than I had planned for it, getting sick and sleeping all morning away in bed will do that to you.
The Sans behind the counter grinned and it made the cigar in his mouth jump up, smoking slightly. In the light of his one gold tooth, a canine, flashed.

“You look a little lost there, sweetheart. It a little overwhelming to come face to face with a superior skeleton or what?” He winked and braced against the counter, leaning slightly.

“You look a lot less shocked than we were anticipating,” you answered first.

“Oh trust me, babe, this is my shocked face. I’m just not surprised. I knew someone would be sending out a suit of some sort to round us up, but I didn’t think I’d get this lucky.” He whistled low and made a show of dragging his eye lights up your form from toe to top. “What a looker! You got a name babe or can I call you mine?”

Ever the gentleman, Papyrus stiffened from beside you and Stretch bit hard down on the edge of his unlit cigarette. You felt their irritation for what it was and scrambled for something to say before the situation got worse.

You hastily blurted out your name. “Also, this is Stretch and-”

“Yeah I know who the two dudes are. This one over here ain’t the most subtle thing is he? If you were trying to be sneaky maybe don’t stop for a photoshoot every half hour. It’s a trending topic Mr. Monster Mascot.” Red laughed but it was a cheerful sort of sound. Then he looked over at Stretch. “You missing a light or something there, pal?”

“Sorry, but you’re not surprised about the whole topside situation? The brand new world situation?” you cut in before Stretch could answer. Each one of Red’s words was barbed and hooked, testing for a bite.

“That’s some crazy stuff to be sure, but not nearly as crazy as you. I mean wow! Aside from being drop dead gorgeous what do you do for a living? No lemme guess, you look…yeah, I’d say you’re a boxer… cause you’re a knockout.”


“Harsh words from a hero among monsters. What, no kind words unless I’m one of your loyal fans? Don’t get too out of shape, funny bones, I ‘aint the type to be confused for long. Yeah, situation is crazy. Do I care? Not really.” He shrugged.

“You don’t have any questions for us?” you asked.

“Oh, for you, sweetheart, I’ve got tons. First off, what’s your number?”

“Red?” a new voice interjected. The wider skeleton stiffened and a flush started to creep along the bridge of his skull. “Red, you better not be scaring off my customers. What are you yammering so
much about?” And then from behind the counter in the kitchen an older woman with salt colored hair and deep wrinkles around her eyes walked out, squinting at the scene until her glasses were in place. When she saw the guests her smile widened and Red’s face turned a darker shade.

“Aw, quit it Ma, I was chatting up a babe.”

“Ma?”

“Shut up, Red, you were embarrassing yourself. Welcome, sweet things, it’s so good to see more monsters in town. And what a darling you have here with you. You need help finding a table or menu?”

“They ain’t here for the food or music, old lady, we were talking.”

“I’d actually love to go for a drink but I won’t lie, we were chatting with your…son here.”

Red blustered and made a pained sound as the old woman cackled and held her stomach to keep herself from pitching too far forward in laughter.

“It ain’t funny Ma, j-no, she ain’t my real ma, that’s just what we all call her around here, especially the staff. You think she really would be my mother knowing what ya do?”

“A family is just made out of love, plus, I’ve seen worse,” you answered, watching the woman named Ma and Red to see who would speak next. Beside you, Stretch was chuckling darkly while Papyrus watched on without speaking.

“Red, do your job and get them a seat. You know we won’t be busy for another half hour. Take it to settle them in. And—” she grabbed Red by the shoulder and even though he was taller, wider, and likely stronger than the frail old woman, he seemed to sweat from her touch. “Go easy on the free drinks. You’re close to your limit.”

“That won’t be a problem, I’m paying for it all. Three house specials if you would,” you interrupted, tossing the company card onto the counter. Ma eyed it and then picked up the plastic to stick into a shot glass on the side with a hum of approval. “But I’d appreciate the company, even if it’s forced.”

Red chuckled, recovering some of his bravado. “You don’t have to hold anything against me, unless you want to, babe, ow! Ma? I’m working.”

“You’re embarrassing yourself. Get them their drinks.”

It was almost endearing to watch Red interact with his boss. He was an intimidating looking monster with his red eye lights, gold tooth, and impressive girth, but it seemed like there wasn’t as much bark behind his bite if the way he acted with the old woman was anything to go by. He said she wasn’t his mom, and yeah that was obvious, but based off the way they acted around each other, it was clear they were close.

“…here.”

You turned at the sound of Stretch’s voice and saw that he had a table towards the back corner already picked out. Papyrus got there first and pulled out a chair for you before he and Stretch followed you by sliding into the booth. Red came around with three different drinks, two in his hands, the third levitating with magic. He set all three down on the table and then pushed a different one each of your ways.
“We got a nice Zombie over here for sweetheart, a John Collins for the Orange eyesore and buddy here gets a nice Ice Pick. Cheers, ya’ll.”

Papyrus’ drink was a bright tangerine color and you could smell the sweet tea from where you sat, but Papyrus hesitated to touch it. Underneath the table you reached for his hand to get his attention and mouthed, ‘you don’t have to drink it’ before facing Red. Underneath the table Papyrus held onto your hand.

“i’m not willing to believe you just woke up one day in this place and didn’t have any questions so,” Stretch took his John Collins and tipped it back, downing the entire drink in one go, “wanna cut the act and answer the questions we got for ya?”

“Yeah, but only if you answer mine,” Red said, turning to you. “Like how are you not exhausted? You’ve been running through my head all day.”

Stretch scoffed and Papyrus groaned.

“THAT’S REALLY UNSEEMLY BEHAVIOR AND NOT THE WAY TO TALK TO A LADY.”

“According to you mr. purity ring, but don’t tell me that’s the only reason you came all the way out here was to correct a little bad language. You had an agenda or what?”

“We had an agenda, yeah,” you interrupt before either Stretch or Papyrus could say something snappy. “You and your brother are both unregistered and, frankly, unknown monsters from a different world. Part of the job is to feel you out and make a call based on that.”

“Oh, ya came all the way out here to feel me up and out? So tell me, like what you see?”

“Well I don’t think you’re crazy unhinged or hell bent on killing humans, so that’s a plus. You came from a rougher timeline, some were suspecting that would make you harder to work with.”

“He’s plenty hard to work with as he is!” Ma’s voice rang out from somewhere unseen, dissolving into cackles. Red sank a bit in his seat.

“But,” you interjected quickly, “I know appearances can be deceiving. Who’s to say this isn’t some elaborate sham, an attempt to play at our pity? I don’t know you, not really. What assurance can you offer me that you’re not as dangerous as a wild card?”

“Oh, sweetheart I’m hella dangerous, but that don’t mean I’m mean. What about these two boneheads, you don’t think they’re dangerous? Sure they are, but they wouldn’t hurt a sweet thing like you would they? What’s it take to believe them?”

“well for one thing, we complied with the local and regional authorities when they came, we didn’t tease or mock them,” Stretch said.

“Your loss,” Red snorted. “Don’t tell me you’re offended, string bean.”

Stretch scowled but then reached across the table to Papyrus’ untouched drink and grabbed it. Like his first one, he knocked it back in one go. Somehow the cigarette still dangled from his teeth, surviving two different drinks.

You noticed a flush beginning across the front of Stretch’s skull and felt a familiar fear roll through you when you realized he was probably a lightweight.

“Are you curious about the event that brought you and your brother to this world at least?” you
asked.

“If you’re willing to shed some light on that, it’d be appreciated.”

At least he seemed willing to listen, so you took a sip from your drink before beginning. “Okay, then to begin with, in this world the monsters have magic and the humans, like Ma, are just human, no magic of their own right?” When Red nodded you went on. “But it’s a sort of secret that there were a number of kids out there with the ability to use magic like so.”

You snapped and the end of Stretch’s cigarette lit up with a burst of red flame. Red’s eye lights shrunk, growing bright as he watched Stretch pull the cigarette out and breath out.

“i thought you said smoking was bad for the people around me?” Stretch said.

You breathed deep and blew out the smoke that had filled your mouth. “It’s not pleasant but I’ll survive it. Don’t make it a habit and put it out of the other customers show up.” You fixed your eyes back on Red and managed a smile. “There’s not a lot of us, but one of those kids was someone who could apparently open tears in space and time. He was pulling other boss type monsters to our world from other dimensions.”

“What?” Red asked, eyes stuck on you.

“Don’t know that part exactly. We’re in the process of tracking him down and bringing him back before he can make too much more of a mess. Maybe you and your brother aren’t terrible, but who’s to say the next set are any better?”

Red didn’t say anything in response right away, leaving you enough time to pick at your drink. It was a nice mix, and the base was an honest whiskey but like anything else made with alcohol, you’d be two barrels in before you even started to feel a buzz. When you set the glass down Red was still staring.

“So, you got a little magic in you, babe, is that right?”

“Technically, all human souls are made out of concentrated magic, I’m just able to tap into it. But yeah, I’m able to set things on fire with magic and move things with my mind and all that fun stuff.”

Red’s smile stretched from something playful and friendly to sharp and cunning. “Well hot damn, if that don’t beat all. I’m a little warm under the collar myself. Is that your doing?”

“and that’s the gist of it,” Stretch sighed. “hon, is this enough or does papyrus have to beat him up in a fight?”

Papyrus scoffed. “I WOULD NEVER ENGAGE IN UNFAIR COMBAT WITH THE PROVIDER OF OUR FOOD AND DRINK. THERE’S NO SPORT IN THAT. A PUZZLE ON THE OTHER HAND WOULD BE MORE THAN-”

“That’s not necessary,” Red interrupted with a laugh, “and trust me, I was really tempted with the offer, but it won’t work. I’m staying put here with Ma and the town. We got business here.”

“so you’re above the law?” Stretch scoffed. He leaned back in his seat, working the end of his cigarette with his teeth before pulling it free to breath out the smoke, noticeably away from your direction, before tapping the ash into his empty class. “figures.”

Red laughed, but it wasn’t a funny sound. “See it that way if you want to, buddy, but I got my own
set of rules to live by. Me and my bro are doing right by the law in this town and we ain’t making
trouble for nobody that don’t make trouble for us, Ma will vouch for that, so no reason to lose
sleep over me.” He glanced your way at that last line and winked.

“YOU STILL NEED TO BE REGISTERED. EVEN IF YOU’RE NOT MOVING AROUND OR
BREAKING THE LAW, YOU STILL NEED TO REGISTER AS A CITIZEN AND SWEAR TO
THE MONSTER’S LAWS. ITS IMPORTANT YOU LEARN THOSE IF YOU PLAN ON
LIVING AMONG HUMANS. THEY’RE NOT JUST SMALLER MONSTERS, THEY’RE
MORE COMPLEX WITH THEIR OWN LAWS AND RULES YOU NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT.”

“Fine, I can do something like that on my next day off-”

“You don’t get days off!” Ma shouted from the kitchen.

“On my next free morning or whenever the internet opens. You don’t gotta slap me in irons for
that.” Red shifted in his seat, leaning closer to you, skeleton hand inching towards yours. “But if ya
like playing with handcuffs we could make it work.”

Across the table Papyrus reached and shoved Red back into his seat, leaving his arm in the air to
separate you from Red.

“THAT’S ENOUGH OF THAT. I’M STARTING TO THINK IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR
EVERYONE IF WE LEFT YOU HERE AND MOVED ON WITH OUR SEARCH. SOMEONE
ELSE CAN MAKE SURE YOU’RE KEPT IN CHECK.”

“i’m with string bean on this one, we’re better off as we are now,”

“Wait, wait, with you?” Red pointed to you and then himself. “Like, with you. You’re the
ringleader of this operation?”

“ Barely. I don’t call any shots, I’m just good at finding people and have the ability to follow orders
even if my track record would have you believe otherwise. I’m the field agent checking to make
sure the new arrivals aren’t an issue.”

“we live on a bus, you wouldn’t like it,” Stretch said.

“Ooh, close quarters, you’re saying?”

Red didn’t have eyebrows but the bone structure above his brows lifted and wiggled the way
someone would wiggle their eyebrows. It was almost funny enough to make you laugh, but you
catched yourself on a grin and bit your lip to keep him from noticing.

The door to the outside opened and a couple of humans entered, greeting Ma behind the counter
and then calling out to Red who returned the greeting, addressing each human by name. Behind
them trailed a group of four that waved nonchalantly but didn’t say anything.

No one seemed upset, surprised, or off put by Red’s presence and you felt like there was a reason
for that. In spite of whatever terrible world he had come from, Red really wasn’t a bad guy. But
you still weren’t sure what type of guy he was. Were all his comments a cheap smokescreen for
something else? He was funny, but…what else was there?

You want to roll out your magic and wash it over him, feeling him out, learning about him the
same way you did with the others. He would feel it, but he wouldn’t know what it meant. How
would he react? Was it worth the risk?
“Hey, Red?”

“Yeah, sweetie?” His grin came easy.

“Why the name Red? Why not Sans, since that is your real name, isn’t it?”

He shrugged easily. “It was my bro’s idea to hide out identities when we didn’t know what had happened. We showed up topside not knowing anyone, not seeing any monsters, and then it’s right there, bam, the sky with a moon in it and a million damn perfect starts too far to reach. We both freaked hard, but bro won’t admit to that, and then we wound up stumbling into this town. This led to that, Ma took us both in and yelled at us to work for the room we’re borrowing, and we get by alright. Not a lot of monsters pass through, but all the human folk living here are real nice and that’s just fine.”

“You sound content.”

“I am. You walked in an’ made great turn into perfect, so who am I to complain?”

“What of your brother who patrols the perimeter of this town? What does he think of the human world?” Papyrus asked.

“Boss thinks this place is the diggs but it’s too soft so he needs to do what he can to be its best so he going on this patrols, more out of habit than need.”

And there it is.

The lie.

It was something in the way he spoke, not in his tone or his voice or even his magic, but something mixed in underneath all those things. You feel it in your gut and you know that there is more to the story than what Red is telling you.

“What does he patrol for?” you asked, watching him closer. As you look for it, you spot the bead of magic on the back of his skull.

“Eh, that’s just the way my brother is sometimes.” A few more patrons came in and waved to Red and Ma, distracting him more than before. “He just likes to worry and do what he can. He’s not violent though, and he don’t have stuff to set up none of his favorite traps. Ma got mad when he asked so that’s out.”

“He’s not dangerous?” You watched him closer. “But what about that thing you said earlier? I thought you were all dangerous.”

It wasn’t anything to get worked up over, but you could see it. Something had unsettled Red and it was something to do with his brother. Edge.

“You done with your drinks or are you still working on them, sunshine?” Ma shouted from the bar. A few patrons laughed and Red chuckled along with them, wiping the sweat off his brow.

“I’m coming, Ma!” Red called back. He reached for all three empty glasses and picked them up. “You three need any refills or sides, feel free to holler. Live music starts in twenty if you wanna stay for that.” His eyes zeroed in on you and the nervousness was completely gone. “And then there’s line dancing if you’re up for that, sweetheart.”

“Please no, it’s my least favorite type of dancing,” you blurt out before you realize that’s too much
information. It makes Red laugh though.

“We can have other dances too, don’t worry, babe.”

Then he was gone.

“WHAT DO WE DO NOW?” Papyrus asked. “DO WE TRY TO BRING THEM IN WITH US USING FORCE OR CAN WE REALLY LEAVE THEM BEHIND? DO YOU THINK THEY’RE TROUBLE?”

Stretch frowned, swallowing his cigarette and then shaking his head. “is this one trouble? yeah, not the sort of trouble you throw in jail. he’s just a creep. i say we leave him, better off with less baggage to hold us down.”

“BUT WHAT ABOUT WHAT THE EMBASSY WANTS?”

Both Papyrus and Stretch turned to look at you, expecting an answer. It made something that felt like a headache start to throb towards the back of your skull. “I have a phone, I’ll step out and give them a call. You two stay here and don’t move until I get back. If you need to order something on my card, maybe something without booze in it,” you say the last part looking at Papyrus then Stretch—who was still flushed in the face.

And then you step out before either can say anything in regards to your plan. You have the number on speed dial and it rings before you even find the back exit that fillers out into the alleyway. The dumpsters are to your left so you turn right and absently walk while your call transfers.

Click

“SevenA, you have an update for me.” It wasn’t a question when it came from Hightower. You relayed what you knew and what had happened, listening for a reaction on the other end of the line. After you were finished it was quiet for a while.

Then

“It’s your call. Have them register at the least, but if you feel they’re stable in their setting you can move on. The situation may change. FourB has not been brought in yet and there is no guarantee he doesn’t pull another set of monsters out tomorrow that are worse than Red or Papyrus.”

“That’s all you got to say?”

“You have final call on this case.”

And it was hard to hear those words from Hightower, a man who existed as part boogyman part father throughout your developing years. He always told you what to do and later in life you always fought him on it.

“We’re staying the night here, we’ll check out their story to see if it holds and then we’ll move on. That’ll be all.”

You end the call before he can say anything more and it’s like a string you had been dangling on had snapped. You feel like free falling for a minute before you remember where you are.

It’s dim outside, as twilight paints the sky in impressive shades of purple red and blue, but the sky never goes ‘out’ on you. There are always stars, or the sun, or the moon to look up at. The sky isn’t nearly as empty or dark as some other things.
For a minute longer you lean against the wall and watch the sky turn color.

When the door finally opens on it’s own you’re almost as surprised to see Red there as he is to see you. He has a bag of trash in one hand and his magic is already lifting up the lid of the dumpster behind the pub.

“Well, look at that pretty alley cat,” he chuckled, throwing the trash over his shoulder and catching it with his magic without even looking at it. “You out here all alone doll face? No one else wanted to keep you company?”

“I had to make a call and get some air. You’re good to stay here if that’s what you want. We’ll help with getting you registered but I think me and my friends are moving on in the morning.”

Red stopped in front of you, frowning. “That’s a shame.”

You snickered at the note of displeasure in his tone. “Don’t get too broken up about it.”

“You’re a real treat and if things had been different I might have really liked to go with you on that trip to see more of the world. My and my bro have only been here a little while but we want to see more of this place, more than just what the internet has to offer.”

He sounded honest and you believed him.

“Red,” he perked up, like the minor act of saying his name out loud was a treat or something. “You mind if I use my magic on you?”

“Damn, not even a first date and already you’re getting kinky on me?” he teased.

You let yourself laugh, knowing it’s a silly thing to imply. “Nothing weird about it. I can’t check or initiate encounters like you monsters can, but I can get a feel for someone when my magic comes in contact with theirs. You…mind?”

“It ain’t gonna hurt none, is it?”

“I don’t think so, it hasn’t for anyone else and weaker monsters don’t even notice it.”

Red scratched at his chin, pretending to think it over before shrugging and throwing his hands up in mock surrender. “Ah, what can I say, you won me over babe. Magic me up.”

And as silly as he made it sound, hearing him consent was important to you. Closing your eyes you pulled out your magic and reached out to Red, easing your magic over his own and then him.

You felt a warmth from him and then the hot breath of a roar, like a lion at the tip of his pride, shaking his mane and facing down the enemies at his door. His soul was warm and proud and brave. There were plenty of nasty things all around him, but his soul wasn’t made less because of it. He was scared but also…brave.

In the midst of your probing, his soul disengaged as if by accident and you felt yours follow suit in an accidental encounter that he didn’t even seem aware of it. His eyes went fuzzy from the light of your soul and you were sure he could see something you couldn’t before he moved to spare you in such close quarters.

You pulled away and he staggered first. You caught his arms and he was heavy enough to make you move back. You hit the wall and laughed as he sagged against you a bit.
“That was you?” he breathed, honestly a bit out of breath from something other than a joke or gag. “That felt a little more like a real monster encounter than you said it would. Damn.”

“Was it unpleasant?” you worried.

“Nah, shit, that was…that was something else. I felt a little exposed there but it was nice. I liked it. Any time you ever want a free pass at someone you see me. I’d be-”

“RED, THE TWO BABOONS ARE RIGHT BEHIND ME THIS TIME AND-SANS!! WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO THAT HUMAN!?”

And before you can see who it is Red is yanked off of you and there’s a new monster keeping his back to you as he interjects himself between you and Red who stumbles on his feet.

“It wasn’t what it looked like, boss. I was keeping my hands to myself-”

“We’ve talked about this,” the taller skeleton in leather said. There was a shift to his voice as the magic left it. He wasn’t shouting or booming anymore, but he still sounded sinister. “You’re not a suave as you think you are. Back off the humans.”

“But she’s not like the other girls, and she-”

“No excuses!”

“Shit, sorry boss.”

“And the language!

“.…..Sorry, boss.”

Then Edge, who else could it be, turned around to face you. Like his brother he was a bit taller and wider than your Papyruses, decked out in spiked leather, dark platform boots, and a scar over his left eye socket. His eye lights were red just like his brother’s.

“Human, are you unharmed? I apologize for the forwardness of my brother but he does not know his place. You are safe here.”

And you know you should say something better, you know who he is and what you’re supposed to say to him, but you’re a bit stunned and all you can manage are a handful of throw away words.

You pointed to his scar and then touch yours.

“Heh, we match.”

And then as soon as the words are out of your mouth your dumb brain starts to catch up with terrible, horrifying, thoughts of, ‘oh no he’s a cute bad boy.’

Chapter End Notes

I think Red was the most fun to write and, my gosh is he a riot! I love him to bits. Edge will be a fun character in the next chapter too. He and Red have been on the
surface as long as Stretch and Blue (maybe longer) so they've been living with the humans over a month an a half and had time to grow.

Fair warning: My underfell boys not going to be exactly like they are in the other stories you might have read with them. Yes, Red is going to be a shameless, fun, flirt no matter what, but Edge is still a Papyrus underneath it all and I really like him. This is wish fulfillment so he's going to be a little more...charming.

But yeah, this was one of my favorite chapters to write so far. I hope you enjoyed.
And then as soon as the words are out of your mouth your dumb brain starts to catch up with terrible, horrifying, thoughts of, ‘oh no he’s a cute bad boy.’

Your traitor brain putters back to life and you realize how stupid you must look. Absently you combed back your hair with your fingers and then extend the other hand to shake. You offer him your name and he hesitantly takes your hand in his. There’s a size difference, more so than Papyrus or Stretch, and you realize that the same was true for Red in comparison to Sans or Blue.

These brothers were a bit bigger than average.

Esge is unflinchingly cordial as his hand wraps around your much smaller one. You noticed the distressed red leather gloves at first, then you saw how instead of hands like Stretch or Papyrus had, Edge's fingers taper off into claws he kept covered underneath the colored leather.

‘Shit, he’s hot.’

His handshake was firm but not enough to be intimidated by. “You may call me Edge,” he said. “And while I am known to be great and terrible, you do not have to worry about your safety while you are here. My brother and I are adequate security for this quaint district.”

“I'm sure. I-uh actually I was just talking to your brother and he lost his footing so you don't have to be so hard on him. Sorry for worrying you.”

Edge turned his head and scoffed. For a split second you though he was upset with you but then his eye lights narrowed in on his brother. “A cad and an actor, they are one in the same. Don't dupe the poor girl into believing you charlatan’s act. It's beneath you.” Edge then turned back to you and the glare lessened. “Don't fall for his tricks. He's far too awful to waste them on you.”

Your face was hot and growing hotter as the heart in your chest raced. You knew it could do that but it had been a while before it picked up so wickedly. And you couldn't help it even if you wanted to because this was too much to process and still believe.

Edge was the literal paragon of a badass bad boy with a heart of gold. You could feel it as his magic crackled in response to his brother. It was a brilliant glittering gold, justice with a bit of courage. You were tempted, so tempted to let your magic run wild and feel his soul like you had with Red, but you held yourself back.

To make matters worse, you remember a bit too well what sort of ‘type’ you had back when puberty was still a wild thing that chased you into the rooms of your girlfriends to gossip and giggle with stolen magazines and videos from beyond the firewalls. You remember all too well…

“Thanks but I think I'll be fine. And really, Red and I had been talking about something concerning why I'm here. You missed it but I came with another group of skeletons to meet you and your brother and see how you were settling in.”

Edge pulled back and his eye lights trailed, toe to top and then down again. “We were wondering when to expect… such visitors. My brother caught you up then?”
It took a few minutes but you summarized your encounter with Red and your position. Edge seemed befuddled by your claim to be a human with magic until you flared you own in mock warning. He then exclaimed quite loudly that if humans had been the ones to erecting the magical barrier in the first place it would only make sense for there to be humans who still had magic. Red chimed in with an easy ‘you’re the smartest, boss’ and you weren’t sure if the shorter brother was being honest or mocking in his praise.

You finally summarized your conversation with the decision to respect their wish to stay as long as they registered and legalized themselves, something you offered to help them do in the morning. You even showed him an app on your smartphone that could help them answer questions about resettlement for monsters. True, they weren’t real resettles, but considering they were still mostly new to the surface, they qualified.

Then you talked about FourB and your job in all this, offering them a spot on the team if they wanted it.

“And honestly, it’d be neater to have you both tag along with what we’re trying to do, you were the last ones to have any contact with the boy who brought you both through.”

“You’re tracking him down?” Edge asked. Your phone was still in his hand and the blue glow of the app made the color of his red eyes seem almost purple.

“It’s my responsibility, he’s one of my people. There aren’t a lot of humans who can use magic and he and I were raised the same way in the same place.”

“Do ‘ya think he ta be the type to get violent on ya?” Red asked.

You shrugged. “It’s been a while and I can’t say I sympathize with his motivations for doing what he’s doing, but I understand why he’s doing it.” At their mirrored expressions you flushed. “It’s some dark twisted mix of logic. He’s not in his right mind, I’m sure of it.”

“Sorry to hear that,” Rd huffed. “But we wouldn’t be that much help in getting ya the information you need. We didn’t have any contact with the twerp, at least not directly. We had to piece it all together with Ma’s help. Her and Mini were the ones who took us in and heard about this kid. Some blond boy band lookalike was asking about wild monsters making trouble before we even knew where we were, like he was expecting us to get violent.”

One day humanity will need you to be its hero....

...a monster to attack and go all out against

... come on, be a hero.

“Hoping for it,” you softly corrected.

It was what you were all made for, the crux of your identity. When that was taken away you managed fine in comparison to some of the others. Anger and hate had been the food you all feasted on for years. Just because it became toxic didn’t mean you could quit it so easy.

FourB…. Raven….he had been pulling Sans and Papyrus skeletons out of different timelines because they were some of the strongest boss class monsters. He was going through different worlds pulling the brothers out looking for something….a reason to be a hero.

Edge and Red looked like they could be villains but their souls were good and their kindness was true. The relationships they had fostered with Ma and the people in this town was evidence enough.
FourB…the boy who called himself Raven, must have realized his mistake after making his observations from the background. Once he realized Edge and Red were not a threat to humanity, nothing to prove himself a hero, he moved on. You wouldn’t be finding that boy anywhere close by.

“You were…. close?” Red asked, eye lights too critical as they roved over your face.

Behind him, Edge held your phone aloft but the light had long since faded. His expression was just as keen as his brother’s. He was watching and learning alongside his brother.

“Yeah, we were pretty close as kids, but like lots of others we had a falling out and left on some pretty sour notes. He won’t be happy to see me.”

“And if he has the power to pull us from our own home dimension to this one he will be formidable,” Edge added, eye lights shrinking and growing brighter.

You felt the static and crackle of his magic. All the hair on the back of your neck was standing up, and you were sure if your hair wasn’t so short and stylized, it’d be flaring and fluffing out as well in response to Edge’s magic. It was an impressive aura, one you didn’t want to get on the wrong side of to be sure. It was reflective of a…harsher forging. The way his magic felt made you think he was the produce of some world harsher than Sans or Stretch or Papyrus or Blue had ever endured.

Edge blinked and his eyes were like lasers on the ground. You realized a second later he was looking at the half step you had taken back, crunching gravel under your boot. Like a light switch the excess of his magic snapped back and the hair on your neck fell limp. The static was gone and Edge’s eyes were back to normal.

“Excuse me, I need to see Mini about a matter.” Edge took a full step back and nodded to Red. “I trust you to behave.”

“Only Ma is inside. Mini ain’t in yet.”

“That’s fine. I’ll update her and she can tell her partner the important information.”

Red picked up on his brothers unease and you read it on his face, understanding everything secondhand. “Everything okay, boss?” Red asked.

“We will talk later!”

Edge looked to you and then dropped his gaze, nodding once more before turning sharply and stomping off inside.

“Did-was it something I said?” you asked, unsure if Edge’s odd behavior was something you should have commented on or not. Was that sort of behavior odd for someone like Edge? You had only just met him but he seemed like a pretty swell sort of guy to have stalked off the way he had.

Red didn’t look like he understood it any better than you did. “You’re fine, sweetheart.” He blinked and then the ease came back into his smile as his gaze turned soft. “Damn fine if I say so myself.”

It’s enough to make you roll your eyes. “I’m not a parking ticket, thank you.”

His eyes went a little wider and his grin stretched a fraction more. “You know what sorta print you’d be on a page? Damn fine print.”
“Wow.” It wasn’t worse than Sans’ awful puns, or the dry humor of Stretch that made you want to scream, but it was close. “I think that’s enough fresh air for me. I’m heading back inside.”

“You ain’t gonna leave your number in case we need to contact you?” Red asked while jogging to catch up and walk parallel with you to the door.

“I’ll leave it with Ma and you can beg it off her once we’re gone.”

“And that’s when?”

Your hand was on the door, ready to pull it open more than just a crack. “Don’t know. Depends on how sloshed we feel in the morning. Probably not more than another day at the most.”

“I’m free in the morning. I can take you around, show you the sights.”

“We’re here for work,” you laughed in exasperation. “It’s not a vacation.”

“Not with that sort of attitude it’s not.”

Inside there were more monsters sitting around a table and a few more sitting with Stretch and Papyrus. All of them looked happy to be sitting, eating, and drinking. In the back behind the counter Edge was bent to Ma’s height, whispering something in her ear.

A pair of headlights cut across the windows outside and then they land on the far wall. You heard the car door slam even as the engine still ran and then the front door is open with an older man, dark skinned and almost as wrinkled as Ma.

“It’s the boys,” the old man rasped, already shifting to run back out. “Let ’em know he’s on his warpath tonight.”

Whatever that meant it made Ma and Edge both react. A few of the customers closest to the doors heard and went still. Then the monsters were up and scattering towards the back room, leaving their drinks and plates of food unfinished. A few humans stood up to help them pass, waving them on and watching the front. The monsters at Stretch and Papyrus’ table got up, waving for the boys to follow without offering an explanation.

“Shit,” you heard Red curse from behind. “Keep your boys quiet.”

You felt his hand on your back before he was pushing past you, to get behind the counter with Edge.

Ma slipped out and she looked mad but it wasn’t directed at any of them. When Red tried to say something she waved him back, ignoring him in favor of positioning herself to greet the guests who were to come next.

The roar of half a dozen different rumbling motors came next, sending their headlights bouncing off the far wall as they parked in front. You were familiar enough with the sound of motorcycle motors to recognize them before they were even visible.

It felt like a heartbeat and a hundred years at once, waiting to see what happened next, but then the front door opened and a middle aged man in uniform let himself in.

Police?

No, something less official. Still, he swaggered like the town was his and he was its king. Ma stood
her ground, arms crossed, face set.

You found your way to Stretch and Papyrus but didn’t sit down. You stayed standing in front of their table, one hand stretched behind your back in case you needed it. When Papyrus reached for it you decided that was the most useful you could be in the moment and squeezed back.

“Oi, where is Mini at?” the ‘security’ man asked. His hair had been blond through and through at one point but was speckled with gray and faded, though he didn’t look like he could be much older than his late thirties. His hazel eyes were angry when they fell on Ma. “Where is she, old bag?”

“She’s at home or out doing as she pleased, she’s my wife, not my slave,” Ma snapped. “What are you here for Steven?”

In response Steven let his lip curl. “You said you were through with the monster halfway house. We’ve taken in our quota of monsters and agreed-”

“You agreed,” Ma cut him off.

“We agreed to quit it. There ain’t no more compensation coming in through so we ain’t gonna ta waste our resources on the odd numbers. What’s this I hear about Mini taking in two extra monsters?”

“I’ve heard no such thing,” Ma answered icily.

“My boys saw it, she took two of ’ems in.”

Ma didn’t flinch or back down as Steven took a heavy step forward. Behind him there were four other men and a fifth lingered outside, watching the bikes. When she didn’t flinch Steven made a displeased sound. One of the men moved forward to grab the nearest table and turn it over, sending glass and plates crashing.

“YOU BULLY.” Edge was out from behind the counter, stalking forward only for Ma to hold him back. Edge looked near murderous and his magic was high pitched static in the air. “YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO DESTROY ANOTHER’S PROPERTY,” Edge shouted, lacing his words with magic again. It made your head ring.

“We didn’t do a thing. Clumsy magic in the building.” Steven smirked and then reached for something on his belt and turned it around. It was blocky with a small screen that displayed readings. “Look at that, crazy magic making this place unsafe.”

“Edge,” Ma hissed. “I’ve got this. Go back with your brother.”

“IT-” Edge growled and forced himself to take a step backwards. “It’s not right what he’s doing. That’s unlawful.”

“I’m the one with the badge here, freak,” Steven barked. “You have a problem, feel free to start something and see how fast we shut this shit show down and cart your asses off.”

There was an eagerness to Steven’s taunting and you recognized it too well. You remembered Sans and how he taunted you, wanting you to fight back. Steven knew that if Edge started anything it would be more than just him who suffered for it. Monster on human violence was almost unheard of for a reason.

It looked like it killed him but Edge backed away. His magic was still wild and angry, but he rolled it in the same way a dog owner subdued his wild mutts. Ma looked just as pained as Edge but she
didn’t move or back down, keeping him behind her.

So far Steven was too wrapped up with what was in front of him to notice Papyrus or Stretch, but that wouldn’t last forever with the goons behind him. Maybe you were just trying to justify yourself, but you had less to lose if you moved before he noticed you.

So you did.

Ma flinched but the heels of your boots on the hardwood were louder than his angry breathing, drawing Steven’s face your way. Then he saw where you came from and who was behind you, twisting his face even more.

“Even more freaks?”

“We’re tourists here, but what’s your excuse, coming in here and smashing tables like you don’t think there are perfectly sane witnesses in the room?” You don’t bother to hide your sneer. “Small fish in a smaller pond; that doesn’t mean we’ll excuse your hateful rhetoric.”

You stepped out in front of Ma and ignored her hissing to get back. You had a lot less to lose and you doubted Steven could even touch what you were afraid of losing. The advance made Steven’s face contort.

“I’m the law around here. You know who my brother is? The police chief! He’s not going to listen to you over me.”

“I don’t care.” You sniffed dramatically and popped your hip, resting your hand there. “I’m not someone you can touch so don’t think you can scare me with threats.”

He pulled a gun out of his belt and smiled. “This look like a threat to you, sweetie? I’m legal to carry in this town and protect my people from the invaders.”

Ma reached for your arm but you didn’t let her pull you back. You were stronger than her and you weren’t afraid of him or his gun. You were afraid of him winning.

“You’re a joke.”

Steven’s smile slipped and his lip twitched. You shook Ma off and took two more steps closer, close enough for him to reach out and hit you if he felt like it. He stepped back and brought the gun up in front of him.

“You’re advancing on me. I’m defending myself here. Don’t come any closer. I’ve warned you.”

He almost sounded excited and you knew why. He wanted a reason. How many others were there out there in the world with a fraction of power, wanting to be justified in their violence.

You bent down and pressed your forehead up against the barrel of the gun and looked up through your lashes. If he twitched to pull the trigger you knew, you’d be faster, and his gun would never have the chance to go off. You weren’t in any real danger, but letting him go, letting his rhetoric persist…now that was dangerous.

“Go for it or are you too scared to see what happens next when you blow someone’s brains out? Maybe you’re too scared to smell it, all that gore and gray matter splattered over your face and hand, at this rang you’d probably taste it too,” you said, licking your lips.

You pressed against his gun with your forehead and he backed up to keep his arm straight. Around him the other bikers have taken a step or two back on their own. Some looked more nervous than
“You think this is a joke?”

“Nah, the only joke here is you.”

You see him move but don’t bother to avoid it. He reeled and used the side of his gun to crash against your face in a pistol-whip. Faster than that, you pulled back just enough and his body followed the momentum of his arm, his shoulder passed in front of you, moving in slow motion. It was easy enough to reach out with your heel and hook it behind his ankle. You tugged and he went down.

The gun clattered to the ground and you heard several of the men he came in with move outside, running or just getting out of the way you can’t be sure. You stepped over his body before he could stand up and kick his gun outside.

A different gun raised parallel with your face and you look straight down the barrel as the man’s hands get stuck behind your blue magic. He tried to pull the trigger but you wouldn’t let him. As Steven rolled to get his feet under him you felt the sweet tang in your mouth as your magic surged. The man’s gun turned red in the center, then orange, and finally white. He screamed and dropped his melting gun in time to save his fingers.

You heard Steven run for the door along with several of the others.

It was the perfect opportunity to let them go. To be better than the bullies. To be a badass hero. To be good.

But.

You followed them out, ignoring Papyrus or Stretch calling your name. One of the men didn’t bother being subtle, he just broke into a dead run for his bike at the far end and crashed into it, eager to climb into the seat.

“We’ll be back for the monsters! This is illegal intimidation and-”

You used your blue magic to smack the blocky electronic reader out of Steven’s hand. It landed face up, reading ‘zero monster magic’ in the area. Something he only just realized when he saw it in the dirt.

“You may be stacking some impressive credentials but I bet mine are bigger,” you drawled, a bit too in love with the way he was watching you with eyes full of fear. “You wanna see who comes out on top between one of those secret magic using humans the government keeps hush hush or a no named gut punch from the armpit of this town?”

“Wha-” he couldn’t even finish making the words.

“We’ll be back,” one of the men behind him cried, already on his bike.

“No you won’t.” Your magic washed over all of them and you knew their names, you knew their faces, and for as long as you cared, you’d know where they were on a map if you went looking. “You’re not going to try anything here ever again, not against Ma, not against the monsters, not against me either. Small fish in a smaller pond, welcome to the ocean.”

And with your magic over them you could feel the ones who believed you and the ones who were too angry for logic. It wasn’t worth it, and maybe they knew it, but Steven and two of the other
five guys were too far gone to understand that. It made you angry, but you couldn’t claim to be surprised.

“Let’s go,” one of them shouted before ripping out of the parking lot. You let him. One by one the others left, Steven being the last to exit.

And it was like coming down from a high as your magic rolled back and you had to swallow it down. There was no other outlet for it and that just…. sucked so bad. You were hungry for it. After years being bred for violence, to be teased with it and then denied left you feeling so irritated.

You heard your name and turned to see Papyrus there. He was closer than he should have been with all your senses on high alert, or maybe that was a skill of his you didn’t know about.

He reached for you and on reflex you flinched away from his touch.

*Irritated?*

*Hungry?*

*Angry?*

Too rotten to touch. You wanted to fight and be cruel and that wasn’t a lie. You wanted to unleash on another human who couldn’t even measure up to you! You hadn’t been good, you hadn’t been-

Papyrus reached for you again and this time you were too panicked to flinch. He tugged you to him and pet back your hair. It was free and wild and-oh, your magic had made it like that. With a deep breath you swallowed down what you could of your magic and your rage. Papyrus kept stroking back your hair, following the curve of your skull. It was like he was petting an angry cat until it calmed.

“I’m sorry.”

His hand stopped and he pulled back. “WHY?” he asked, eyes wide and confused. “YOU WERE PROTECTING US. IF ANYONE SHOULD BE SORRY IT SHOULD BE US. WE-I COULDN’T DO ANYTHING AGAINST HIM. AS A MONSTER AND THE MASCOT I COULDN’T DO ANYTHING TO PROTECT YOU IN THAT SITUATION. YOU DID WHAT I COULDN’T.”

“I didn’t scare you?”

“I WAS TERRIBLY FRIGHTENED!” Papyrus shouted, sounding almost angry. “YOU COULD HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY HURT AND I HAD TO WATCH THAT. YOU’RE STRONG AND BRAVER THAN THAT BULLY BUT YOU SHOULDN’T NEED TO BE.”

“I wasn’t being brave,” you admitted, dropping your eyes and your voice.

“YOU WERE MY HERO.”

You felt your insides turned to mush at his words. Your knees wobbled and the heat on your face spread up to your ears. When you looked up, jaw slack and eyes wide, Papyrus had the biggest smile on his face and eyes filled with honesty. He meant it.

It…why did you feel like crying? There was a knot in your throat that kept you from speaking.

Oh…. *oh!*

You didn’t know what to say or even if you could make words he would be able to understand, so
you just breathed deeply and rubbed at your face with the heels of your palms, hoping the tears weren’t really there to betray how shook you were from a few simple words.

“…guys?!”

Papyrus turned and you looked up to see Stretch in the doorway, looking stricken. It made Papyrus stiffen while something rolled in your gut. The night’s fuckery wasn’t done with you yet.

“What?” you forced out. The word sound cracked and broken but it was sufficient.

“…it’s sans and blue."

The pit in your gut rolled.

Chapter End Notes

I am so sorry this came out late!!! I didn't get home from work until late and then things happened. I had this ready, but I just suck when it comes to getting to the computer/internet. But here is the chapter and look at that—there’s some plot. Plus a moment of reader being a badass because I wish I was a badass. More Edge and Red in the next chapter for sure. Hopefully Sans and Blue are okay~

After this there are three chapters left before the first of 6 arcs is finished: Sunshine Riptide.

Fav quotes from Jaylene : YISSSSSSSSSSSSSS & EDGE IS CURRENTLY MY FAVE, THANKS. YOU'RE THE WORST
Sans and Blue?

A few things fell into place in your mind.

Like, the reason that, even after twilight, the pair of them hadn’t found the rest of the group to report in. Also, the fact that Edge hadn’t mentioned seeing either of them during your conversation earlier was another of those things. You didn’t doubt Sans’ or Blue's abilities, but if they had encountered a group of racist humans…would they have held back and taken the punishment, escaped, or fight back?

You knew the answer for Sans even though you wished you didn’t. You hadn’t even been aggressive and he was ready to throw down.

Ma closed Whiskey Stops and sent everyone home with doggy bags and a promise to open early tomorrow. Too many of the patrons seemed to understand her situation and gave her an encouraging word, pat, or hug before paying and leaving.

Edge and Red looked concerned but not worried, Ma looked frazzled, and Stretch….he looked like he needed another couple of cigarettes to take the edge off his anxiety. No one could move fast enough for him and what was worse was that he couldn’t shortcut to a place he had never been before, so he had to slow down and follow Ma and her boys to their house on the edge of town.

The house had a long driveway, a stretching front yard, and a worried older woman in the doorway watching for the rest of her family to come home.

“Mini,” Edge and Red called out, jogging up while Ma followed at a slower pace. You weren’t sure, but you worried that her age was making things difficult for her.

Edge grabbed at Mini’s arms and looked her over, only sighing in relief once he had concluded she was fine. Red blinked out and short cut into the house, skipping the front door and the woman standing in it.

“We got the rest of the tourists,” Ma called out loudly. “I’ll tell you about the Steven problem once we’re inside with something stronger than tea.”

Once Ma was close enough she kissed her wife on the side of her face and then headed in, pulling Mini along with her. Stretch was the first of you in, followed closely by Papyrus, and ending with you. You paused on the threshold but then pushed yourself to move, finally stepping over it.

The house wasn’t huge, but it was large enough. The hallway filtered into an open living room that spilled into an open kitchen. At the island counter on two stools a pair of skeletons sat, sipping tea and coffee.

“blue!” Papyrus exclaimed, rushing forward ahead of the others. His brother turned at the sound and smiled brightly, making the bandage patch on his face stretch up.

You froze in your tracks as you watched Papyrus greet Sans and everyone else make some sort of greeting. Ma and Mini were worried about Edge and Red, or rather how they felt after the hectic
night, and each set of brothers fussed over one another. It took a moment more before you realized you had to make your legs move if you wanted to enter a circle of conversation.

Stretch turned away from Blue and glared over at Sans who looked bored and untouched. Papyrus fretted at his brother’s shoulder.

“you were fighting?”

Sans looked away. “that’s not how he got hurt. i didn’t land a single hit.”

“not for lack of trying, i’m sure,” Stretch hissed.

“BROTHER, WHAT WERE YOU AND BLUE HAVING A DISAGREEMENT OVER?”

That’s when Blueberry noticed you in the kitchen, hovering at the edge. His eyes started to brighten, a sign of joy, before he noticed the way you held yourself. Something must have made him worry since he slipped off the stool and brushed past the others to reach you, ignoring Papyrus and Sans’ lack of conversation.

You heard him call your name and looked up. “ARE YOU OKAY, WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?”

The question was so out of place it made your brain flatline for a split second. Blueberry…was asking about you? He was worried about you? There wasn’t a scratch on you. He was the one with a bandage on his face but he was still concerned about your welfare first.

It made your heart pinch.

You didn’t deserve his kindness or his concern. You wished you were, but you knew better and weren’t in the habit of lying to yourself.

He stopped right in front of you, fingers twitching but hands still, unwilling to touch you without your explicit consent for some reason. There was a hesitation there along with his worry. Instead, you rested the flat of your hand just under his bandage.

“Me? What are you doing worrying about a person who doesn’t have a scratch on her when you got something like this? What happened? Sans didn’t do it so who did?”

You knew what wounds looked like when they came from Sans.

Blueberry grumbled, skull flushing a light blue. “IT’S NOTHING. IT WAS JUST A LITTLE HIT AND I DIDN’T EVEN LOSE ANY HP FOR IT SO YOU DON’T NEED TO WORRY. NO MAGICAL DAMAGE AT ALL!”

“Does that mean it was a human who did this to you?”

Blueberry hesitated and then looked away before nodding. “WE DIDN’T FIGHT BACK THOUGH. AND THEY LEFT AFTER MINI SHOWED UP. SHE SAID SHE WOULDN’T GET IN TROUBLE FOR IT BUT-UM, I’M SORRY WE DIDN’T FIND YOU SOONER.” Blueberry turned back to look at his brother and dropped his head. “I EVEN FORGOT TO CALL, SORRY.”

“…it’s fine, anyone can forget something like that in the heat of the moment…we were a little distracted too.”

Stretch looked up over his brother’s head and met your gaze head on. His eye lights were tired and
you thought you saw shadows under his sockets. The fear for his brother really did a number on

“same group?” Sans asked, turning in his chair to face both Ma and Mini. “You have a racist

problem here in this town?”

“Doesn’t every small town?” Ma sighed, rubbing at the skin between her eyes. Behind her Edge

and Red watched the two older women, concern clear in their expressions. “It’s gotten worse over

the past four or five months, but it’s our problem, mostly.”

“IS IT STILL A PROBLEM? WE CAN HELP WITH IT. THE EMBASSY COULD SEND

PEOPLE HERE TO MAKE IT SAFE AGAIN AFTER WE LEAVE. WHAT THEY WERE

DOING WAS WRONG.” Papyrus looked almost as upset as he sounded.

“It’s not something that can be fixed so easy. It’ll get patched up, sure, but then four months later,

three or even two months after that it’ll all just start up again. It’s hate and it never goes away. We

just deal with it when and how we can,” Ma huffed, arms crossed. Then she blinked and turned to

her wife. “Oh, and speaking of doing what we can, this here is my wife, Mini, she helps many of

the monsters in town get settled in and keeps a general eye out.”

“It’s how we found these two,” Mini chuckled, looking fondly up at Edge and over at Red. She

was much shorter than the both of them.

“you’ve helped other monsters then?” Stretch asked, catching Papyrus’ eye lights.

“Some stay and settle, some even have families here, and others move on. Each one makes the

decision themselves and we just support their efforts as best we can.”

Mini’s smile turned soft as she reached over at Edge who bent at the waist so she could reach his

face. She pat the side of his skull in fondness before reaching for Red who grumbled a bit more but

didn’t pull away when she pat his face too.

Blue frowned up at his brother. “WHAT HAPPENED WITH YOU WHILE SANS AND I WERE

HERE? IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU RAN INTO SOMEONE TOO.”

“Ah shit, I don’t have enough food in me to get into it. Mini, are there places set for all of them?

You all, get into the dining room, we don’t have room for ya elsewhere.” Ma interrupted, waving a

hand to get everyone’s attention. “Let’s sit down for dinner and then we can summarize our

stories.”

So that’s what you did.

Mini served a chili dinner for everyone including herself and it was made with enough mixed

ingredients to be nutritional to both humans and monsters. It was a while before anyone spoke up,

but the person to do so was first Papyrus, answering Blue’s question about what happened. You

felt Sans’ eye lights on you the whole time as Papyrus explain in no lacking detail how you got

into a fight with some Steven guy and chased him off.”

“Just like that?” Sans asked.

“IT WAS MUCH COOLER THAN WHAT I CAN RECOUNT BUT YES, JUST SO!”

“…is it possible some of the men he was with...were the same guys that got into it with you and

vanilla bean over there, blue?” Stretch asked, looking to his brother. Sans frowned at the nickname

but didn’t say anything about it.
“MA—MAYBE THAT IS SO. THEY HAD REALLY NICE MOTORCYCLES AND I MADE THE MISTAKE OF COMPLEMENTING THEM ON ONE AND IT WAS ENOUGH TO MAKE THEM THINK I Wanted TO STEAL IT FROM THEM. THEY THREW SOME ROCKS AT ME AND IT’S JUST A SCRATCH! I’M SURE IT’LL BE GONE IN THE MORNING.”

“Some of the oldest families can be deeply prejudiced,” Ma explained. “The families that have been around these parts since before Mini and I moved in still see this place as theirs. They don’t like the ‘divergent’ people. Before it was monsters it was couples like us, and before that it was people like Omar and Anazi. There’s always something for them to hate.”

“But it’s not been bad like it’s been with the monsters before. Now they have…legal grounds to come out on top after they provoke fights and incite incidents,” Mini added. “We do what we can but…the’re well connected, Steven especially. I doubt with however good you scared him that’ll be the end of it. Maybe for a while, but not more than that.”

“is that what you said you were staying for?” Stretch asked, looking across the table at Red.

Edge looked down at his brother while Red just scowled. “Maybe, what’s it to ya? We can leave and stay like we want, don’t mean we need a reason for it.”

“IT’S A NOBLE REASON, TO BE SURE. YOU CAN-”

“I’m sorry,” Edge cut in interrupting Papyrus, “but could you not do that with your voice? It’s getting on my nerves. There’s no reason you should be still using magic to distinguish your voice above ground.”

“DIS-WHAT?” Blueberry asked, glancing back and forth between Papyrus and Stretch, looking to either for a hopeful explanation.

“How did you know that’s what it was?” you asked, looking to Edge. You had realized right away that there were monsters who spoke with an overlay of magic to their words, but you had never figured out why or how.

It wasn’t like you could do it, in spite of your efforts.

When Edge spoke his words didn’t boom in your brain and when Red spoke his words weren’t jarring like Stretch or Sans’ could be at times. It wasn’t a big deal, and you doubted the people who didn’t have magic could even tell, but it was probably true for other monsters to pick up on.

“why?” Sans asked. He didn’t pull his magic back and Edge’s eye lights narrowed in response.

Red chuckled and then leaned across the table, looking at you. “Hey, babe, you can tell, can’t you? Is it pleasant?”

“It’s not something I would complain about, why?” you asked.

You didn’t miss the way Blue and Papyrus reacted, expressions mirrors of matching horror upon hearing that their voices were, on some small level, irritating you. Red just grinned, eyes sparkling scarlet.

“What’s it like, listening to them and their voices? It’s probably different for you than it is for Ma and Mini, since most humans our age don’t even notice it.”

“It’s not something we’d make a stink about with our guests,” Ma sighed. She reached over Edge and swatted at Red’s skull, muttering something that sounded like ‘dimwit’ under her breath. “You
both were freeloaders when you showed up so of course we set you straight right off.”

You felt Edge watching you but when you looked up he averted his gaze. You couldn’t tell if he was scowling or not, but he didn’t look happy with you. Maybe the fact that you flinched under his magic…maybe he thought you were turned off by the feel of it or something? Either way, you didn’t like the way he didn’t look you in the eye the way Red did.

“Sweetheart?”

Red was watching you, expression expectant. He was waiting for your answer.

“It feels like, static in my brain. It’s barely there since getting used to it. Like I said earlier, it’s not something I would have ever complained about or even mentioned. I know other people my age don’t notice.”

“It’s something only us boss monsters get the privilege of, or at least I’ve only known boss monsters to be able to do it,” Red explained. “Adding a thin layer of magic to our words makes them echo and it’s a way for other monsters we run across to understand who and what we are. It’s different for each of us, but not by much.”

Stretch broke the silence first. “Is that so?”

You noticed the difference right away. His magic wasn’t in his words anymore.

“Is it still bothering you?” Blue asked, eye lights on you.

You forced out an easy smile and shook your head. “It was never a bother, Blue. Don’t worry. But yeah, it sounds great just the way it is right now. Thank you.”

“If you like my voice the way it is now that’s enough for me,” Blue exclaimed. “Papyrus, you should try now too.”

And Papyrus did, followed by Sans and then Stretch was talking to his brother while Papyrus asked their hosts more questions about the monsters they helped transition. Sans watched on while Red interjected facts and opinions to help Ma’s explanation made the most sense. You watched on, quiet, while Edge kept his eye lights downcast and at the rest of his dinner without comment.

Eventually the nature of your visit came up again and Papyrus explained how you were, yes, making sure the ‘new arrivals’ weren’t harmful, but also tracking down the person originally responsible for all of it.

“Another bully like Steven,” Red muttered, looking to his brother then you. “The world’s full of them.”

You shrugged and let the conversations wash over you. There were a few more comments and attempts to pull you in, but you stayed quiet, answered with as few words as possible when asked, and offering nothing up unprompted.

Eventually the night grew too dark and the boys all assembled to head back to the trailer and sleep off the night with a promise to come back in the morning and visit. They’d also check to make sure the brothers were registered with their own IDs.

The walk back lasted forever and was over in the blink of an eye. No one used any shortcuts even if they could. Everyone made the trek back through parts of dark and under lamp light until they were back inside the bus.
It didn’t take the skeletons long to get ready and they were all in their beds before you were finished brushing your teeth.

You stopped outside Blueberry’s bed, seeing how he slept on his side so that his bandaged half of his face was up. The bandage was peeling and you flinched, but forced your hand to move, pushing it back in place. You saw the crack and felt the magic leaking through and it was enough to rattle you.

No big deal?

Yeah his wound would heal after a night of good sleep, but still…. it was a crack in his face. It must have hurt. Someone did that to him.

With the roll in your gut still fresh and angry you climbed into bed and dozed. You didn’t sleep. You kept your resting shallow.

Midnight came after an eternity of waiting.

You slipped out of bed, making no sound as you stalked to the front and ease yourself out through the smallest gap left with the door partially ajar. You slipped free and touched down on the gravel, freezing at the sound.

Not you

You turned your head and saw the red halo of his cigarette and then his eyes, honey orange and small in the dark. Stretch leaned against the bus smoking. Two different buts littered the ground at his feet.

“I thought I told you those things were nasty,” you hissed.

Stretch shrugged. “They take the edge off things.”

“Like what?”

Stretch rolled his eyes from the sky down to you, pinning you with a look that betrayed his thoughts before his words could. You weren’t that stupid. You knew why he was outside waiting for you.

“Where are you going?” Stretch asked instead.

“Out.”

Stretch grinned. “You know where those guys are on the map, don’t you?” He flicked out his spent cigarette and then walked over it, killing it in the dirt. “So, let’s go already.”

“Stretch-”

“It was my brother. I’m not going to just go to bed with this and neither are you. Don’t expect me to do anything less than what you’re planning to do for us.”

“What makes you think I was planning on doing anything?” you asked, knowing it was a stupid question even before it was past your teeth.

Stretch fell into step beside you and pointed down at your boots. “You never took those off.”

“You think you know me so well,” you sighed, digging your hands into the shared pocket of your
sweatshirt over your stomach. The half moon turned parts of the landscape silver and left the rest of it dark but you never had an issue seeing things without full light.

“Nah, not well enough yet, but I will, one day. So, where to?”

Wordless you let him through the town and out, following a light in your mind when you pulled up the map of the town. There were three names you paid attention to, three names of people who hadn’t changed in spite of all the logic and rhetoric, and at the top of that list was good old Steven. You hadn’t scared him enough if he still thought he still had a snowball’s chance in hell of making shit once the opportunity presented itself.

You’d get to the other two later.

The doors were locked but the windows let Stretch see inside and that was enough for him to shortcut you and him both inside. The house was large and winding, but you found your way up the stairs to the second floor and the back bedroom, left a mess in spite of its size.

Steven slept on his stomach under a single cover, one leg slipping free off the back of the bed, head turned halfway into his pillow as he slept on, unaware. He looked stupid even in his sleep.

On the way over neither you nor Stretch had discussed your plans or intentions, but when you moved Stretch was content to let you take the lead. He pressed himself into the back corner of the room until he was nothing but two amber lights in the darkness.

Good, this part was for you to do alone.

You grabbed Steven by the ankle and yanked him harshly. It wasn’t hard to tug him out of his bed onto the floor and then yanked him around so he was on his back. He woke when his head hit the floor and his expression turned livid once he saw you.

Your magic swelled.

He tried to get up and move but you swatted his efforts away and tripped him once more, sending him down onto his back. He flinched when you stepped over him but swatted at you, swearing loudly. You stepped on his wrist to keep his hand down. He reached with the other hand and you pinned that one too.

“You bitch, you can’t get away with this! You call me a criminal but this is my home and you’re breaking and entering and-and assaulting me in my own home! I’ll have your asses. I know my rights-”

“Shut up,” you groaned, holding down his other hand with your fingers around his wrist. It made your skin crawl to touch his bare skin, it made your gut roll to be so close, and it made your head scream to know you were

Not

Being

A

Good
Person

Tonight

Steven started spouting nonsense again about his rights and his status as a human and his hate. He spit at you but missed. Stretch’s magic leaked out from behind you but you didn’t indicate for him to emerge. You wouldn’t need him and you didn’t want him to dirty his hands too.

‘YOU WERE MY HERO.’

“Shit.” You swallowed and then reached down deep for your own magic, pulling it up. You felt close to dizzy, but it wasn’t because you were ill. You just…needed to keep going.

“We’re going to leave this town tomorrow and you plus your goons are never going to bother the people here ever again. If you try it, if you think you can, well…I’ll know.”

He scoffed, seemingly unbelieving. “So? You think you're going to arrest me? You’re just a thug. You can’t touch me. I’ve got-”

You crouched down on his chest and slid your knee up under his chin, pressing down on his throat. It stopped his words up and pinned him in place.

“I’m not going to hurt you, I’m not going to arrest you, I’m going to teach you something. I’ll show you something and you’ll learn from it or you won’t and then I’ll really have to do something,” you said out loud.

“Wh-what?” he choked out.

You pulled up the magic and the black smoke came with it too. It was enough and you turned down to face Steven, feeling the magic charge your one good eye with ghostly neon light.

“Let me show you what happens when you step out of line.”

You breathed out smoke that snaked like something living into his open mouth and up his nostrils. He gagged but the smoke swirled down, down, down and then it was gone and he was still, eyes glazed over and black as your magic showed him a vision plucked from your deep memories. You hadn’t held back as much as you should have, but you weren’t trying to be a hero tonight.

You were just another monster in the dark.

You and Stretched visited the other two houses and before dawn it was all done and so much of your magic was gone.

Stretch touched your back between your shoulders and the two of you were on the top of the bus next to the hatch thanks to his shortcut. The world was still dark and quiet around you but you were shivering.

Stretch was behind you and you heard him say your name but you pulled away before he could say anything else and fell to your knees retching over the side of the bus into the bushes. You were so sick of yourself, you heaved and the rest of the dinner came up along with bile. You hated the feel of your skin, the sound of your blood in your ears, the sway of your nearly exhausted magic sloshing in your gut along with your guilt.
You weren’t a hero, you weren’t anything good or decent. You had been made into something terrible and you ran from it, fought it, and denied it as much as you wanted until you couldn’t, because a good person didn’t do what you did. A hero didn’t force their traumas onto others. A hero didn’t attack the defenseless in their beds. There should have been some other way but you—you weren’t a good enough person to see it.

You had come so far but was it all a lie? What were you even? You couldn’t call yourself a monster. Monsters weren’t nearly as terrible as you. You just mentally scarred three different men with some of your own worst memories and for what? Because they hurt your friend? Maybe that could be excused, but what about the part of you that…enjoyed it? Enjoyed sharing your agony with another. Delighted in their pain and misery. You hated yourself for it. You were a hurt thing hurting others and you would never be any better.

It was still night but Stretch didn’t seem to care as he called your name louder and pulled at you. Limp and empty you rolled away from the edge, off your ankles onto your butt. Stretch was in front of you and then you saw past him as he gathered you up into his arms, hugging you tight. “You’re fine,” he said. “You’re safe here.”

It was a joke, it had to be, so you chuckled darkly. “But you’re not…not from me. You saw me.”

“I saw you, I saw it all and I’m not leaving you. You did what you had to for your people, for these people. You protected them you-”

“Did something terrible to those men,” you hissed. “You don’t even know what it was but you saw it. The last one wet himself and the other two were messes all on their own.”

Stretch ran his hand up into your hair and wrapped you closer with the other arm tight around your waist. He was shaking, trembling. Was it because… was he scared of you too?

“They were dangerous. They were going to hurt others like my brother, like your friends, like the monsters in the restaurant that couldn’t stand up for themselves. You did what you did because they couldn’t. You protected them.”

“I scarred those three for life.”

“They deserve it.”

“You don’t deserve this.”

“No one deserved it, not like that. It’s easy to justify it all once we’re out of the woods, ain’t it?”
You wondered if the reason Stretch held you so close was so that he wouldn’t have to look at your face or smell the vomit on your breath. “But you can’t pretend that what I did was a good thing.”

Stretch pulled away only enough to look you in the eye. His eye lights were still a bright orange and narrowed to thin lights that pierced you through. “Don’t you dare do this to yourself,” he warned. “I don’t care what the others say, not even you.”

You pulled away but he wouldn’t let you. His eyes were neon orange and super charged with feeling, something that made both monster and human magic that much more powerful.

“You don’t even know what I put in their heads.”

“It doesn’t matter. You protected us. You protected them. It was hard and it hurt, but you did it. Bad people don’t do hard things because they have to, and they never feel remorse for it, so don’t think that’s what you are.”

And you weren’t sure how but your soul slipped free and hovered in the small space between you and Stretch, your magic washing out with it. You wanted to claw it back into your chest, unable to see it but still feeling it all the same.

“I can see you,” Stretch whispered, reaching out to hover his hand just short of touching your soul, like he needed your permission to do that, you could feel his magic like string pulling on your soul. “I see you and it’s nothing but good. You’re good. You’re doing a good job, honey.”

“You saw me do something terrible.”

“You think that makes you so bad, then color me worse. You’re just perfect the way you are, shadows and all.”

Stretch leaned in to nuzzle at the side of your head while pushing with his magic to force your soul back into your chest. You felt warm and soft like being wrapped up in a blanket when his magic touched your soul. There was a feeling similar to a click as your soul fit back into place and your magic fell away.

“I wouldn’t have you any other way,” he whispered darkly. You couldn’t see his expression clearly with the way he held you, but there was a feeling you got while in his arms that made you almost shiver with warning. He pet at your hair and the shiver was gone and you were silly for almost imagining it. You were the only dark thing under the stars.

You still hated the skin you were in and wanted to claw yourself free. You still felt terrible and dirty and sick, but you didn’t want to retch anymore. The heat of your anger eased and you felt….

tired.

"It's still a terrible thing," you said, softly.

When Stretch called your name again you looked up. His eye lights were still supercharged and bright with neon color. Both of his hands moved from your back and head to either side to your face. You didn’t move as he pulled your face under his chin. The rest of your body followed and went nearly limp in his lap. Stretch pulled up his legs to box you in, bent and braced on either side of you as his arms cross behind you back.

“You can feel terrible about it, that’s okay,” he said.

“I don’t feel anything,” you lied.
“That’s okay too.”

Your eyes itched and you choked on your own breath as the tears rolled free. They came silent and then softly and then they rolled faster and fatter from your eyes down your face. Stretch didn’t let you go as you sobbed, biting the fabric of his shirt to keep your cries muffled. He pulled you closer and you let him.

Chapter End Notes

I'm late again?! I really did think I was going to have this done before work but I was a little bit of a mess as I adjust to the early alarm and tighter schedule once more. But to give you all a heads up I'll not be able to update on Monday for this coming week like I wanted to. Chapter 10 will be out Thursday night to make up for it. *fingers crossed*

Stretch was fun to write because I feel like he is a character that has some darkness that's well hidden under a carefully crafted lazy boi persona, one that's more forgiving than Sans' more paranoid perspective. He'll justify a lot of sin if it is to help him or his family -especially- his family. Thankfully Blue only got scratched and those humans only get mentally *cough* banished to the shadow realm *cough* I mean traumatized. :)

Also, one of the things that was bugging me the most when I was writing was having to go back and fix all the dialogue for the skeletons so it looked right with either all CAPS or lowercase and it just killed the flow in my writing a few times-thus I've officially come up with a reason to not have to type like that anymore. Hopefully it doesn't come off as terrible. Whenever their control slips in future chapters you'll see a return to the lowercase or all CAPS writing.

Thank you, lovelies!
You were awake to see the dawn break far off in the distance, but you climbed into bed and pulled the curtain shut before it could color the sky. You fell asleep hungry and woke up for a handful of minutes, stirred by the emptiness in your stomach before exhaustion won out and you fell back asleep again.

One of the times you woke up there was enough of a crack in the curtain to see how bright the cabin was. Across the way the other bunks were all open and empty, some with folded sheets fixed up and others left messy and careless. When you listened you heard little to nothing stir, or maybe your head was still too fuzzy from last night to hear properly.

The next time you opened your eyes it was because someone was close by and their conversations were loud enough to hear. Your curtain was moving, like someone had pulled it back and then let it go. Through the gap you could see Blue’s hand.

“But it’s half past two. She should have been up by now.” That was Blue’s voice. You could tell even without his magic making the words echo around in your head. Then the person next to him...

“She didn’t sleep well. If she’s still asleep it means she needs the rest,” Stretch said.

“What made her so exhausted?”

“Papyrus told you she got into a fight with one of those bigots yesterday, didn’t he?”

“But you said she wasn’t hurt!”

“You can get tired without getting hurt. She did great but she’s tired and I know you like to get on my case about it, but she’s not just being lazy.”

Blue huffed, sounding offended. “I never said she was. I wouldn’t call her lazy ever.”

“Even if she was lazy?” Stretch teased, sounding a little too amused by his question.

Blue blustered and you could picture the flush on his face clearly in your mind’s eye. “She’s not like you. She’s been doing so much and putting up with all of us so of course she’s going to need to rest up... ‘sides, even if she was being lazy I wouldn’t call her that.”

“Then you’re going to leave her alone?”

“Of course!” Blue mumbled to himself and took a few steps away, out of sight from the gap, but then you heard him stop. “But if she wakes up I-I wanna be here. She shouldn’t have to wake up
alone or..."

“Someone will call you, but you’re meeting up with Mini aren’t you? She really helped you out yesterday so it’s good there’s some way you can pay her back.”

And you were drifting so you didn’t hear what came next but when you opened your eyes again the world wasn’t nearly as bright. The shadows were longer and stretched across different parts of the bus.

You stomach rolled and a moment later you realized why. You had been hungry the whole night through, but now there was the smell of something juicy and thick with meat that made your mouth ache. You rolled over and pawed at the curtain, rolling it back before sliding one leg and then the other out onto the floor. You pulled the rest of your body out, sitting on the edge of the bed while you adjusted to the new position.

“Awake?”

Sans was the last person you expected to be up and talking to you. You moved to face him and saw him standing in between the bed with a basket filled with fries and heavy with a triple patty burger that smelled too much like the ones you were used to.

What you wouldn’t give to have a Grillby’s burger and french fry basket right now…

“What are you doing here Sans?” you croaked, tasting the tang of old vomit all the way down your throat. You had brushed your teeth, but had been too exhausted to do much more before collapsing into bed right before dawn.

Sans looked like he actually winced at the sound of your voice and you wondered if he was disgusted by the sound or capable of feeling empathy for a human being that wasn’t his dear old Frisk.

Sans moved closer and pushed the basket against your shoulder before answering. “You sounded hungry.”

On cue your stomach rolled audible and you felt the pinching heat of hunger. You had to swallow down the urge to drool openly because as hungry as you were, you still weren’t stupid. It was a juicy looking burger, but it was Sans who was offering it to you.

“What’s this for?” you asked, taking the basket but not moving to eat anything in it.

“I could hear your stomach growling all the way topside. F-figured you didn’t have the energy to get up and make yourself something or find something if you were passed out this late.”

It sounded like a good explanation but it was coming from the one skeleton you didn’t feel comfortable believing in.

“Yeah, but why would you care?” You had enough energy to muster up a glare. “Why would you bother?”

“You think I’m such a heartless guy?”

“I still have your bruises.”

As if to drive home your point you rolled up the sleeve of your sweatshirt, far enough to show off the white floral tattoos that were broken up with sunbursts of green and purple impact marks from
his gravity attacks. You dropped your arm and your sleeve before he could see any of the other scars you kept behind long sleeves.

“T’m sorry for those too,” San muttered, eye lights fixed on a point on the ground by your feet. “I-I told you I regretted it, didn’t I?”

“Honestly, I don’t remember something like that.”

You grabbed a fistful of fries and stuffed them into your mouth, too hungry to pretend you had the integrity that could deny food when you were so, so, so damn hungry. Your magic had burned up too much of you and left you empty.

Next time you used so much magic it would be easier, but it was just like an atrophied muscle; it needed time to build back up. Your body wasn’t used to the strain of it like it once was.

Sans shuffled from one foot to the other, seemingly almost nervous just by standing next to you and that didn’t make sense because with you in the state you were in, he could take you on and actually win. There wasn’t a reason for him to be nervous.

“Sit down if you’re going to fidget,” you coughed before sinking your teeth into your burger.

But Sans didn’t sit, instead he blurted out, “I heard what you did last night.”

You froze with your jaw wide around a new edge of the burger. It took a bit of extra force, but you return to your eating as Sans slid into a seat opposite you on the edge of the bed. If he had been anyone else you might have really worried about being found out, but you really didn’t care what Sans thought of you.

“So?”

His eye sockets widened. “So?” he echoed.

You swallowed another mouthful of your burger. “So what’s it to you? What do you want me to say about it? If you wanted an explanation you’re wasting your time.”

“I’m not stupid, I don’t need an explanation. I went out this morning and heard about it from the locals as well. I can still put two and two together when I bother.”

He glanced down and then up again like a person that came up for air before diving back underwater. Staring at you too long wasn’t something he felt comfortable doing.

Good.

“Then why bother bringing it up? Why bother feeding me like this? Why bother going all the way back to New Ebott for my favorite burger and fries?”

There was a longer than normal silence before Sans answered you, and by then half of your meal was already gone.

“I didn’t know it was your favorite, I just knew it would be good. Grillby’s never disappoints.”

And as loathed as you were to admit it, Sans was right. Grillby was the master of comfort food for a thousand and one different monsters, but he had soon amassed for himself a cultish following of local humans who were just as hooked on his famous menu. The fact that his main and only location was close to the transitional houses and Embassy meant it had been one of your favorite
places to treat yourself to in the morning before the rush hour traffic flooded his little restaurant pub.

It had been a while since you last saw the fire spirit himself and you found yourself missing him almost as much as his food.

You bit into the last of your burger and felt a bitter twinge of loss when you realized you were almost through with your eating. Soon it’d be gone and you’d be hungry again.

“You need more?”

Sans’ question surprised you enough to freeze you once more. He wasn’t looking at you, instead he was staring at the floor.

“Okay, that’s it, you’re freaking me out. What is it you’re trying to do?”

He flushed, face still turned down. “I just asked you a simple question, it’s not like it was that big a deal. Ya need more or not?”

You didn’t miss the color on his face. “You’d get some for me?”

Like your words were a magic spell the blush darkened. “It’s not a big deal.”

The basket was nearly empty so you set it to the side and leaned out on the edge of your bed, stretching your legs and leaning your elbows on your knees so that you’re nearly close enough to touch Sans. He doesn’t move but you see the way his shoulders stiffen and lock up.

“Sans, we’re not huge fans of each other are we?” He picked his head up and the blue lights in his sockets fixed onto your face like metals on a magnet. If he meant to say anything next you didn’t care, and instead rolled on with your comments. “Nah, you don’t need to answer me it wasn’t a real question. I’m not stupid and you’re not as subtle as you think. You don’t need to be my friend and hell, you don’t even need to trust me, but we need to work with one another. This…” you pointed to the basket. “It’s more than just working together. What’s your deal this time?”

“You think I have to have an angle?”

“You don’t?”

Sans forced his eye lights off your face for a moment and then refocused them on a point just past your face. “I heard what you did last night and I heard what…it did to you. You did something that went against your principles, but you did it anyway.”

“Not very noble of me was it?” you sighed, drawing back. “But isn’t that what you suspected?”

“Not like that. I saw how sick it made you.” You flinched at his words but he didn’t stop. “It’d kill you to do something half as terrible to my bro or the others.”

Blue with his bandaged face flared through your mind and the anger it triggered was pure and the closest to justice you’d ever felt. He was one of your ‘people’ and someone you cared about so strongly you were violent to those who would call themselves his enemies.

“I’d never hurt them.”

“I know that now,” Sans said.

“I never would have hurt them, even before knowing them.”
“I know.”

“I…wouldn’t.” You breathed heavy and loud, reaching up to run a hand through your unkept hair. “I really wanted to be a good person, I want to be a person I’m proud of. Doubt me if you want but I’m not going to beat myself up over it if you don’t believe me.”

“Hey, do ya maybe think that, I get that? You think that I might be trying to…show you I get it?” Sans struggled. He looked pointedly at the basket on you bedsheets and then dropped his eye lights. “I get it, I screwed up. I was…I fucked it up. Sorry. I shouldn’t ever have hurt you like I did.”

You didn’t want his apology. You liked feeling upset at someone who hurt you. He was trying, he was honestly remorseful about what he did, and you could see if he went back to do it over it would be a different story.

Your bruises would fade but, inside your head his voice was still there, fucking you up with every echo.

‘a monster to attack and go all out against…. come on, be a hero.’

“Remember when I offered you my hand up on the roof and told you I wanted to try?”

Sans blinked at the shift in your tone. You saw sweat made out of magic bead across his skull. That was all you needed to see to know he remembered the exact conversation and exchange. You had wanted to try and put the past behind you and move on and be a friend to him, but not like this! Not after he saw your moment of weakness. Not after he had seen you so low he felt he could…. could what? Win you over with a burger and fries?

“i-I want to try, for real this time. I’m sorry. You haven’t heard a pun out of me since and dat’s for a reason, see. Honest, I wanna try again an-and be someone you can be helped by.”

You felt your magic roll.

Damn it, this isn’t-this wasn’t how you wanted things to go. Was he looking down on you now? Did he think you were soft? You weren’t ready for this sort of conversation. Not with the way you still felt after last night. The emotional wound was still sore and you wanted to wallow in the pain of it a bit longer.

“What were you fighting with Blue about?”

Sans’ hopeful expression fell apart. “What?”

“The two of you were fighting before he got hurt by the humans. ‘not for lack of trying’ remember?” you asked, using your fingers to make air quotes while you mimicked the voice and phrase from last night’s dinner. “What was that about?”

“It-it wasn’t anything. He was being nosey and I told him I didn’t owe him an explanation about something.” The sweat beads rolled off his skull and multiplied. “It wasn’t something worth getting upset over and I didn’t even scratch him.”

Fine.

You stood and took the empty basket with you, carrying it over to the counter to throw away and clean out while Sans hopped off the bed to follow. He called your name and you glanced up but didn’t pull the plastic basket out from the sink or sudds.
“You okay?” Sans asked, watching you with an open worry that you had never seen on his face while in front of the others.

There wasn’t anyone else around you, just Sans and you inside the bus for company and it felt like this was your first time seeing Sans without all his walls. His sudden kindness and openness didn’t sit well with you, and maybe that was because you were being petty or you just didn’t feel ready to move forward after last night’s debacle. Either way, you weren’t ready to do anything with him about it. Maybe some other time or date when you didn’t feel like an invader in your own skin you could revisit this conversation with him, but not today.

“…You need to return the plastic baskets.” You passed it back over to him and Sans took it, cradling it gently. “Grilby gets pissed with the people who don’t bring them back.”

“Ye-yeah I remember, but what about us?”

“What about us?” You left your hands in the sink for the stray bubbles and suds to fall off.

“Are we…good?” Sans seemed so unsure of himself. “You and me?”

“We’re fine. I need to shower and then I’m gonna head out.”

“I could go with you!” Sans hastily volunteered. “You’re still tired aren’t you?”

“Not enough to need a companion and honestly, I would appreciate the time alone.” You shook your hands in the sink and then wiped the excess off on the back of your pants.

When you passed him you could feel the discomfort radiating off him. He stiffly turned to watch you go and you didn’t look back or acknowledge him. Instead you breezed past to pick out some clean clothes from your duffle.

When he called your name again you glanced up. He looked worried.

“I’m…really sorry. You know that right? I’m sorry I hurt you.”

“I believe you.” You nodded at him and drew on your humble courage to get the rest of your words out. “And I can forgive you for it. But that’s all done.”

“Wa-what-wait. What do you mean it’s all done?”

“I’m tired so let me just put it plain for you, I’ve forgiven you for hurting me and for the other things you did that are still hurting me. But I’m not ready to move on with you right now. You can go back to being pissy at me and everyone else if you’d prefer that, but I don’t need someone taking advantage- taking care of me when I’m weak.”

“That’s not what I’m doing. I’m serious. I-I-I mean it.”

“Would you have said all this if you hadn’t seen me like that last night?” When Sans didn’t answer you sighed, too tired to hold onto any more emotion for the original skeleton. “Yeah, it’s like that then. I’m gonna go. If you want to talk to me again when I’m not barely put together we can try again.”

He called your name.

“Thanks for the meal. I owe you one.”

And then you disappeared behind the closed door. You didn’t bother to listen or feel for his
presence on the bus as you busied yourself in getting ready. You showered, washing and drying your hair enough to pin it up in a style that might hold. Your undercut was getting longer so you used a man’s razor to trim it back until you were happy with it again.

When you emerged, dressed and refreshed, the hatch to the roof was open and the rest of the bus was empty.

You stepped into your boots and headed into town, picking out a few supplies and ordering some more food to take the edge off your returning hunger. And as much as you adored the rest of your roommates, you used Papyrus’ social media tags to avoid the parts of town he had been sighted in hours earlier.

You had something else you needed to get done.

You pulled up the map and took a minute to untangle the different Sans and Papyrus names for who they really were, Edge, Red, Stretch, Blue… It was easy to find your way after that.

It took a little longer since you couldn’t just take a short cut, but eventually you stopped in front of his path and waited for him to turn the last corner and see you.

He noticed you right away and faltered only once before turning his eye lights down and continuing on with his route.

“Edge.”

He stopped at the sound of his name and turned towards you. You jogged up to meet him and he nodded as you approached. The set of his shoulders and rigid shape of his posture made you think he was nervous or something just as unpleasant when around you.

“You are…awake. The others mentioned you were resting later and couldn’t come out for such reasons.” Hie eye lights flickered over you, like a general taking inventory on the condition of his men.

“I just woke up not to long ago. I haven’t run into any of the others except Sans yet,” you admitted, wondering if there was disbelief in his voice. Maybe sleeping until three thirty in the afternoon was a bit too much for him to believe or appreciate. Twilight wasn’t far off, after all. “I wasn’t feeling well.”

His eye lights snapped up to your face, brighter than before and his hands raised, hovering but not quite reaching for you. “Were you ill?”

You thought about the vomit and the crawling itch that came with your dissociative episodes, the ones where you felt like you weren’t meant to be inside your own skin. They were almost as bad as the panic attacks and you were sure Stretch had seen more than he needed to.

“I’m able to hold down some food now, but it’s no big deal. I wanted to ask you about the town or your patrols. You do them to help keep some sort of peace between those sorta guys and the locals, right?”

Edge drew himself up and lifted his chin. “The great and terrible me wouldn’t let such uncouth villains run amok as they saw fit. Indeed you are quite observant to have deduced such a fact!”

He looked like such a hard ass but he was secretly a total softy on the inside. His moms had done something amazing with the month and a half of raising time they had invested in Edge if he was this well adjusted to human life.
“I wanted to ask you about that and if there was a difference today?”

“Today?” he sounded puzzled by the question.

“Yeah, you notice anything missing or something different in the routines you’re used to?”

Edge nodded slowly, watching you with a new level of keenness. “Yes, but you wouldn’t have any idea as to why that would be, would you?”

You rubbed at your face. “I might have had a couple of conversations with some of them. It’s my hope that some of the trouble you’ve been having dries up with just this.”

Edge regarded you with a tilt of his head and you wanted him to say something but there was too much silence between you.

You opened your mouth to speak but a buzz in your pocket made you flinch. Edge looked at your pocket and it was a look of expectation so you pulled out your phone and saw a text from Stretch.

“Oh, we’re not…heading out tonight. First thing in the morning instead.” You scrolled to the bottom of the text and then clicked the screen off. “It sounds like they’re enjoying themselves elsewhere.”

“You’re not leaving for another day?”

“It’s just the morning.”

You rubbed awkwardly at the base of your neck, suspecting your exhaustion played a role in the group decision to delay departure. Stretch claimed it was so they could watch the town for any more incidents, but it sounded like a weak excuse.

“That means you’ll be here for the night festivities.”

“Night festivities?” you echoed.

Edge’s eye lights glowed brighter for a split second before he tilted his face away and watched you from the corner of his eye sockets. You saw the blush on the high points of his cheekbones. “Ye-yes, the night festivities. It’s Friday night.”

“Oh…does that mean something around here?”

“Many things are celebrated on this weekly date.”

“Like, what sort of things?” you asked.

Edge turned the fullness of his face away from you but extended a hand he couldn’t see. You stared at his gloved hand, waiting for an explanation.

“You may discover that for yourself if you so wish. Would you,” he paused and forced his face to turn back toward you partially, addressing you by name. You see how much more of it is flushed with color. “Would you like to accompany me if you are not too unwell?”
Chapter End Notes

Dating Start!

Enough angst, now fluff and filler and dates. Sans and reader had their moment now it is time to feel good things and Edge is just the skeleton to help with that. (Seriously, the next chapter is one of my favorites overall and easily my favorite from the Sunshine Riptide arc.)

Speaking of different arcs, each one should be about 10-12 chapters long with a total of 6 arcs.

Thank you for all the comments and attention. Greatly appreciate it!
You didn’t hesitate for more than a second to accept his outstretched hand. The red leather of his gloves was soft and his grip was looser than anticipated, so much so that the tips of his clawed fingers never curled enough to touch your hand’s underside. It felt like he was holding something made of glass.

“So, night festivities?” you echoed, hoping he would clarify. “When do those actually start?”

It was dark enough in the twilight sky for the last bit of sun’s light to just barely illuminate your surroundings. Some of the shops and storefronts already had their neon and custom shop lights turned on.

“An astute inquiry, as it is not technically night one might not believe festivities to be in effect, but that is not true.” His eye lights were fixed on the point where your hand met his but when you squeezed he looked up. “I-I will show you what the humans enjoy here.”

He started to lead you down the street and out to the main roadway where the sidewalks were wider and paved for heavier traffic. The Heritage District was more friendly to foot traffic and had plenty of walkways for someone to get lost down.

“What about what you enjoy?” you ask, holding onto his hand when his hold grew lax.

“I enjoy all the good things!” he answered in a voice that pitched higher than what you were used to. He coughed and then added, “Both Ma and Mini were explicit in instructing both my brother and myself in how to show a…someone a good time if we ever were presented with the opportunity. I, in my wisdom, complied such teachings into an updated collection that I may refer back to from time to time.”

“That sounds like something real helpful. I noticed you sounded well adjusted compared to what we thought you’d be like after the culture shock. Was it very hard when you and your brother both surfaced?”

Edge seemed to relax the further you walked and you hoped it was partially due to your comments. You didn’t want him to be uncomfortable around you even though you were both little more than strangers. You had just talked briefly the previous night in the alley with him being far more subdued at dinner. And yeah, that was his prerogative and sure it was probably a lot to process in a single night, but you really hoped he wasn’t uncomfortable around you.

At your question his red eye lights glowed a little brighter and a new smile stretched across his skull. “Nyeheheheheh, indeed it was challenging to acclimate but not too difficult for the great and terrible myself. My brother and I were quick studies and the prodigies of several excellent teachers.” His voice pitched lower, adopting a softer tone. “And they were sacrificial in their kindness to two strangers who could pay them nothing in turn.”
The main walkway was darkening rapidly but the lamp posts were strung with bulbs of smaller dot lights that lit the sidewalks in several different branching directions. Some ways back the road had ended and all that was left were the footpaths.

You noticed there were a number of human couples and groups out with a smattering of monsters intermixed in more than one group. A fox looking monster was leading a shorter girl in tight red curls around and a couple of ladies were walking hand in hand just ahead of you.

“Ma and Mini sound like some real stellar ladies. Were they the ones you ran into first?”

“No, that was Paul, their husband.”

You almost missed a step but recovered before he could notice.

“Paul? O-oh, I don’t think we met him last night.”

Edge shook his head, seemingly unbothered. “You wouldn’t have. He passed away several weeks ago but had been sick for a long while now so it was not as…unpleasant as a human’s passing might normally seem.”

“I’m sorry to hear about your loss,” you managed to say, feeling a little unsteady on your own two feet. “I…that must have been a lot for you guys.”

Edge noticed your subdued expression and glanced down. “It was unsettling, but also an honor to be a part of a human’s transition to whatever comes next. And he did not leave the world worse than he found it. Both Mini and Ma had each other and my brother and I learned his lessons well.”

“Still, that’s a lot. You’ve been here only a month and a half or little more, right?” when Edge nodded you went on. “It sounds like you’ve seen a lot more than some of the monsters that have been top side for years.”

“Yes, they were very helpful in curbing some of our…rougher habits and tendencies. How we communicate with humans here is very different from what we were used to. I shouldn’t shout so much and I’ve come a long way in developing ‘tact!’ That’s important because I am still a terrifying and magnificent monster and that’s not going to change anytime soon.”

You laughed out loud before you could think better of it and Edge stopped walking to watch you as the giggles shook your whole body. After a moment you swallowed what you could of your laughter and coughed in an attempt to get over the glee.

“You shouldn’t ever change,” you managed to get out, still close to dissolving into giggles once more. “The magnificence and terror look is a good one for you.”

It’s dark, but there are enough streetlights and shop signs turned on to see by and you catch the color, pink and dark, spreading across his skull. It’s an honest compliment he hadn’t been ready for by the looks of it. (The thought that maybe you were one of the first to compliment him in such a way stroked your ego a bit too much.)

“THAT-AH-ah, ah ha,” he stumbled over his words and swallowed before trying again. “That is…indeed an inspired observation, y-yes, n-nyeh eh. That you would recognize my-my magnificence shows courage.”

“Eh, it wasn’t easy to miss,” you replied casually.

“Th-then you were not, were you not intimidated previously? I had worried and asked Mini if it
was possible I came on too magnificently. Some other humans are still apprehensive about 
approaching my brother or myself, but more so myself because I am the far superior specimen of 
terror incarnate.”

You remembered his actions during dinner and before that. He had only spoken up to request the 
others not speak so dramatically with magic infused in their voices…something that wasn’t even 
necessarily for his benefit since he was also a boss level monster. He had been so quiet otherwise 
and you wondered if that was because maybe he thought he was just…coming on too strong?

“Did you think I was scared of you?”

“I am frightening.”

“You are,” you agreed with a laugh. “But not enough for me to get scared off. Trust me. I’m a bit 
tougher than I look.”

“You looked plenty tough last night,” Edge replied with the color still on his cheeks. “I didn’t 
expect…that.”

For a split second you thought back to last night with the memories you forced into the minds of 
those three racists while Stretch watched. You almost panicked before realizing he meant the fight. 
When Steven and his goons came into the restaurant and you got in their face about it. 

It... hadn’t been as memorable as San’s fight and easy to forget.

“Ah, you…saw that.”

“I envied you. A monster acting so freely would have ramifications for more than just my own self. 
My brother and the rest of the town’s monster population would suffer for it, but you did what I 
could not.”

“Then let me envy your restraint. I’ve never been good at listening to people tell me no. It might 
have been flashier to get angry and go off on some jerk, but it takes a lot more strength to stand up 
and resist the taunting. Plus, that’s something you’re not used to doing, is it?”

Edge glanced away, showing off more of how the blush stretched far across his skull while he 
nodded. “Ye-yes. It was most unusual but as I previously stated, we were tutored by some of the 
best.”

He cleared his nonexistent throat as a means of segwaying the conversation and you let him 
because the poor boy had suffered enough ego stroking and you didn’t want his face to turn pink 
permanently or anything. But dang he was cute. Studded leather and spikes and blushing 
cheekbones? Yes please.

“So the night life around here…?” you asked, letting your words hang in the air between you.

“Ah, firstly, have you had dinner yet?”

The question made your stomach roll with want. “I did eat a couple of hours ago but that was my 
lunch? I slept through breakfast so….”

“You haven’t had dinner yet?” His voice pitched on the question.

“I mean, not technically but it wasn’t so long ago so maybe it’d be considered dinner…” You 
didn’t want to sound desperate but you were ready for some more carbs.
“That’s not—would you be well enough for some light snacks?”

His concern made you grin and chuckle. “I’m good enough for light, medium, and heavy snacks.”

He grabbed for your hand again, no hesitation this time, and guided you down a side path towards a lot where food truck after food truck lined the edges of the square block. In the center there was a rolling greenway where several couples and groups had sat down to eat. At the very center was an Obelisk looking feature that served as the focal point for several different light strands to meet up at.

Each of the different trucks had a different type of food they were selling and several were desert exclusive trucks with cute designs and motifs to attract customers. You noticed quickly that there were even a couple of monster food trucks that were servicing both humans and monsters.

You….should probably eat something monster based to help replenish your depleted magic stores. The downside to being a magic using human was the calorie intake stacked on top of the need for magic replenishing foods. You could naturally replenish your magic of course, but that was a slow process that either knocked you out or burned off the energy from your human meals.

You basically ate like an olympic swimmer.

“There’s so many places to pick from,” you finally comment.

“Nyeheheheheh, and lucky for us, there is nothing to stop you from eating from as many as you want. No need to choose.”

“I mean,” you chuckled, eyeing him slyly. “There’s that whole bit about money, but sure.”

“Not for me there isn’t!” he cried happily, striking a pose that might have been intimidating if you didn’t know him better. “Witness my greatness in action, human.”

You really wanted to laugh but you didn’t because it was just too mismatched. Edge looked intimidating effortlessly but he sounded so glad and carefree even if his words might have sounded haughty coming from anyone else.

It almost reminded you of Papyrus.

Edge didn’t bound, per say, but he crossed in front of you and approached a soft pretzel seller, calling to the owner by their first name. “Akira, I require sustenance for my human!” He pulled back enough to stretch his arm out and gesture to you. “Your finest please.”

An older man with a baby strapped into a carrier laughed and approached the register. Behind him a younger teenage boy slipped on some gloves.

“You got it Edgy, what you want?” the man named Akira laughed.

Edge looked at you expectantly, waiting for your answer.

“What you recommend? I’m not picky and I like everything you have on your menu,” you said. You didn’t mention how hungry you were becoming just by looking at the photos.

Akira side eyed Edge with a subtle smirk and then waved back at the boy behind him, saying something in Japanese. The kid came up with a paper bag filled with bagel bits that he handed over to you.
“Thanks, what we owe you?” you asked, trying your best to keep from salivating.

Akira just laughed loudly and bounced his baby while, past his shoulder, the teenage boy rolled his eyes. “No cost, no charge. Edge’s human means no charge,” he chuckled looking like he knew something you didn’t.

Edge’s human?

“Next!” Edge exclaimed, hands on your shoulders, lightly turning you to a drink cart where a monster cat family repeated almost the exact same behavior, passing off fresh lemonade slush drinks to both of you with secret giggles. The same was for the third truck where you picked up chocolate dipped waffle cones filled with fruit and whipped cream.

What an amazing invention!

“And that’s not nearly enough nutrients,” Edge explained before taking you to a fourth truck selling calzones. “It’s not my specialty lasagna but it is a sufficient substitute considering the location.”

Edge ordered for the both of you and minutes later he had the baskets in hand and was leading you off towards a lit area near the Obelisk where a few park benches had been left open. Like a gentleman he offered you a seat first and then followed, crossing one leg over his knee and distributing the food.

“Monster lemonade slushes are way too good to be legal,” you sighed, after another sip.

“Nyeheheheheh, I’m glad you appreciate the monster food. I-er-well, I thought so but wasn’t sure.” Edge bit the end of his straw and slurped loudly.

“It’s amazing. I was hankering for some monster treats, honestly. You really lucked out with the food carts. It always like that for you?”

He eyed you sideways and chuckled. “You doubted my magnificence.”

You held up your half finished calzone. “Obviously not.”

Nearby, a couple of adults with instruments started to play for ambiance music. It was something folksy and old but still modern enough to sing or hum along with.

And it was so easy to eat and talk between mouthfuls of food the pair of you enjoyed. He and Red had gotten their identification cards earlier that morning and were now officially registered as monster citizens. You asked him about his experiences and he was more than happy to answer before turning the conversation around to ask you about your experiences with the other skeletons on the road thus far, as well as your intentions or plans for the future.

Then things got easier. You talked about music and shows and all the other things that monsters claimed to be overwhelming once they were topside. He mentioned the wealth of different foods to try as well as his favorites.

You asked about how he got so much free food and he explained it was a perk of the sentry duties he performed for the town. There had been a number of instances early on that he helped prevent and because he didn’t take money or donations of any type, ‘there’s no honor in it!’ the townspeople who knew him best offered him free eats instead.

When you asked if that made Red jealous he laughed. Apparently Red liked staying with Whisky
Straits’ menu day in and out and didn’t move much outside.

“Speaking of that lazybones,” Edge grumbled. You watched as he pulled out his cellphone and clicked through his contacts before pulling one up.

Seeing him use a touchscreen so easily made you wonder if he could give some tips to Blue, considering how heat sensitive screens were something the skeletons had to be mindful of and regulate their magic to effectively use. Blue was still using a flip phone with real buttons because he found the touch screens a pain. Still, it annoyed his brother when the memes wouldn’t send because his phone was too old to read the images.

“There.”

You looked up when Edge replaced the phone in his jacket pocket and slurped loudly from your empty cup to get his attention. It was enough to make him grin.

“What was that for?” you asked.

“I’ll show you next.”

He stood up and turned around offering his hand again. You gathered the trash together into a single bag, crunched up into a ball, that he tossed across the way into a trashcan. A trio of teenagers saw him sink the shot with blue magic and cheered.

“You’re not too full?” he asked, leading back out onto the walkway.

“I can move if that’s what you’re worried about,” you scoffed.

His grin might have been devious, but you doubted that’s what made it different from all his other smiles. In a handful of minutes you were back in front of Whiskey Straits and you recognized who was waiting for you just inside.

“Boss what’s the rush for—” Red’s words stopped short and his eyes went wide when he spotted you next to his brother, but faster than his reaction was his recovery. His surprise melted into what possibly passed as a saucy smile as he braced against the bar. “Damn, boss, what we win the lottery or something?”

“Red,” Edge warned even as his brother’s smile grew.

“Somebody call the cops, because it’s got to be illegal to look that good!”

It’s enough to make you snicker behind your hand but Edge looks far from amused.

“You’re making me regret this,” Edge hissed, towering over his brother. “Where did you leave your manners?”

“Ey, boss, ain’t no harm in it. Is there, babe?” He wiggled his brow bones and the expression was enough to make you laugh.

“You’re without class,” Edge complained, stepping closer to you. “Does that mean you’re not grown up enough to join us?”

“Join us? Huh, where were you thinking of heading?” you ask, looking back up at Edge and then to Red who was smiling nervously with a sweat bead (or two) of magic on the side of his skull.

“Manners, yeah. You got it boss,” Red laughed nervously.
Edge then turned to look down at you and tugged on your hand, taking it in his once more. “Last stop of the night.”

You followed him out and Red hurried to catch up with you, shouting something to Ma at the counter before closing the door behind him. He hurried until he was at your other side and then reached for your other hand.

“Hey, that looks heavy, let me hold it fer ya.”

You chuckled but it was enough to make Red’s eye lights spark a shade brighter, like a fire soaked in the hearth. And even though the line was cheesy Edge didn’t complain as he guided you to the same place Red seemed to know about.

You heard the music, a high energy mix of old country and older rock that filtered out into the night, louder whenever the door opened. Inside you saw the crowds, all moving together with the same mirrored steps. There was a mechanical bull in the far corner, a couple dozen small tables, and a bar in the center of it all.

“This is…” you let your words trail off.

Edge tugged you along. “It’s not as elaborate as a puzzle, but it’s close enough that people still enjoy it.”

“Not my favorite type of dance, sweetheart, but it gets the boss’ rocks off on a slow night and it ain’t so bad if you got the right company,” Red elaborated as he followed you out onto the dance floor where the lines were already moving.

“Oh Stars,” you sighed through a nervous chuckle. “It’s line dancing.”

“You nervous, babe?” Red goaded with a daring glint. “You worried you won’t be able to keep up with a couple of masters?”

“You see a couple of masters point them out and then I’ll get worried.”

The lines turned around for a new set and Edge found a spot wide enough for the three of you thanks to a couple of older folks moving around to accommodate you.

You were between the two of them, two different skeletons with different sizes and shapes, but once the music picked up they moved the same way and so did the rest of the room. Like everyone was an expert but you.

It reminded you of a game you used to play with the other kids, back when you all were still learning how to use your new powers. You’d stand in the shadows of the person in front of you and do what they did fast enough to stay in their shadow.

Red laughed at your messy start but you fell into the rhythm and caught onto the pattern before the set was halfway through. Over his shoulder you could catch Edge’s knowing grin and hear Red’s exclamations of joy whenever you were able to keep up with him and his brother.

Someone shouted about the brothers ‘being out tonight’ and then there was a ripple of conversation just outside your range of hearing.

The song ended and a new one started. Hearing the tune some of the dancers scattered for the tables and their drinks while a DJ warned about making the bodies sweat. It was something cheesy and cute but then the music picked up, more aggressive than before, and you realized with a jolt
why so many people had scattered off the dance floor.

‘Expert level’ apparently meant it.

You cursed under your breath as you felt your stamina slacken, and keeping your elbows up started to burn, but neither of the brothers seemed winded. A second later you realized why and rolled your eyes. Like Papyrus and his morning jogs, the boys were using their natural magical skills to their advantage.

Well, they weren’t the only ones.

Your mouth tingled with sour tang.

Half of the original humans on the dance floor were staggering off, some laughing some gasping for air. People were cheering for Edge and Red by name and you didn’t miss the competitive glint the boys shared between each other.

You could tell the song was near finished as it climaxed in tempo and speed, running the last set of moves through faster than before. Your legs and arms burned worse than your core as you stepped in time to the animations on the screen overhead, copying the moves as seamlessly as possible only to freeze on a high note of suspension, the song finished.

A roof lifting cheer went up and Red and Edge were congratulated by name. A couple of monsters who had lasted the whole set, though not done as well with their copying came over to congratulate the brothers while a few of the townspeople took photos from their seats, happy to just be there for the show.

Red laughed loudly and grabbed for your shoulders, tugging you his way only to spin you round to face him. His eye lights were the brightest you’ve ever seen them and they were shaking in their sockets to match his smile. “Damn, sweetheart! Was that an earthquake or did you just rock my world? Where did ja learn ta move like that?”

“Red there was literally a jumbo-tron with what we were supposed to do,” you laughed, gesturing back to one of the many screens set up to show the animations for the more complicated dances. “I can’t believe that was yer first time,” he laughed.

“First time on this sort of dance floor.” You rubbed at your shoulder and rolled your neck, laughing to yourself. “But damn if keeping up with you all wasn’t a challenge. Do you even have limits to your stamina?”

“If we’re not fighting we just use our magic for it, but yeah, we can get tired. Why, wanted to see how long I can go?” Red leered.

“Cad,” Edge interrupted, smacking Red upside the head. “Use your manners or you’re out.”

“Boss!” Red whined, holding his head but a look from Edge made him swallow back the rest of his complaints behind a nervous chuckle. “S-sure, sure.”

Edge’s hand hovering over your shoulder made you turn back to face him and he was grinning. “As I suspected, you executed the puzzle step masterfully! Next time we will have to find something more stimulating to challenge you appropriately.”

“More stimulating?” you laughed, sounding exasperated in spite of your efforts to hide it. “Stars, I’m barely on my feet as it is. I don’t know how I’d survive anything worse.”
“Then it shall be a challenge for the both of us, nyehheh!”

“You’re the coolest, boss.”

The vibration in your pocket made you reach for your phone. You had a number of unread messages and a couple missed calls from a handful of minutes ago, back when you had been busy on the dance floor.

You scrolled through the messages first, noticing most were from Blue or Papyrus with one from Stretch you had read earlier, detailing plans to leave in the morning. There was even one from the housing lease place. The rest of the messages were for ‘when you wake up’ and had timestamps ranging from early morning to mid afternoon.

Blue and Papyrus were out, Blue with Mini, Papyrus with a couple of monster friends he had made in the morning. No info on Sans (not that you wanted to hear about it) while Stretch lamely excused his absence as being ‘out 4 stuff’ and nothing more.

You listened to the first voicemail while Edge and Red talked not too far from where you were standing. Blue’s voice came up first, sounding a little breathless as he explained an encounter he had with the person who threw that rock at him yesterday—one of the men you traumatized. Your heart clenched before the details came, but much to your relief the story had a happy ending.

“He apologized and everything and now—yeah, so now I have a new bike! Stretch says we need to get a bike mount for it so we can take it with us so I’m going with him to do that, but I’m going to park it next to the bus, behind it, and then Mini is gonna show us where we can go. I hope you wake up soon. We won’t be long.”

That had been from back when you and Sans had your conversation.

The last voicemail was from three—no four minutes ago.

“You’re awake! Sans was supposed to tell m-us when you woke up but he was too lazy to remember and that was who knows how long ago, he’s off and not answering anyone’s questions. Um, but I don’t know where you are and I—I wanted to check in and see how you were. How are you? Are you okay? Are you still tired? You’re not sick are you? Where are you? Um, you don’t have to tell me I guess if that’s too much, but I can—we can meet you somewhere, wherever and—and I’ll text you in a minute if your phone’s not taking calls. Okay? Um, so, bye then!”

You glanced up from your phone and saw Red at the bar ordering something while Edge hung close, watching you for when your call ended.

“Where are we exactly? I forgot to look at the name for this place when we walked in.”

“Ken’s Country Corner,” Edge said, leaning in to answer while a new swell of music picked up behind you. He guided you over to the bar where Red was paying for a trio of drinks.

You sent off the text to Blue and then turned your phone face down to climb into a bar stool between the brothers with your drink.

“So you tuckered out or ready for another round.” Red’s smile spread and he hurried to add, “On the dance floor! A round on the dance floor.”

You felt like Edge was making another face past your shoulder to keep Red in line.

“I probably shouldn’t stay out much later than this. I’ve not even seen any of the others since
waking up so I should really touch base with them and talk about what we’re doing next.”

“What *are* you doing next?” Red asked.

“Heading North. It’s where FourB was last seen and he’s been popping in and out of that area pretty frequently. The next part of this whole adventure is tracking him down before he can do anymore damage.”

“And he’s dangerous?” Edge asked with a frown.

You shrugged. “No more or less than me.”

“You can create rips in time and space with magic?” Edge asked with a teasing tone and a raised brow bone. Red snickered just past your opposite shoulder.

“His skills are *different* from mine, not less impressive. I’ll be fine. Plus, there’s the four of my teammates that are in on this. They’ll be helping. Even if he was stronger than me I’d be showing up with backup,” you answered.

And speaking of backup…

Blue shouted your name from the front of the room, calling out before he was even all the way inside.

You didn’t expect the sound of his voice to make you smile like it did, but you slipped down from your seat and waved, catching his eye from across the room. He saw you right away and raced around the obstacles in his path to reach you and he didn’t slow enough to keep from barreling into you with a major bear hug. It made you laugh out loud and you didn’t care how silly you sounded. Blueberry’s arms were squeezing you.

“Hey, Blue,” you wheezed through the squeezing hug. “How ya doing?”

“Me, what about you!? You were asleep all morning and you didn’t wake up once even when we were loud, like you were sick or something. You-you’re okay, aren’t you?” he asked, pulling away enough to look you over. His eyes were wide and worried just like his voice and his arms around you were shaking.

“I’m sorry I made you worried like that. I was just out late last night and I tired myself out. I didn’t sleep well so I was making up for it by napping throughout the day. “You made a show of turning your head in either direction to show off how ‘healthy’ you were. “Look, not sick, just needing a bit more rest. You good?”

“Your magic was almost all gone.”

Your smile almost fell off your face and Blue went still when he realized what he said and how it made your react.

“No-nonon-it’s fine, I’m sorry for saying something! A-an-and I’m sorry I checked but I was worried ‘cause even if we’re out of magic we don’t pass out like that. I thought something else was wrong. I’m sorry, don’t be mad.”

“I-I’m not mad, honey,” you chuckled, still feeling a bit sick in your stomach with something close to guilt. The idea, the very thought of Blue knowing what you had done last night made you want to crawl into a hole. “I just don’t want you to worry about me. It’s nothing. I’m fine now.”
Blue ducked his head again and leaned against you, hugging tighter before letting go enough to step back and give you your space.

“I shouldn’t have gone off if only Sans was going to be left behind. Was he even there when you woke up? Were you alone?”

Unfortunately so.

“Yeah, he was there. We talked briefly but I was really hungry and I needed to leave. He probably forgot to mention it to you or text anyone.” With your luck he was going to give you and the rest of the group a royal cold shoulder once you went back.

Blue cursed under his breath, a dark look on his face that surprised you. “I should have known,” he muttered. He glanced off to the side and noticed Edge and Red, both staring at the pair of you with a casual posture. It was enough to make Blue stutter and pull out of his dark mood. “Oh, you were with…company. Did you eat yet or just get drinks?”

You laughed and pulled Blue along with you. “I had plenty to eat with Edge earlier. Come here.”

And much to your pleasant surprise, Edge and Red got along well with Blue who was able to move past his bitter feelings towards Sans and connect with the two, rougher, skeleton brothers. Red thought it was cool that Blue knew how to ride a motorcycle and Edge even made a nice comment about Blue’s trailing scarf before gesturing to his own. Blue thought it was neat how they had something in common.

Before you knew it the night was late and you were heading back with Blue to climb into bed with only a few minutes to catch up with Papyrus and Stretch who you haven’t seen all day. Sans was out but Papyrus said he trusted his brother and wasn’t worried about waiting up for Sans before going to sleep, so that’s what you all did.

In the morning you were one of the first ones awake with Papyrus to go on another run and workout. When you are finished you headed off into the shower first and came out to the smell of fast food breakfast. You had an egg muffin in your mouth when there was a knock at the front door.

Who?

No one knocked.

Stretch answered the door and moved back in time for Edge and Red to climb up the steps and drop their duffles.

“So, when do we leave?” Red asked with a wide grin.
long haul. No way we're leaving them behind.

So, Edge and Red got the Poly talk from their caretakers and saw a healthy three person relationship modeled in front of them so they are ready to go in wooing reader compared to some of the other skellies. I am here for all the healthy ships and that includes healthy brother friendships. This is a abuse free fic-Edge just smacks his older brother to get him to tone down the lewd behavior. Also from now on if the bois are startled they might slip back into their all caps or all lowercase way of speaking, just so you know that's not a typo.

I loved this chapter even if I hate and SUCK at line dancing in real life. You remember what I said about this being wish fulfillment?

Starting this week I'll switch back to weekly updates and I'll get to those on Saturday instead of Friday (work is a bit more overwhelming than anticipated, haha.)
Stay Frosty Royal Milk Tea 1

Chapter Summary

Part 2 - life on the bus with six skeletons is bound to be an adventure.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seems like the whole damn world went and lost its mind  
And all my childhood heroes have fallen off or died

Stay Frosty Royal Milk Tea  
FallOutBoy

There were a total number of six bunk beds, a fold out bed from the couch, and the master bed in the backroom plus the driver and passenger chairs up front that could be stretched out if the need for them was great enough.

With Edge and Red all the bunks would be filled with skeletons leaving you to shack up somewhere else. The obvious choice was the huge queen sized bed in the back but you felt like that wouldn’t be fair for the one small human to take the largest bed on the bus, yet Papyrus and Blue protested (too much) when you mentioned this.

And that’s how you ended up with lots.

“So, does this mean you want to be the black dot or do you want to be a normal dot?” Red asked before picking out a stick from the cup. It emerged blank and he flipped it over a few more times to make sure before nodding in acknowledgment.

“That depends on you, if you want a bunk or if you would rather have the big fancy bed all to yourself,” you answered, gesturing for Edge to draw next.

Red chuckled just past your shoulder. “I’d rather not keep something so nice just to myself if you don’t mind. Any rules on that?”

“You can figure that out for yourself while hitchhiking your way back to Ma’s if you think that’s appropriate language,” Edge grumbled, ever the mediator when he thought Red’s flirting/teasing/joking got too out of hand.

Red laughed nervously and you recognized the familiar magic sweat beads that came whenever Red was in danger of disappointing his little brother. You had wondered if Edge was more of a bully brother and that was why Red faltered so easily at the first sign of a warning, but it turned out to be a bit more simple.

Red was the older brother, and though most of his stats were lower, he had an impressive magical reserve that reminded you of Sans’ own stores. (Stretch also had more than his brother, but the difference wasn’t so clear cut.) Red didn’t have much to fear from his brother in terms of stats, but even you could see he cared what Edge thought.
The two brothers were close and had a number of inside jokes that were starting to show up the longer you spent with them and you suspected the whole ‘boss’ title was just one more of them.

You pulled a stick from the cup and sighed in relief when you found it blank. You would be keeping your bunk bed with the draw curtain after all. Behind you Blue made an excited noise when he realized he had a chance at the bed. But Stretch and Blue both drew blanks. Papyrus pulled the second to the last stick and it came out with a dark black dot before Sans could even draw.

“Nyeh eh eh! Naturally I the great Papyrus will get all the things I utterly deserve!”

“It was random,” Stretch chuckled, tossing his stick back into the cup and winking your way when his gaze met yours.

“Congratulations Papyrus,” you laugh. “I’m sure you’ll enjoy it. You’re tall enough to appreciate such a large bed.”

“Ah-ah well yes, I suppose so, though it is not my race car bed and lacks the style and flare I’ve come to appreciate, I think I will enjoy it,” he said as if he was making up his mind through the conversation before turning to look over at Blue. “But that doesn’t mean others can not also enjoy it before sleeping hours because that’s where the TV is located.”

“We still have another season to finish!” Blue cheered, remembering the anime he had convinced Papyrus to enjoy with him.

Originally the pair of them had been opposed to watching anything that was an ‘anime’ because all of what they had seen had been nothing but the sappy cliche romance types. After exposure to a bit of the typical fighter animes that were so popular with the kids, both boys were hooked.

And that was good because it looked like you would be on the road longer than you wanted to be.

There were a few sections of the road between you and your target destination that diverted your bus because it was driven by an AI (and programed by a monster?!) for safety reasons. So a one hour cruise through a town ended up being three hours going around it. It looked like you would be in close quarters with the boys a bit longer.

You stood to put the sticks and cup away in a cabinet but had to slam it shut before the supplies inside spilled out. You found somewhere that wasn’t a mess and Edge told you he’d remember where the cup was even if you forgot where you put it. Meanwhile Red had helped himself to exploring all the different cabinets and drawers he could find.

“You don’t have a lot of food in this place do you?” Red asked, holding up a box of oatmeal with the dinosaur eggs Papyrus was so partial to. “I mean you got a ton but it’s six skeletons and one hungry, hungry human so you’re good for a couple days no more.”

“Forward thinking,” Edge agreed, examining the interior of your, admittedly bare pantry.

“I mean, we stop to have dinner each night. If we didn’t we’d go crazy with cabin fever,” you answered.

“And what about food that isn’t high carb energy bars?” Red went on. “There’s not a lot else in here. Nothing that ain’t a dry or fast food.”

“You getting picky on me?” you teased, bumping his hip with yours.
Behind you, you felt something like a predator’s attention on your back, but when you turned around Papyrus and Blue were in the back watching anime, Stretch was up at the front in the passenger’s seat reading on his flip phone, and Sans was…in his bunk? On the roof? Somewhere else? You weren’t sure and you weren’t eager to keep track of his movements.

Looking at ‘Prime Directive’ was like looking at a kicked cat and you didn’t like the unintentional emotional manipulation. You hadn’t meant to make him feel like shit, but dang if he didn’t take rejection worse than an eight year old. Why did he act like it was a bigger deal than it was? It was just you.

“Not complaining sweet cheeks,” Red chuckled. “But we know how to make some decent dishes so what about a cooking night? There’s bound to be a supermarket on the way we can break at for stretches and shopping.”

“You think we’re going to be on the road long enough to need to go shopping?” you asked with a tired huff. All the skeletons in a grocery store… the very idea of it made you dizzy.

Red gave you a pointed look before breaking it to eye his brother. Edge grumbled but pushed off the counter to lumber over and stand next to his brother.

“You’re tracking this FourB person from the Embassy for how long?” Edge asked in a softer tone.

“A few days, over a week.”

“And how long has he been out and about making trouble?”

You glanced past Edge to where Stretch sat at the front. “A couple of months at least.”

“Yeah,” Red interjected. “We don’t doubt you’re like a stellar bad ass babe, but catching this kid might take a bit longer than you planned and it’s a good idea to have like, a full fridge and pantry when you’re carting this many hungry skeletons around.”

“Yeah, that’s not a terrible idea,” you relented. “But I really don’t plan on being on the road forever.”

“No, of course not,” Red chuckled. “But like, we wanna be able to make some food.”

“…You want to show off.”

Edge and Red both turned around to look at Stretch who still lounged haphazardly in the passenger’s seat, playing on his phone, never once looking up.

“Excuse me?” Edge pulled himself up to his full height and the easy slope of his shoulders was gone. He was all angels and harsh lines.

Stretch looked up from his phone as if just noticing them and smiled. It was a tired, easy sort of smile that paired well with his chuckle. “Nah, it’s cute I think. Yeah, let’s stop for some food and go shopping once we’re in the next town. It’ll be nice to use that stove after all, yeah?”

Edge’s eye lights flickered and then he blinked and the stiff set of his shoulders went soft. He glanced back at you and then back to Stretch, who had gone back to looking at his phone. Finally Edge smiled.

“We—well yes, with a respectful interpretation of the language I could see how one would assume our desire to cook and eat good food as a positive, and I even agree with it. Yes. Red, you shall
clean out the cabinets until they are neatly organized while I tackle the fridge with permission.”

“Knock yourselves out, but don’t feel like you need to.”

“We are not guests and therefore not entitled to the exclusion of proper living maintenance. We have every intention of pulling our own weight and contributing to your success on this mission.”

“That’s sweet of you, Edge. And you too, Red, thanks for thinking of us. Just don’t tire yourselves out.”

“Impossible!”

“But thanks for the concern, sweetheart,” Red added with a sly wink in your direction.

With Edge and Red occupied you left them to climb up into the driver’s seat and turn it so that you were facing Stretch. Kicking the curtain part way, you were both separated from the rest of the bus. It wasn’t much but it was enough to get your point across. Stretch looked up from his phone and turned it off once he caught your eye.

“…Hey.”

“Hey.”

He looked away and turned his phone over in his hand, doing a fantastic job of looking distracted when you knew he was hyper aware of you.

“You wanna tell me about it?” you asked.

“…About what?”

You crossed one leg over the other and rested your head on your fist after situating your elbow on the soft arm rest. You looked ready to wait forever for him and it did take a while longer before he said anything in response to your stare.

“You think I was being rude?”

“You don’t?” you countered.

Stretch shrugged. “Edgelord seemed fine with it.”

“You’re being rude now, Stretch. That’s not his name and you know it. Maybe it’s a bit unusual but he likes it and Mini picked it out for him so we can respect that. What’s going on?”

“We’re on the road.”

“What’s going on with you?”

“I’m reading a novel?”

You sighed and waited a moment more before asking again. “Stretch, you’re upset about something and you’re either taking it out on our new arrivals or the new arrivals are what you’re upset about. I don’t want us to have issues because we can’t communicate. Tell me what’s going on, please.”

“It’s nothing.”
Of course Stretch wouldn’t make it that easy for you. From what you heard out of Papyrus, OG Sans was just as horrible about his communication skills. It would be like pulling teeth to have such an honest conversation but you were worried about what would happen if you didn’t.

You wanted Red and Edge to have a place among the group. Blue seemed to like them well enough last night at Ken’s Country Corner. The trio had got on like a house on fire and it had been fun to watch.

They had promised to trade practical fashion advice for riding a motorbike after hearing about Blueberry’s gift. Red had asked about the make and model and when Blue couldn’t remember Red spouted off a few tidbits of information that helped them all guess what type it really had been. Earlier, before leaving, Red had offered to look over the bike for Blue and make sure it was all up to specs seeing as how he was an engineer with an eye for cars mostly. Apparently bikes weren’t all that hard to understand.

You felt something close to an idea begin to take shape in your mind.

“Do you not like the Underfell brothers?” you asked, referring to them by the codename the Embassy had used to identify their alternative reality. “Blue seemed to like them okay.”

Stretch’s nonchalant expression twitched and you saw the waver in his eye lights as he watched the road. It had been so subtle and small, if you hadn’t been watching for it or expecting it you would have missed it.

“Yeah…. I heard all about them last night. Bro told me enough.”

“Enough to get jealous over?”

Stretch stared at you without turning his face and you saw his eye lights narrow, orange and dark enough that you could miss them if you didn’t know they were there.

“I’m not jealous of them,” he denied with a light flush that made your grin grow.

“You’re so jealous of them because your bro is paying more attention to them than he is you. It’s all over your face, hun.”

His blush only darkened. “D-don’t call me that. You don’t know what you’re talking about. Blue’s my older brother, he can do what he wants. I don’t control him.”

“Yeah, but that’s not how jealous feelings work. We all know they’re irrational and make no sense half the time. Explain it away it you want, but the way you feel isn’t going to change on its own. You’re jealous of the brothers for having Blue’s attention.”

Stretch turned his face away, tearing his eye lights off of you. “Even if you were right and that’s all true, there’s nothing to be done about it. I’ll mind my words around the pair. You don’t need to worry anymore.”

You got up from your seat and tugged on the back of his chair, turning him around to face you. Stretch didn’t fight it but he also didn’t look up at you as you loomed overhead.

“That’s not true, and playing nice isn’t the only thing that’s important. Your feelings matter too. You don’t feel great right now and that’s no good. You’re my friend. I care about that.”

It wasn’t what he expected to hear, judging by the way his eye lights shot to your face and glowed brighter, so much so that someone not looking might even notice them. His brow bones shifted into
an expression of disbelief and you scoffed.

“Don’t look at me like that, Stretch, of course I would care.”

“…it’s not…”

You don’t mind his emotional slip. A faint echo of magic behind his words wasn’t a big deal.

“It’s a big deal to me because it’s you, numb skull. You think I wouldn’t care after what you’ve helped me go through? Don’t be dense. I care and I want to help you.”

As if it wasn’t clear enough with just your words you reached out and grabbed the fabric of his shirt where days ago your teeth had been, biting and sobbing as you fell apart in his arms. He hadn’t left you or judged you or rushed you, but he let you cry to your heart’s content no matter how messy it made him, and then helped you into bed before sunrise. He had been there to see you do your terrible deeds and he stayed until the end, until your ugly fallout.

Stretch recovered and chuckled, fingers itching to hold something. You pulled a honey stick out before he could hanker for a cigarette, tossing it at his hand without explanation.

“If you want I’ll talk to Blue and he can tell you all on his own, without prompting, how amazing of a brother he thinks you are. You’re always complimenting him but don’t think he doesn’t think the same of you. You’re his brother, no one else. You all might be…alternative versions of one another with similar features or whatever, but those boys aren’t going to take your place with Blue.”

“….I know that.” He glanced down at the stick of honey in his hands, fingering it gently. “It just sucks you know.”

“Well suck on something sweeter and then maybe it won’t be so bad.”

As if setting an example you reached into the front pocket of your hoodie and pull out a stick of rock candy. You had a couple more left but you decided you could be liberal with your last few if you were going grocery shopping soon. You pulled off the plastic and sucked on the sugar while Stretch ripped off the end of his honey stick and did much the same.

“You going to be good?” you asked, resting your rock candy on your bottom lip to watch for his reaction.

You felt good about your talk, but Stretch’s emotions were what really mattered. You knew it would take more than one affirmation to deal with such sensitive feelings, and you weren’t even the subject of his discontent.

“I’m…going to be fine. Yeah. Sorry about the comments too, really. I’ll watch it.”

You hummed in appreciation. “Thanks. I’m not asking you to be besties right away, but I’m sure you can all get along. You’ve already got a ton in common.”

“Oh yeah, like what?”

“You’re both monsters, you’re skeletons, you’re not from this world, you’re in a bus with me, you’re on a secret mission for a shady branch of the government, you like to eat…”

Stretch laughed and it made you smile.
“Alright, I get it, I got it, you’re good honey.”

“I thought you didn’t like that nickname?”

“I never said that, I just didn’t want you calling me that. It’s my name for you. It’s not fair we all have to go by nicknames around here aside from the ‘originals,’ so share in our suffering.”

“I’d hardly call it suffering.”

“You don’t think it obnoxious?”

You grinned, tapping the end of your rock candy off your bottom lip while you thought. “Nah, it’s nice when it comes from you. I’d deck the wrong guy for trying to use it on me though. I’m not a fan of nicknames from strangers or people I don’t like.”

“Oh, so you like me now?”

“Of course.”

Stretch’s grin fell off and in its place was a healthy orange blush, a shade darker than the golden honey dripping out of the plastic sleeve. A second later he blinked and began to recover but not before your lips had curved dangerously into a cunning grin.

You were having too much fun flustering your friends. It was fast becoming your favorite bad habit.

Before he could recover enough to tease you back you got up and moved to the gps, selecting a new destination and updating it before leaving for the end of the bus.

You could hear Blue and Papyrus getting along as they supplied commentary to the action anime and you could see Red and Edge arguing about food’s nutritional values.

You couldn’t hear Sans.

Considering how quickly Stretch got jealous when his brother made friends with two new skeletons, how did Sans feel about his brother, the mascot of all monsters and internet influencer, getting along so well with practically everyone else? Since the start of the trip…how often had the two of them hung out?

Maybe you were way off, but you had a sad gut rolling suspicion that you weren’t.

You climbed up the ladder to the top bunk and brushed back the curtain just enough to grab his attention. In the dark, the glow from his white blue eye lights stood out.

“Hey,” you spoke first.

An awkward silence stretched between you before he replied. “….Hey?”

“We’re going shopping soon. You wanna come?”

You watched the way his eye lights wavered in the dark.

“Nah…wasn’t planning on it.”

He was still sort of a jerk and the older brother so there wasn’t any excuse for how much of a wad he had been to you…but….! Ughhhhh!!!
“Well you should come. I’m going to drag Papyrus out too so we’ll all go.” You started to climb back down but thought better of it and paused to say one last thing. “We’ll be there soon so don’t be…choco late.”

Sans’s eye lights didn’t even blink and you groaned to yourself, scrambling down so that he wouldn’t be able to see how stupidly embarrassed that pun made you. It was terrible and you knew it and this was why you didn’t like puns!

Chapter End Notes

Part 2 of this 6 part series is here! I'm excited for the road trip adventures to continue with Red and Edge. They're a good pair.

Who do you think it was shooting mini daggers at Red for being so casual with the reader?

I am a big fan of a few things and one of those things is open communication. Like, I'm a sucker for the drama too, but reader is determined to make sure all the boys get along. There are going to be issues of personality and things like jealousy that get tackled and I feel like there's for sure that romantic angle, but also these boys love their brothers a lot and jealousy doesn't always have to be romantic-trust me, I get low key jealous of people who have time with my best friends while I'm stuck on the other side of the country. It happens.

Weekly updates are gonna be a Saturday thing cause I'm so tired and burnt out from work I can't manage the Fridays, lol. Look forward to it!
You weren’t sure if it was because you were traveling in a group or because your stupid bus was so horribly oversized for most of the back roads, but it felt like it took forever to find a way into the parking lot of a suitable supermarket. At the rate you were all going at it would really take another two months to get where you needed to go.

No, that was just you being pessimistic. You were going to be fine.

Behind you the entirety of the bus empties into the parking lot and you can hear several different branches of conversation going off at once. Some wanted to go get drinks from the smoothie place (Blue and Edge), some wanted to just walk around and wander (Stretch) and some of you were going into the grocery store itself to do the shopping.

Though he hadn’t seemed thrilled at the idea, you had invited Sans and Papyrus to go with you and help pick out the foods best suited for feeding monsters. You could take care of your needs well enough but you didn’t know what everyone else would need.

“You need human foods still, and it’s not like monsters can’t gain nutrients from such foods,” Papyrus said, reaching for a shopping cart to guide out of the parking lot.

Sans was a few paces back and meandering in your direction so you decided to stop and wait for him to catch up before going any further. If he wanted to mope and sulk he would have to try a little harder. The more you thought about it the more you were convinced there was something unresolved between the brothers. They had been on the surface exposed to human culture longer than anyone else and it had shaped them in undeniable ways. Papyrus was a monster ‘influencer’ on the internet and Sans was… a puzzle.

“They don’t replenish your magic or give you as much energy though, and I mean if we’re being honest here, I gain a lot more from your monster food than you do from my human food,” you answered. “I still need help replenishing my magic just as much as my physical energy.”

“You do eat a lot,” Papyrus hummed.

Behind you Red snickered and you turned around to glare lightly but let him have his joke. It wasn’t anything worth getting upset over. It was true after all, you did eat a lot, you needed to.

“…Nothing wrong with that.”

You blinked, too surprised to say or do anything else when you realized the comment came from Sans. Sans?! He almost sounded… nice. It was a considerate comment if nothing else.

“Absolutely, completely! A healthy appetite and diet are both essential for a well balanced
lifestyle,” Papyrus agreed.

Feeling empowered you playfully glared back at Red over your shoulder. When he caught your eye you stuck your tongue out and then laughed when he flustered.

You walked even with Papyrus while Sans and Red trailed a few steps behind you. You had a list in your pocket you pulled out and showed off to Papyrus. He recognized almost everything on the list and you only had to explain what a few human foods were before deciding to cut those off. You tore the list in half and handed the side with more monster meals to Sans.

“Can you and Paps get these and meet back in the middle? You two probably know these stores better than anyone and will be best at finding what we need.”

Sans took the paper like it was something that might bite him but it was Papyrus who spoke up.

“Of course, when we were on our own I was always in charge of acquiring the necessary groceries for our daily living. Sans, lazybones, was helpful in transportation.”

“No kidding,” you chuckled when you noticed how Sans turned towards his brother.

“Heh, not a lot to that. You lead and I just ketchup.”

“SANS!”

You didn’t even wince as Papyrus slipped back into his old habit of talking with magic behind his words. You, along with Red, chuckled at how comically the younger brother reacted to the pun.

“Heh, if you don’t wanna taco bout it that’s one thing but don’t go bacon my heart when I’m trying so hard over here.”

“Trying hard at what, you insufferable brother?”

Sans’ smile reached his eyes as he looked up at Papyrus.”What, can’t dill with a little cheese?”

“I am so utterly disappointed in your manners at this moment in time,” Papyrus moaned with both hands over his face.

“Heh, lettuce all romaine calm and just get what we need. No need to get all burnt up over it.”

You nodded to Red, waving your half of the list before starting to head off in the opposite direction of the store. Behind you, you can hear Papyrus and Sans fall into an easy sort of banter that’s not familiar but something you still somehow recognize. They sound like brothers and it’s a little sad how easy it was to just get them together again when you know thanks to Sans’ stubborn personality it had been a while since they were so familiar with one another.

“They sound like they’re going to be okay.”

You glanced to your side, hands still loose in your pockets, and caught the look Red was sending your way. “Hmm?”

He chuckled. “As flattered as I would be to think this was just a slick way for you to get us alone together on a shopping date, I think you’re a far kinder person.”

You feel the heat on your face and blame it all on the way Red watches you, with a knowing sort of stare that makes his smile all the more....more....alluring? Ugh, when did that happen?
“I don’t know what you’re talking about. Where is the candy in this place?”

You hear his chuckle past your shoulder and it seems to echo a little more with the depth of his voice. Red doesn’t let you get far before he’s at your side again, walking shoulder to shoulder like the two of you make a pair.

When he reaches for the list you don’t stop him from grabbing at it but do look up when he calls your name.

“Heeeeey, I know you’re busy today, but can you add me to your to-do list?”

You nearly choke on the gasping laugh that gets caught in your throat, reaching up to slap both hands over your mouth and wheeze in-between your fingers at the way he pairs his awful pick up line with his wiggling brow bones. It’s too much to handle at once and you’re far too amused to pretend you hate it.

“Red, shut up,” you laugh through your fingers, feeling the weight of tears caught in your lashes. You rub your eyes with the heels of your hands and cough to get your breathing regular again. “Give that back.”

When you reach for the paper he pulls it out of reach and stuffs it into a pocket of his hoodie and laughs. “Nah sweetheart, I got it this time. There’s only three things on tha’ list and they’re all human things.”

“I know, it’s why I tore the list off where I did. We actually have a lot less to find, comparatively. We’ll be done in five minutes, eight tops if the check out counter is backed up.”

“That doesn’t sound like fun.”

“It’s not supposed to be fun, it’s a chore, we’re in a store.”

“Don’t mean it can’t be fun.”

You scoff playfully at his comments and make a show of rolling your eyes. “If you say so.”

“It’s all about the company you keep. Wanna bet we can make it fun?” Red asked, bending low and close so that his voice is a warm breath on your neck right under your ear. You almost miss a step when his arm reaches over to loop around your waist, tugging hips to hips.

You’re close enough to feel his body’s heat, rolling like his magic, steady and warm. You hate admitting it to yourself, but it’s a nice feeling and you wouldn’t mind curling up around it like a house cat and dozing comfortably. You haven’t known Red long, just a couple days, but after exposing your his soul you feel impossibly close and familiar with him. You trust him, and his touches aren’t unwelcome.

Almost subconsciously you feel your grip on your magic go, and some of it leaks free to brush up against Red’s. He notices it instantly by the way his grip on your hip tightens and his own step falters. You hear his sharp intake of breath and then another sound deeper in his through that he tries to mask with a chuckle that sounds almost nervous.

“Damn, babydoll, why you gotta be so forward? My soul can’t take it without warning,” he laughs, sounding near breathless.

“Sorry, I was careless,” you confess, feeling hot from embarrassment. Hastily you snap back your magic and Red leans into you more with almost a whine sounding in his throat. “Sorry, I just sorta
was absent minded for a second. You okay?’

Red looked up and his eye lights flickereded with a circle of orange red magic before his grin stretched wide enough to distract you. “Did I mention wanting to be on your ’to do’ list because I sure as hell could take a bit more of that.”

You snort back another laugh and shake your head. “You’re terrible, you know that?”

“I’ve been called worse by lesser minds so don’t think I can’t take that as a compliment!”

“Just…. get a basket. We’ve got stuff we need to pick up. If we spend all day standing here we’ll never get anything done.”

“You could get me done.”

You laugh loud enough to turn a couple heads but it was worth it to hear Red’s chuckle.

Without much more distraction you manage to acquire a basket and find a couple of the things on your list in the first few aisles. Red insisted on carrying the basket and arranging the items in it before you could keep anything to carry for yourself.

“Why does it say candy at the bottom, how is that specific?” he asks with a huff when he rereads your list.

“It’s not, that’s why I’m here. I know what I like.”

“What about the rest of us?”

“Ha, I know that too, or no one mentioned it. Stretch is a sucker for those honey sticks at least. You want anything for yourself that isn’t on the list?” you ask, turning down another aisle, absently keeping an eye out for the others.

Sometimes you could hear Sans or Papyrus taking to one another two aisles up or over. It was easy to give them their space and let them pass you by, knowing their monster foods were located in different, nearby, sections of the store. It sounded like the brothers were done well with each other. Sans hadn’t short cut out of there so far, which was a good sign at least.

From what you had read on his bio from the files the Embassy gave you all, that was his favorite way to avoid conflicts or unwanted situations, and you recognized early on how a person could abuse such an ability to get out of emotional confrontations.

“I like cigars and smoking but I know better than to find that here. Stretch…he the other one who smokes, right?” Red asked in a casual tone, though it didn’t sound like a question when he voiced it.

“Yeah, but he doesn’t do it around us so much because he knows it’s deadly for second hand consumption. Ma tell you the same thing?”

“Pretty much,” Red hummed, walking along beside you with an easy pace.

It made you slow to keep even with him until he stopped and you had to turn and look back at him to see what it was. There wasn’t anything around you on your list and it didn’t seem as if he was looking at anything on the shelves.

“Red?”
He glanced up, brows raised in a silent question.

“You got something you need to ask me?”

There was a slight quirt to his grin. “I knew I liked ya. I’m not one to beat around the bush if I can help it, but I wanna be fair about it. The other Papyrus…Stretch? Yeah, he don’t like us none, does he?”

You shifted the weight of your body from one foot to the next, watching him as an answer took shape inside your head. You didn’t want to say the wrong thing and throw Stretch under the bus or lie to Red about anything.

“He might feel a bit threatened by your closeness to Blue, his brother. He’s a decent guy and he said he’d be kinder cause yeah, I noticed it too.”

“I saw you talking to him after that, thought it was cute you looking out for us,” Red said. “Bro won’t make a big deal about it if he can let it go, he likes to be positive even after all we’ve been through. Still, he knows as well as I what’s what. He’s not dense.”

“I didn’t think he was.”

Red huffed and glanced down at his shoes. “He’s a lot cooler than me sometimes. I couldn’t just let it go so easy but he’s, yeah, he’s the coolest. He’s such a smart kid too, he was like a straight A student with Ma and the others. It only took a couple of weeks and he was like a whole new skeleton! I-I learned so much slower.”

Red’s pride for his brother was overwhelmingly obvious and it made you grin. “You love him a lot, I can tell. Yeah, he’s the coolest.”

Red huffed, a faint blush on his cheekbones. “Hey, yeah, but what I was getting at, if there is something I need to say...umm, I wanna try and let go of what I can but I can’t promise I’ll be able to if it’s for my brother. You can talk shit about me all day long and, hell, I’ll join in, but my bro ain’t someone I ever wanna hear anything bad about. He doesn't deserve it.”

“I think I understand what you’re trying to say. I...get it. One of the things you all have so much in common is how much you love your brothers. It doesn’t matter what time or world you came from, you’re as thick as thieves when it comes to your brother, huh?”

“I…guess so.”

You nod along and take a step backwards before turning on your heel. You stop a few paces down and pull out a package of two dozen honey sticks. You think better of it and grab a second one before waving them at Red who hurries to your side and takes the packages into his basket.

“I don’t think you have to worry too much about Stretch from now on. He’s coming from a place where he’s a bit more overwhelmed with how out of place he feels in this new world, he didn’t have a Ma or Mini to show him the ropes and form bonds with. The people who picked him up weren’t that warm. He just had his brother and maybe that was enough, but when it looked like that bond was being threatened by two flashy new and cool skeleton bad boys-”

Red chokes on a laugh and with private delight you catch the way his blush darkens across his skull.

“-but I think he’s a bit more secure right now if Blue’s texts are anything to go by.”
To prove your point you withdraw your phone and show off a picture of Blueberry, Stretch, and Edge all posing with different milkshakes and the milkshake statue that stood outside the shop. The three of them looked like they were old friends having fun in a playful photo.

“Damn, they look like they’re having all ‘da fun, don’t they?”

You smile over at Red and his expression of fond amusement. He was an older brother after all, he was allowed his sentiments. “They’re doing okay, I think.”

“Fine, okay, you convinced me. Thanks for looking out for us sweetheart,” he chuckled. “I owe you one. Let me know when you wanna cash in.”

“I’ll keep that in mind for a rainy day,” you casually banter back.

The colors on the candy shelf drag your eyes down until you find a party size package of sour candies and pull it free. There are enough individual bags to keep you set for a while so you toss it to Red before looking for the other thing you need before leaving.

“What else is left, or is your sweet tooth that bad?” Red asked.

“Less for my sweet tooth and more for…uhh, more for just me.”

Red chuckled behind your shoulder, drawing closer. “How is that supposed to make any sense?”

“It’s a habit?” You tear your eyes off the shelves to catch him staring and remember something. “Ah, I haven’t explained it to you or your brother. It was something that I picked up as a part of the training I went through. Before monsters surfaced me and a group of kids were raised to be a precautionary defense against the monsters if they should ever break the barrier and make war again.” With an easy roll of your shoulder you go back to searching the shelves. “It’s why I can use magic and why I’m on this team looking for another one of those kids. Anyway, humans don’t use magic the same way monsters do.”

Red’s voice is close as he hovers just past your shoulder. “Yeah? Funny fact, tell me more.”

“You’re okay hearing about how I was raised to fight monsters?”

“You’re not fighting me now, are you? I mean, I’m not one to normally turn down a friendly spar if that’s what gets your engine revving. I’m sure my bro would bend over backwards for a chance at ya too.”

“I don’t want to fight you, dork.”

Red laughed close enough that his breath was back on your neck. “I know, I felt your soul and saw it too. You’re not a bad apple, not by a long shot. What else were you saying?”

“Well the candy helps me focus. When I feel magic from another monster there is a sorta danger sense that’s triggered. Basically I taste something sour in the back of my mouth and it helps me to hyper focus on any perceived threat.”

Behind you Red goes still.

“And sometimes it’s just fun casual magic I’m feeling so I like having some sort of candy or gum on me that I can suck on until my body realizes that yeah, it’s okay, I’m safe this time,” you say.

With a delighted gasp you spot a plastic tote on the bottom shelf double stacked with different
flavored rock candy sticks. It’s perfect and huge and will last you a good long while. It even came with a handle!

“So what’s these ‘em tarts here for?” Red asked, voice slow as he poked the bag of Sour Patch Kids.

“That’s if I need the focus. I sometimes….”

You pulled up the tote to hold and then realized how heavy Red’s gaze on you was. It was enough to make you falter. You trail off into a nervous laugh and glance away. It had been going so well you hadn’t thought how awkward it would be to admit to something so personal.

You remembered the day on the roof of the bus, talking with Sans after your fight. You remember almost falling into those darker memories and scrambling for the candies before it became too much. You were sure Sans thought it weird but thankfully had hadn’t pressed you on the issue. Maybe he didn’t know they were panic attacks.

And it wasn’t like you were ashamed of them or yourself! It was pretty normal considering all the crap you went through to make yourself ready for defending humanity. There was some messed up stuff you hadn’t deserved, and other things they exposed you to. So, years later you still weren’t over it and likely never would be.

You weren’t ashamed of your panic attacks, but it was nice when people didn’t know, when they still thought you were…

“I get them too.”

You met Red’s steady gaze with one of your own. You expression is a lot more open than you wanted it to be, but he doesn’t call you out on it or maybe you feel small for it.

Red shrugged and broke off the gaze, some color still on his cheeks. “It’s only at night though, when I hear certain things or don’t hear other things. It’s tricky, ain’t it? Touching something familiar helps, the…tactile aids help ground me and it’s been good so far.”

“It’s good you have something that helps,” you finally say after enough awkward silence passes between you. In the aisle there is no one else to hear you or see you, but several over you can make out the voices and conversations of others going about their day and minding their own business.

Red closes the distance between you and stops in front of you, toe to toe. You have to tilt your head back to look up at him, as he’s a wider, taller Sans from a harsher world who actually prefers wearing real footwear as opposed to some ratty, god-awful house slippers.

You’re close enough that you can smell what makes him unique. He’s a Sans but he’s still himself, an individual with his own past, thoughts, traumas, and ideas. The thick of his jacket smells like old tobacco and woodsmoke, with something sharper you can’t yet identify but still appreciate.

He leans down and you don’t flinch or pull away, letting him do as he pleases. You can see his grin curve and the gold of his tooth catch the light as he moves. Then you feel his hand on your wrist, phalanges sliding over the soft of our hand down to your fingers, stopping when they feel the plastic handle you’re still carrying.

“That looks heavy.” He tugs it out of your grip but doesn’t back up. “Lemme get it for you.”

You don’t say anything in response and don’t pull away, even when he hovers his face right over your ear, breathing warmth over the skin. It’s another terribly long second before he speaks, and
it’s raspy and low compared to everything else that’s come out of his mouth.

“You ever, and I mean ever, feel unsafe around me or the others, don’t hesitate or apologize. I don’t want that between us. You’re always going to be safe with me, yeah? You do whatever you gotta ta feel that way.”

You don’t know why you feel dizzy when you lift your head. “Oh?” You take a breath. “Don’t you think I’m dangerous?”

“Hella, babe,” he laughs. “But that don’t mean I can’t feel this way or recognize what’s right in front of my eyes. We’re peas in a pod, aren’t we?”

“Sorry if I gave you that impression, but I’m not scared of you or your brother.”

“Oh?”

You feel his other hand on your wrist and you don’t know why you don’t pull away. You like it, the feeling of his bones tracing lines up and down across your skin. You remember feeling like a house cat and wonder if something is wrong with you.

“I trust you and your brother. I…feel safe around you both. If I didn’t you would have been able to tell in my magic.”

And to prove your point you push some of your magic against Red and he stiffens at the contact but then he laughs, backing up and running a hand over his face, scratching at his colored cheekbones.

“Sh-shit sweetheart, don’t tempt a guy. I hear ya, I hear ya.” He held up the rock candy tub between you like it was some sort of shield. You noticed the color is still bright across his skull in spite of his laughter and smile. “Imma give it to you now because I’m not composed enough to fall apart in the candy aisle of a FoodClub.”

You want to ask him what makes him think he’s going to fall apart but bite your lip instead. You decide to let him be for the moment and mention finding Sans and Papyrus somewhere else in the store so you could pay for all the stuff (on the company card) and get the gang together in time for a dinner out. It was too late to cook anything and you’d have enough food to take care of yourselves tomorrow night.

Before you’re out of the aisle you grab a few more bags of candy for the rest of the boys and ignore the way Red laughs at your back, carrying the basket no matter how heavy it gets.

Chapter End Notes

Red was a fun one to write, I really enjoyed this chapter and specifically all the moments when they got closer (physically and emotionally). I love writing all of them, but dang was this chapter fun and all they did was shop. Next week Sans gets more attention but for now he’s happy closing some of the gaps between him and his brother.
I'm sick in bed for the rest of the day, so don't mind me as I take a nice long nap after this and try not to fall apart. (Low key wishes for a skelly to take care of me rn.)
Chapter Summary

Another encounter with Sans~

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sans scrolled through a new file left in his drive, skimming through most of the reading before closing it out in favor of returning to his favorite files.

Back when Asgore had asked him to work with the human branch of the Embassy he had been apprehensive, but it had turned out to bare more fruit than he could have predicted. The documents and files he had been given (and the ones he had taken) were a wealth of new information. Data on souls, magic, the original barrier, their own kid soldiers…. like you.

In his drive the most read and studied file had been yours. Even before picking up on the project to hunt down his copies-er, the versions of him and his brother from other worlds, you had stood out. There weren’t a lot of soldiers that the Embassy let walk free like that and he had puzzled nights and days over the why of it all.

Why you? Why had they let you go? Why not someone else who wanted out?

Like a bad habit Sans opens up your file once more and lets the text fill the page.

**Subject: SevenA**

The name was an odd fit and he liked the name you chose for yourself much better. The numbers and letters didn’t mean as much to him even if they were supposed to help people of ‘importance’ distinguish one child apart from another. He had asked about the naming convention once and hadn’t gotten an answer that appeased him. All the kids had a number and then a letter and no two kids had the same letter if they had the same number. It was confusing. Just give the kids names.

There were stats on your magic and your HP and your Defense and then a note that *subject’s current status may not be accurate past date XX/XX/XXXX*

It was an old date and he wondered if they hadn’t checked after your ‘physical’ the morning you all left over a week ago. Still, your magic stores were impressive even if your HP and Defense were average at best. Some of the other kids had you outclassed by a lot.

But damn if the roster wasn’t a skeleton crew anymore. It was chilling to read some of the updates and hear the clinical language used to describe how some of ‘operatives’ had offed themselves after the barrier came down and they just couldn’t deal.

What the hell was Sans supposed to do with his sympathy for the boogeyman who had been literally bred to hunt and kill him and his kind? They were just kids, some younger than Frisk.

*You* had been younger than Frisk when they picked you up. He could read about that, about the orphanage they plucked you out of after tests and physicals to determine the probability of your
success in their project.

“and they call us monsters.”

At least he and Papyrus had a dad up until his accident with the machine. It hadn’t been that long, but at least it had been something. Someone had tucked him into bed at night and he had been that for Papyrus once they were left behind. Had anyone tucked you into bed? Ever?

Sans felt the temptation to close out of the document and fold up the tablet completely but as usual, he let it be. Maybe there was something close to guilt crawling down his spine, cause yeah it did feel shifty to be reading up on you while you were asleep in your bunk just a few feet below him, but talking with you had been hard. This was as close as he was going to get to a decent conversation for a while more.

He knew it was his fault. He wasn’t stupid. He had screwed up royally during that first meeting. He just….didn’t believe in coincidences and that was a hell of a coincidence so of course he was suspicious!

Did someone know about his stupid crush? Did Hightower expect it? Was it all fabricated to lure him in like a pitcher plant with flies? Did you know? Were you really as kind as he hoped or were you like the others? Would you burn him too?

**Reason for Dismissal: Insubordination, excessive defiance, failure to perform to standard, deviation of thought….**

Oh yeah, that sounds like you.

He remembered the exchange you had with Hightower, the big bad at the Embassy who had found him right after your fight. He had taken a shortcut right out of there to hide behind a corner and listen, daring to believe that maybe your cover would slip and the suspicion he had wallowed in would be worth it. It hadn’t. You had bit back with anger in your voice and Hightower had… relented.

“Then so be it. Do as you wish.”

It sure as hell sounded like you were a model of insubordination. You were probably more trouble to control than you were worth since the grand threat of monster war was out the window. They didn’t need you for that anymore and the jobs they had set up for the other kids didn’t jive with your personality. He couldn’t see you behind a desk or in a meeting or on a landline phone setting up appointments.

And hell, for being ‘rusty’ you were pretty damn swift in a fight. Fast as a whip and just as hard to hit. He…hadn’t be so challenged since one of Frisk’s genocide runs. Those had been scary. At least you hadn’t tried to take a swipe at him. He knew you wouldn’t. You had a fire engine red soul of determination that could mean anything but when he checked you…

*Is determined to be a good person and do the right thing.*

What the heeeeeeell? Who had such a stupidly cheesy pure soul like that anymore? You were supposed to be some sort of bad ass with an undercut, hard heels, and a glare sharp enough to shave ice but you were just a huge... marshmallow, weren’t you?

Sans closed out of the document, not needing it anymore as he groaned and dropped the tablet onto his chest. He dropped an arm over his eye sockets and let his legs stretch out.
It only got harder to try and make it up to you as the days rolled on, one into the next. You were close with the rest of the bus, even the two new ones.

Actually, Red and Edge were especially chummy with you in a way that made Sans suspicious (rarely a good thing). The pair were too well coordinated and talked too openly with one another. Was that because of the world they came from? It had been a harsher reality so of course there were sure to be some differences.

Either way, you were close with all of them and did a lot to mediate peace on the bus. Even with him and Paps. He hadn’t said anything about it and he doubted Papyrus had either, but you had picked up on the distance that existed between him and his brother, a distance that didn’t exist between the other pairs.

But that was to be expected after being topside for so long. Papyrus was so popular with so many fans, humans and monsters alike. Sans did what he could to keep up, but… ah well, there was a reason Asgore made him the Judge in the first place. Who would expect a short stack with criminally low HP and Defense to be anything to watch out for? He was the element of surprise and magic and little else.

Topside where the dangers were all political and complicated there really hadn’t been a place for him. He was a puzzle piece that didn’t fit anymore.

The sound of the front door opening drew his attention and Sans rolled over enough to peer over the edge of the roof. Speaking of Papyrus, he was out and about, warming up for his morning run. You stepped out behind him, rolling your neck and waving your arms.

It must be almost dawn. Damn, did that mean he had stayed up all night again? He was going to have to get better about sleeping at reasonable hours. Napping all day wasn’t going to cut it for much longer.

Eh.

He must have been too distracted to notice Papyrus’ attention but when he looked down again his brother was grinning and waving like crazy, silently expressing his joy in ways the other bus residents couldn’t hear. They were always so careful, after all, not to wake up anyone with their morning routine.

You were looking up at him too, waving a small hand.

Sans hesitantly waved a bony hand back, hoping Papyrus wouldn’t wave him dow-oh nope, there it was, Papyrus was falling for a reason.

It was easy enough to roll over and take a short cut down to land between them.

“Sup?” he asked, sucking the magic out of his words. You had never flinched before, but he thought he had been enough of a shit to you without the added headache, it was the least he could do.

“Will you join us on our run brother?” Papyrus eagerly whispered.

“Nah, not my thing.” Sans looked between you and his brother and shrugged. “Have fun.”

“You are such a lazybo-such a, aah, a lump . What about staying healthy? All you do is nap.”

You were watching him, waiting for an answer.
“Ah, you know me, Paps, too lazy to even exercise good judgement.”

It wasn’t a clever pun but it got you to snort and that was enough to get him to smile. Sans felt light and just adventurous enough to push his luck. While Papyrus scowled with the usual little brother frustrations Sans tugged at the collar of his hoodie. “Yeah, you sweater believe it but I just don’t have the guts for so much working out.”

“Sans!”

“I’m so lazy, I’m bone idle!”

“Enough with the puns. That is-” Papyrus is too frustrated to finish his sentence in time and Sans is quick enough to squeeze one more in before it’s too much for his younger brother.

“These aren’t all of them. I’ve got a skeleTON more!”

You’re laughing but you lean on Papyrus with a mock expression of outrage. “Sans,” you nearly snort, “you-your jokes aren’t even that humerus.”

“I’ve been betrayed!” Papyrus exclaims, forgetting to be subtle even as you cling to him and refuse to be thrown off by his raised arms. “Backstabbed, double crossed, swindled, misled! How dare you, my dearest friend!”

“Paps, I’m sorry,” you whine, reaching for his jogging jacket to bury your face in. Sans can see the pink flush across your skin even if it isn’t something anyone else could catch. “I’m sorry, it was just there, I could-I couldn’t he-help it.”

You can’t even get a sentence out without punctuating it with giggles.

… cute

“If you are so inclined to join the lessers in their pitiful banter then so be it, you two can train together for all I care,” Papyrus huffs, sticking his nasal ridge up in the air.

“What?” Sans forgot to suck out his magic in his surprise.

Papyrus lifts you up by your shoulders and pulls you off, holding you up so that your feet dangle and swing when you kick out. It’s enough to make Papyrus grin before he swings you around and deposits you in front of Sans.

“What, you mean like a spar?” you scoff, eyeing San oddly. By the way you look at him Sans knows exactly what you’re thinking of. The last time you two were in an encounter together it hadn’t been friendly.

“That’s not a good idea Paps,” Sans chokes out.

“Why not?”

It wasn’t Papyrus who asked it, but you.

Sans doesn’t have the words to reply quickly enough and Papyrus isn’t one to wait around. Sans hears his brother say something and feels the pat on his shoulder but doesn’t react until Papyrus is gone, sprinting off with magic in his steps.

His voice sounds broken but Sans says your name and you wave a hand at the nearby field before turning in that direction.
“Wait, what are you doing? Where are you going?”

“I don’t want to wake anyone else up and based on past experiences we can get noisy.”

“You’re not seriously-yo, you don’t really want to do this, do you?”

There’s a fence half rotten and older than the road you’re climbing over. It separates the dirt and weed choked gravel from a field full and rolling with healthy grass that’s just wild enough to reach mid calf. If you fall it would hurt a lot less than the rocks and gravel…or the hard floor of a media room.

“Come on bone boy, our last dance left a pretty bad taste in my mouth. I’d like to have the opportunity to try this again…on better terms.” You’re straddling the fence with one leg on either side when you look back and offer a hand. “You okay with that?”

“You’re okay with me?”

You roll your eyes and retract your hand. In one fluid motion you vault the rest of your body over the fence and then turn back to face him with a hand on your hip and a quirk to your lips.

“Don’t flatter yourself. I’ll be lucky if I can get a sweat out of this. This is a friendly spar, not me dodging for my life, kay?” When Sans didn’t reply right away you huff and shift the weight of your body from one side to the other. “Seriously? You gonna stay stuck there and make it too easy on me?”

It’s more than he hopes for, but Sans is done self destructing the moment suspicion comes creeping. He takes a shortcut over to the break in the fence, a handful of paces down, and makes a show of stepping over the break when you made such a show out of vaulting over. It’s enough to get you to roll your eyes and he really can’t ask or hope for more.

You can’t trigger an encounter but he’s more than willing to take that step, if only to give you the first move. He’s not surprised when you waste it. You were a cautious fighter. You reacted more than you acted.

He summons a dozen different bone attacks at once. “What was that you said about breaking a sweat?”

You snicker and brace before springing into the attack, finding openings for your body and your soul like an eel in the water.

Unlike the fight with Frisk, your soul doesn’t fully detach itself from your body. It’s too saturated with magic for a full removal, but it’s emerged enough for you to be able to manipulate it through Sans’ attacks with deft ease. Your body isn’t anything to underestimate either.

Sans is used to encounters where it’s only a small heart shaped object he’s trying to hit. He can nick your body and you barely take any damage because that’s not your soul, but you guard your arms and legs and head and hands as well as your soul and it’s impressive.

Man, if this was how you moved after a week and a half of basic endurance training he was glad he never had to go up against you in a monster-human war while you were at your peak. He’d be mince meat.

You’re inventive, using the fence to vault off of when it looks like you won’t be able to jump high enough to avoid a sudden blaster attack. You don’t sacrifice too much sweat when you roll low into the grass only to pop back up a few feet away.
On your turn after a few rounds of easy dodging you call up your magic and Sans is tense for the feel of it. You pull it into your hands and he sees the way your fingernails turn black, almost as if burned that color, before your turn is over.

The next turn when he throws his bones at you instead of dodging you grab one out of the air and it explodes, throwing the rest back. Thankfully the encounter has muffled the sound enough that you both know it won’t wake any of the others. Your palms are red and glowing with roaring magic. The tips of your fingers are turning like charcoal the longer you hold onto your magic.

Oh, Sans had read about this. It was exciting to think he’d be able to see it in real life. Reading could only do so much to excite the imagination. With magic pooling in the palms of your hands and leaking out into the air he could feel the heat of it. If your magic had an elemental preference it might be fire.

He doesn’t know what he says as a taunt but it’s something that makes you grin. He uses both bones and blasters in one move and none of them reach you thanks to a shield of magic. Oh! You had cast that several turns back but now it was only just materializing.

On your turn you use the shield like a blunt object and throw it at Sans, but he can blink in and out of its way. Sans knows in addition to his impressive magical capabilities he can be near impossible to hit.

“I think I see that sweat,” he calls out to you.

“It’s hot over here, or are you blind with only one eye?”

He laughs back, summoning four different blasters to hit from all different angles. “I can see just fine how hot under the collar you’re getting.”

Sans also noticed how when you used magic only one of your eyes lit up with a silver red halo of reflective magic. It wasn’t so different from his own magical habits.

Still, between the two of them, you were a hella lot more intimidating. Papyrus might disagree but-

“WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING ?!”

The bone attacks Sans had summoned fell apart as he reacted on reflex to the killing intent. It was just enough time for him to see the barrage of bones and short cut out of their range. Shimmering blue magic dug up chunks of earth on their way towards him and it wasn’t even an official turn so there was no rest for Sans as he blinked in and out sweating from the effort.

A red wall of magic stopped the next attack and Sans actually staggered, seeing as how they all impacted loudly against your barrier.

The attacks fell apart and Sans heard Blueberry cry out your name, sounding worried and scared.

The barrier fell down and you stood up from the grass where you had been crouching, both burning hands extended. You blinked and the magic left your eyes and then your hands. The encounter was over, having been interrupted by Blue.

“Hey,” you weakly called, holding your arms open for the smaller Sans to run into. Blue stumbled at the last second and fell into your hold, making you stagger back. His hands lit with magic as he checked you, now in contact.

“He hurt you,” Blue breathed into your shoulder.
It seemed he had noticed the few nicked HP points Sans had managed to shave off before you started fighting back. Actually, you hadn’t ever fought back, just used your magic to block and defend. The closest you came was throwing your barriers at him and that was like…. nothing.

You looked up over his head at Sans and then down at Blue. “It’s fine, we weren’t fighting for real. It was just a friendly spar. I’m not really hurt, look.” You pulled him back and smiled wide.

Blueberry must have believed you because he didn’t say anything else, but he did glare back over his shoulder at Sans with more venom and pure anger than Sans had ever seen.

It reminded him of the spat they had that one day they were supposed to be looking for Edge. Somehow Blue had found out about the first day fight and had wanted to talk to Sans about it. Sans had avoided as much as possible before it turned into a semi friendly encounter with Blue trying to check him for more info.

Blue had heard about the fight but Sans wasn’t sure if he knew about the bruises. He hoped not. Humans could get hurt from attacks that still missed their souls completely, and be in pain in spite of their HP being at full.

“It’s fine, Blue.” Stretch was outside, climbing over the broken part in the fence to get to his brother. “She’s fine, you can see for yourself. There wasn’t any malicious intent, right?”

Blue made a sad sound into your chest and then stepped back further. “I… I think I overreacted. Sorry.”

You tugged the ends of your sweatshirt down over your hands and used the fabric to brush your palm across his skull and then dab at the moisture around his sockets. Sans felt another roll of guilt when he recognized the honest panic Blue had to come down from.

“You don’t have to apologize to me, I’m fine, and Sans is fine too.” Sans can see the way a huge smile takes over your face as you try to cheer up Blueberry. “Hey, don’t worry about me so much, I’m a badass who can handle herself in a fight or two. Look, you’re safe here with me. Stretch too…”

His brother came up behind Blue and rubbed at his small back. The shivering had tapered off and Blue took a couple deep breaths before looking up at your face again.

“If you say so. Still, sorry for interrupting your… fight.”

“Yeah, and I was just about to win too.”

Stretch snickered and you glared up over Blueberry’s head at him. He waved off the angry look and pat at his pockets, looking for something to put in his mouth.

“I didn’t say anything,” he hummed.

“What, you laugh at anything now?” you snapped back.

“Nah, just jokes.”

“I assure you, my victory was no joke.”

“If you say so.”

You gasped dramatically before reaching for Blue, turning him around to face his brother. “Did
you hear him? The nerve.”

“The absolute appalling nerve,” Blue agreed, his smile wobbling back into place as a faint blush covered the front of his skull.

Your arms were draped over his shoulders and crossed in front of his chest while your head awkwardly rested behind his neck. You weren’t taller than him without the heels (and how you managed to move so well in them during his fight Sans will never know).

Stretched rolled his dark eye lights. “Yeah, yeah, you can be offended over breakfast. Blue, weren’t we planning on something this morning?”

“Omelets! They’re like tacos but with eggs.” He turns around, keeping your arms around him and you’re close enough to kiss as he reaches up to support your shoulders. “With cheese and peppers, you’ll love them!”

“I’m sure I will.” You squeeze Blue in a friendly hug and then pull away but Sans doesn’t miss the way his counterpart follows your withdrawal, seeking our your touch for the last bit of contact. “But I’m gross and need to take a shower. You mind keeping something warm for me?”

Sans looks up and notices Papyrus back from his run, standing next to the bus talking with Edge who was outside and leaning against its side. Neither looked too bothered about what had just gone down.

The only one missing was Red, but he was just lazy enough to be the only one to sleep through the whole ordeal. That was fine. Sans wasn’t terribly fond of the cop-iteration of himself. Edge was enough of a stickler for manners that he wouldn’t make a fuss over it but Red was just bold and obnoxious. No filter on that guy.

“I think it’s a good enough idea for all of us to turn in,” Stretch agrees.

You look back at Sans and nod to the bus. “You coming?”

It’s enough for today. His soul feels heavy and light and in pain all at once. He’s...willing to be content with that for now.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so who of ya'll said it was Blue glaring at Red a few chapters back? Not to confirm or deny anything but he has a habit of showing up and stealing the show, lol.

Sans and the reader got a little closer this chapter and had some moments, plus we got some insight into where he’s coming from and how detrimental it can be to not have that open channel of communication going with your family and friends. Paranoia doesn’t shut up, but your friends can be louder.

Thank you for the ‘get well soon’ wishes! I’m feeling much better but I have no voice left. I sound terrible when I try to squeak out a few words, but I’m that person who’s like ‘I need to run my mouth or I’ll die’ at the end of the day; rip to people with common sense but I’m different.
You had all been on the road long enough. The hamper was full, you were out of clean things to wear, and the compact living situation was starting to eat away at some of your sanity. It made sense to stop and find a hotel to crash at, something with real beds and enough room to move.

Finding a hotel was easy, booking the rooms was a little trickier considering who would be sleeping with who. It didn’t seem fair to have a room all to yourself but you had an endless credit line and six adamant skeletons who insisted you deserved your own space. Even if they had to make do with modest rooms.

Over the phone you confirmed your reservation and the AI pulled your bus into the parking lot before evening could bloom out of late afternoon. And it was a nice enough hotel, but after so many days on the road, it might as well have been heaven on earth.

“I’m going to die of joy, is that possible?” Red asked.

“You seem healthy enough,” you snicker in response.

“Are you sure you’re okay then?”

You raise a single brow in question. “What are you getting at?”

Red’s grin went wide across his face. “I don’t know, but have you been to the doctor's lately? Cause I think you're lacking some vitamin me .”

Edge does you the honor of smacking his brother upside the head without looking. It’s more of an involuntary reflex by now, and one that always makes you chuckle.

“Lets see where our rooms are and then we can unload a bit. For all I know the rooms are all over the hotel,” you say.

Papyrus was ahead of you at the doors, holding them open until everyone was inside.

At the counter a middle aged woman with a clinically neutral expression ran your card and turned over four sets of key-cards. And it’s only when you see them out in front of you do you breathe a sigh of relief. You had been worried about not getting enough rooms or having to share with someone. That would have caused way too much drama and you had too much on your plate to deal with anything else.

“We’re all on the same floor, and these two rooms are right next to each other,” Stretch commented, pointing to two different sets of cards.

“They’re all in the same wing,” you correct before grabbing up all the cards and gesturing for the boys to follow you to the nearby table area where you can distribute the key cards appropriately.

You keep out the only single card as it’s for a single bed room and the one intended for you, but take note on where everyone else is staying. You’re between Stretch and Blue’s room and Sans and Papyrus’ room. Across the hall is where Edge and Red are sleeping. So far it’s good enough to keep everyone happy.
Your room is a tad smaller than the other two, as the others are all on ends, (and yeah the set up is weird enough to almost care about) but at least you have a balcony and a *privet* bathroom for the first time in over two weeks.

The fact that there’s a bag for laundry service is almost too sweet to stomach. The fact that it’s an extra charge doesn’t even phase you. (Every time you run the card you’re vindictively delighted to know you’re draining Embassy resources.)

You were in the middle of stuffing all your dirty things into the bag when there’s a knock at your door.

“Hang on!”

You scramble to get the rest into the bag and then pull open the door, standing to the side so Blue and Stretch can come in if they want. You can hear more voices belonging to the other boys further down the hall. That’s when you notice the...swim trunks?

“Oh, hey guys. What are you up to?”

When did they even get swim trunks?

“Look! They have a gift shop downstairs and Papyrus got these for all of us!” Blue rushes to explain, somehow reading your confused expression well enough to know. “We’re going to try swimming!”

“You can do that?” you ask before you can stop to consider how…impolite that might come across.

Stretch chuckles first. “Nah, we can’t float on our own, but we make do with blue magic and some of us just like standing around in the water. This place is pretty empty too so…” he ended with a shrug.

No one would get too upset at a number of skeleton monsters in floaties helping themselves to the pool.

“Do you have a swimsuit?” Blue interrupts. “We could get you on and we could all go swimming. You don’t even need blue magic in order to float, right? I wanna see it, I’ve not seen a real human float yet.”

It’s such an odd thing to say you can’t help but snort a bit into your shoulder. “That all?” You glance back at the bag of dirty laundry you still need to drop off. “Well I don’t know about swimming just yet. I have these clothes I need to drop off first. Ah, speaking of that, any of you boys need your clothing washed?”

Stretch’s grin makes you feel bad for asking. “We can figure out how to do that ourselves. You don’t have to baby-bones us.”

“I was being polite.”

Blue snickered and you felt betrayed by the look he shares with his brother.

“Fine, see if I ever offer to be helpful again. Remind the others when you see them. It’s better if we get it done overnight so it’s ready for us in the morning.”

“So you’ll come after you’re done?” Blue asked, eye lights sparkling until their shape nearly
morphed into stars. You felt weak to his excitement and heard yourself speaking before your brain could comprehend what was coming out of your mouth.

“I’ll meet you down in the pool room when I’m ready, don’t rush me.”

You close the door on Blue’s cheer and before the door shuts you can hear someone further down the hall ask about you. It could have been Red or a groggy Sans, but your money was on Red since Sans asking after you still didn’t make a lot of sense.

You two weren’t antagonistic with each other, and the cold war vibes were practically gone since your spar, but you were easily closer with the rest of the boys. Plus, Red was always pestering about you.

You stuff most of your things into the bag, and fill out the laundry tag before attaching it and dropping the whole unit down the laundry chute at the end of the hall.

Back in your room you start to get ready with what you have. Blue had wanted to see you float but you didn’t have a swim suit and… buying one seemed like too much of a hassle. Plus….

You caught sight of yourself in the mirror and tugged at your shirt, pulling it up over your head enough to see what you looked like underneath.

You can stomach a handful of seconds before turning away and scrambling for your pajamas.

Your hands fumble but you change into the long black nightshirt with sleeves long enough to end at your elbows. The bruises were all but faded so you didn’t have to worry about anyone seeing those.

You take a minute longer to calm down and spend it breathing purposefully on the edge of your bed. Eventually you glance at yourself in the mirror, see your coverings, and breathe deeper. Arms and a bit of leg…you were… fine.

You were being stupid. It had been years and you were still so squeamish.

No.

Just….

You’re not sure how much longer you sit on the edge of the bed, watching seconds and minutes tick by. Nothing stops for you. Maddeningly, the world moves on without you. You’re the only one making a big deal out of this. Blue was waiting for you. He wouldn’t care. The others would wonder where you were. Someone would want to know why you were taking so long.

You smack your cheeks and stand up. You find a handful of sour candies and chew through a whole package before you feel put together again.

You were fine. You were going to be fine.

The bathroom had a robe you decided to borrow, carrying it over your own arm and slipping your room card into its pocket.

A voice at the end of the hallway catches your attention.

You follow it to the bend where the elevators and the opposite wing start, only to find Edge on his phone, holding it up for a video call. You recognize the face waving goodbye before the red
icon signals the end to the call.

Hearing your footsteps Edge turns and you think he grins, but it’s hard to tell if he hadn’t already been grinning for the end of his video call ‘home.’

“How are Mini and Ma doing?” you ask casually.

“They’re doing well and happy to hear we’re on solid ground again. They were afraid we’d tear apart the bus if we were left on it much longer. A baseless concerns, I assure you!”

You snicker at his bluster and reach over to push the elevator call button. “I’m sure you two wouldn’t be the first to crack. It was tiring for all of us and this stop was well deserved.”

“If there had been someone to ‘crack’ under the pressure of confinement I would have stepped in. I’m not sure where their concerns stem from, honestly. I have far too many manners for that.”

You glanced briefly back and noticed his lack of swimming attire. “You weren’t planning on joining the others in the pool?”

“No, I thought calling would be a better use of my time. In addition to that, I didn’t want to buy a suit for swimming. If someone wants to see all my bones they can ask instead of gawking at them out in public!” Edge finished with his nasal ridge turned up and the sight he made was enough to get you to laugh.

He almost scowled at the sound but the color on his cheekbones let you know it wasn’t in any real anger.

“I fail to see the humor in my remarks, human.”

“No, I was—it just made sense. I thought so too but I didn’t think a skeleton would have those kind of thoughts,” you answered through your chuckles.

Edge’s halfhearted scowl abated. “Ah, I...see then,” he commented as the elevator pinged before opening. He followed you in and punched the button for the floor requested and the ‘close door’ option. He makes a ‘humph’ sound before speaking again. “I should have suspected you to be the only other one with a modicum of decency out of our lot. You are always very...coordinated in your manner of presentation.”

“Thanks. I mean, Blue and Papyrus are pretty coordinated too I think, they’re just more outgoing with their style.” You cast a glance his way and then grin. “But I would have said the same thing about you too if someone mentioned it.”

“Me?”

“You’ve got a signature look,” you laughed, wagging your fingers in his direction. “Edgy bad boy.”

The blush was darker on his face and you can tell Edge is a bit thrown by the way he crosses his arms and holds himself straight. “That is nearly the same thing Mini said of me when we first met, but she thought it was aesthetically pleasing with a private context that she only recently shared with me.”

“Oh?” your interest is sky high and you make a mental note to call Mini about it later.

The lights inside the elevator slow as you approach the ground floor, but Edge pulls out his phone
and opens up his photo apps. By the time the doors open and you stepped off he has what he was looking for pulled up and he turns his phone to show it to you.

It takes everything in you not to double over laughing.

Mini had sent him a photo of the cover from one of her period harlequin romance novels. The cover had a ‘bad boy’ type hero with a scar over one eye, slicked back pompadour styled hair, a leather jacket and dark jeans. There were some tasteful blood stains on his shirt as he held a busty damsel under one arm protectively.

*Love in Blood and Leather* was the title of the paperback smut, featuring bad boy heartthrob *Edge* Lawson and Betsy Sweetheart.

“Oh…my….” You couldn’t manage to say anything else for fear or risking a loud laughing fit in the lobby.

Edge scowled but there was no real anger behind the expression. “Don’t laugh too loudly. You’ll disturb the other patrons,” he lightly chastised.

Edge’s name came from an old paperback smut novel. This was cursed knowledge and you didn’t know what to do with it but you were dying to at least laugh. Your chest hurt from keeping it all in and he must have seen since he rolled his eye lights and tugged you down a nearby hallway. Ducking into an alcove he pulled you close and muttered. “You can laugh now if you want to,” he said before pulling you even closer.

You buried your face in his jacket and *cackled*. Your shoulders shook with the effort and you felt tears in your eyes. You needed to find that novel online and, *ohmystars* you couldn’t think about it without picturing your *Edge* on the cover. It fit so well! Oh this was going to haunt your thoughts for days to come if not for as long as you knew Edge. It was too much and exactly what you needed to forget about your episode in front of the mirror.

“*Edge,*” you whined into his shirt, careful not to dirty it too much.

“I-I’m not changing my name even if you think it’s weird. I like it so get your chuckles out now!”

“Never change it, not ever. I don’t think it’s weird at all,” you giggled, pulling back enough so that he could see the wide smile he had given you. “It’s perfect. You’re perfect just the way you are. Don’t ever change.”

“I hadn’t planned to!” he proclaimed.

Before you could say more, or maybe before you could notice how colored his skull was, Edge pulled you back and wiped at your face with the end of his shirt, smearing your tears and roughing up your cheeks with the explanation that you ‘looked a mess’ at his expense. You let him fret over you a moment longer before pulling out of his arms and grinning easily back up at him.

“Thanks for that. I think I needed a good laugh.”

“Good laughs are rarely unpleasant, but why would you say you needed one?” Edge asked, poking the skin under your eyes as if he was looking for more tears or a sign of tears to come.

“I ah, I actually hadn’t felt like swimming and I was sorta, ugh just, I didn’t want to go?” you explained, shrugging at the end. “Not a big deal, just wasn’t feeling it.”

“If you didn’t want to go swimming what are you doing down here?” he asked, voice pitching
higher as he fit his hands over his hip bones and leaned into your personal space.

You shrugged. “Everyone else seemed so excited for it and Blue asked.”

“That’s not a good enough reason. If you didn’t want to go swimming you don’t have to and you shouldn’t feel obligated to. You spend enough time stuffed in that metal tube with Blue, he can survive one evening without your company.”

“I don’t mind hanging out with everyone….”

“You don’t like swimming though, do you? Is it because of the…” Edge held up his hands and waved them in a poor imitation of flames. He had been watching your spar with Sans since almost the beginning, you found out later on, and he had seen you use fire based magic.

“No, it’s not that. I’m…fine in the water, I’m not Grillby or anything, not great though. I just don’t…I’m not terribly fond of feeling so exposed if that makes sense. You know what you said earlier?” When he nodded you go on. “I’m also not super excited to get gawked at, even if its by friends, sorry.”

“That’s the last thing you should be apologizing for,” Edge responds, sounding almost angry, though not at you. “If you wanted time to yourself we would understand. Blue might get huffy about it but he wouldn’t hold it against you.”

“I’m not tired though, and I really did want to hang out with everyone. I just didn’t want to…” You tugged at your nightshirt, long and dark, hoping Edge would understand without you having to put it into words.

“Honestly, I’m not sure what you’re so apologetic about. No one is entitled to your time or your body, not even your friends.” Edge made a face before tilting your chin up, enough that you see his eye lights as he finishes his thoughts. “I don’t intend for my words to make you embarrassed, but I don’t want to see you doing anything you’re not okay with for the sake of others, even if it’s something small and seemingly insignificant. Please understand what I’m trying to say. Nothing is more important to us than your comfort and consent.”

Damn

You really didn’t want to start crying on Edge again, especially not so soon after laughing tears of mirth into his t-shirt. But he was too sweet, too good, and way too considerate for his own good. How did he expect a person to react?

Had you ever heard anyone say that to you outside of therapy? Your comfort and consent? When had those ever been a priority growing up?

Even when you had been uncomfortable enough to ask to be left out of events and activities at the Embassy, the shame and guilt you felt later one when you had been forced to watch the others, (the younger, the smaller, the weaker), do what you had been too scared to accomplish…that always drove you back. Your consent wasn’t a real thing for so many years. Like a fairytale or a myth, it was something you hadn’t believed in until you were outside.

“It’s just swimming. I’ll be fine,” you try to say.

Edge leans into your space, scowl deepening. “It’s not just anything. Don’t belittle your own feelings. If you want I can explain to them that you’re too tired and turned in for the evening. They will understand.”
“But-”

“But Blue can shove it,” Edge interrupted, still leaning. “His happiness is not more important than you. Don’t sell yourself short. And if you need to, I can talk to him about it for you.”

“No, that won’t be necessary. I-honest, I really do want to spend time with everyone, but if I’m being completely honest I’d rather just sit in a lawn chair and stay like this.”

“That’s acceptable,” Edge said, looking convinced but still weary, like he didn’t trust you to take care of yourself if the situation changed. “But do not push yourself for anyone else’s sake.”

“I won’t. Would you feel better if I promised to let you know if I didn’t feel comfortable?”

“Please do.”

You grabbed his hand and held onto it, surprising him with the contact. “Thank you, Edge. I feel better knowing you’re looking out for me. Let me make it up to you somehow. Please.”

“Yo-you d-don’t need to do that.”

Edge blustered and there was another dusting of dark color high on his sharp cheekbones. As delighted as the sight normally made you—because you loved watching your skeletons squirm—you wondered if a day would come where the simple things wouldn’t be so big a deal.

You hoped not anytime soon.

This was too much fun to watch.

“I do not need compensation for behaving admirably.”

“Are you trying to tell me you don’t think there’s anything I could do that you would like?” you asked coyly.

Edge’s eye lights shrunk and his sockets narrowed. “You are trying to manipulate me.”

You don’t miss a beat or falter in your response. “Yeah, because I wanna do something nice for you and you’re not helping me by making it any easier.”

“You don’t need-”

“I know I don’t need to, but let me do this good thing, please, Edge,” you cut him off, tugging on his hand so he has to look at you and see how open your expression is. You really do want to do something to show your appreciation for his care. You would with anyone. When he doesn’t respond for another long beat you squeeze his hand through his glove and add an extra, softer, ‘please’ that you hope gets him to understand.

His shoulders slope down and you see some of the tension ease out of him as he dips his head in your direction. His eye lights waver in their sockets before you can hear what it is he’s mumbling into the collar of his shirt.

“What was that?”

“A s-spar with me too. I want to spar with you too, the way Sans got to.”

That was it?
“Of course, I’d love to. Don’t hold back because I won’t.”

You give him hand another squeeze and he inhales without the need for air, sounding a little off balance thanks to you. You watch him for all the little details that let you know he’s pleased, savoring every last one.

“I’m not going to-I don’t. It will be a fair spar.”

“You don’t think Sans’ spar was a fair one?” you asked, tugging him along. The two of you walked down the rest of the hallway in the direction of the pools. The smell of chlorine in the air only grew stronger to closer you got.

“He initiated the encounter without issue, even if it was interrupted unceremoniously. I have nothing to take issue with in that spar,” he said.

The pair of you got to the double glass doors and he reached for them first, pulling the one closest to you open for the both of you to fit in through. The pool is easy enough to see from where you enter in, and as expected Papyrus, Blue, and Stretch were all scattered around the main pool while Sans and Red took up space in the nearby hot tube, (five feet apart from one another of course).

Papyrus was the first to see you enter and it was his voice that called out to you in greeting before Stretch could look up from his float or Blue could come up for under the water. You dropped your things onto a nearby lawn chair and shucked your room slippers off one by one, waving.

You glanced back at Edge and noticed how he was in no way dressed for poolside fraternization. He was still in his tall red boots and decked out in all his usual garments, including the studded leather jacket and trailing scarlet scarf.

Catching your look he huffed and pulled out his phone to flip around and wave. “I will be enjoying a good chair and some casual reading if you don’t mind.” He hesitated with his phone halfway replaced in his jacket pocket. “You’ll alert me should you need my…help, won’t you?”

“I’ll be fine Mr. Lawson,” you teased.

Edge’s blush came back but he didn’t fluster at the comment. With a firm shake of his head he turned and claimed a nearby chair for himself to stretch out on and went to his reading. From the pool Blue surfaced and was kicking from his pool noodle to the edge of the water. You met him at the edge and sat down.

“You came down, I thought you were-um, is-are you really down or are you just saying hello goodby?” Blue grabbed for the ledge and hung, watching you with a curious expression.

“Sorry, Blue, no floating from me today. Do you mind if I just hang out here on the ledge while you all have fun?”

“Of course!” he exclaimed a little too loudly. He winced and then ducked his head before adding, “I’m happy you’re here at all. You don’t have to swim if you don’t want to. But look, I can go around the entire pool with this thing and I don’t even need to use blue magic for it.”

And before you can say anything more Blue pulled out his pool noodle and used it to lean on while kicking his way across the rim of the pool, much to your delight.

You weren’t sure why you had been dreading that talk. Blue wasn’t angry at you or even disappointed, no one was. Papyrus boasted on how he could stay afloat with just his blue magic while Stretch drifted lazily on his popsicle shaped floaty bed. Anytime he got too close to the edge
he’d use his magic to bounce back.

It was a nice evening and it lasted until dinner time when you all decided to hang out in Blue and Stretch’s room for room service and watch MTT classics for a change.

And it would have been a perfect way to end the day.

But that was out the door once you got a call from your least favorite person. A text made Sans’ phone vibrate and you meet his eye lights across the room while the television program played in the background.

It was easy enough to slip yourself out and cross the hallway to your room with your vibrating phone pushed close to your chest. You hit the answer button just as Sans appeared, blinking after a shortcut, in the hallway next to you.

Wordlessly you let him in while answering your call.

“Hightower?”

“You’re at a hotel.” His voice was sharp and to the point. It had been a while since you last heard it, but it was just as cutting as you remembered. He hadn’t even reprimanded you and you felt chastised.

“We needed the break. You gonna chew me out for the room service bill,” you sassed. It was easy to snap and posture instead of cower in fear. You weren't afraid of Hightower. He wasn’t anything that could hurt you anymore.

“That is inconsequential. Are you aware of the local development in your area?”

“What local development?” you asked out loud, meeting Sans’ eye lights again. His face was just as confused as yours even though his phone was buzzing with new emails. He showed you what was coming through and you recognized the sender, but every email was blank with just a single document apiece.

“That is a no.”

“You can be helpful and let me know what we’re looking at here or try to make this into another damn lesson I’m not going to learn from? What is it?”

You felt your skin crawl and knew if you had hackles they would be all on end, ruffled and raised. It had been such a nice evening and you felt good, but no matter what came out of Hightower’s mouth next you knew that your night was going to end on a sour note.

“You should be more aware of your surroundings. You’ve been keen on tracking FourB but neglect in observing other items in your vicinity.”

Before Hightower could finish speaking you flared your magic enough to use it for a map. You saw your surroundings, you saw the hotel, and then you saw the city block. You zoomed out further, scanning for anything of consequence.

You saw it before you were more than four miles out.

“What?”

“I assume you spotted one of them.”
You swallowed and zoomed out further until you saw a second and then third name pop up. “Why am I seeing these names, Hightower. I thought I was the only one you let walk?”

“You were. As dirty as the laundry may be, there were a number of your colleges who broke faith with our policies in a less amicable manner. They are as rouge as FourB now and likely in communications with the subject. I’ve sent their files to your counterpart. You may review them together.”

“Hold on a hot second Hightower, what do you mean-”

But the line was dead.

In a fit of anger you pulled the map back fast enough to get dizzy by it, but you can see up to fifteen miles now and spot all the Sans and Papyrus dots on top of yours, but also see where FourB, FiveG, FiveH and TwoK all reside.

“…what are these files for?” Sans asked, and you realize with a startle there is magic in his voice again, but that’s only because you hadn’t responded the other two times he asked. You dismiss the map and let the magic fall apart as you blinked at the lights behind your eyes.

“I…” You swallow to feel your throat again. “I think we should tell the others about this. FourB isn’t the only one like me nearby. I…I think he has friends and I don’t think he plans on coming in peacefully.”

Sans watched you slowly before nodding. “You want to tell the others now?” when you nodded again he huffed. “Alright then. It looks like we might be having that sleepover after all.”

And then he was gone.

You stood still, too stiff to move. Your chest hurt with something close to anger. You had been so happy and so content with the way things were. You and the skeletons were…enjoying yourselves. You were having fun. You were watching movies and eating out and telling funny stories every night. Sure sometimes things got tense with such close living quarters and the unending barrage of terrible jokes and puns from some of them, but it was good. You had been enjoying yourself enough to forget the real reason for your time together.

There was a job, and you had been plucked from the mediocrity you had found after therapy and the Embassy for a reason.

The names from the map…all of them had been close with FourB—Raven. All of them had been upset with the peace between monsters and humans, more so than most of the other kids.

You realized a moment later what the unpleasant feeling in your gut was for.

These kids had been raised to kill and hate monsters, and there are currently six monsters you were very close with and in no way prepared to even think about losing.

No.

Your heart burned with something loud.

You were not going to lose any of them.

You were determined not to.
Another fun chapter that actually has some plot at the end! Also, FourB’s name is revealed as Raven and he'll be referred to as both from now on, but mostly Raven and you'll find out why soon.

I really didn't want to give Edge a new or different nickname, but I understood why someone would think 'Edge' could be insulting, so here is the compromise. Thus this fun little backstory. He's such a good Skelly, he deserves to be happy.

Enjoy!
You walked into Blue and Stretch’s room to find most of the skeletons already surmised of a change in plans, but it’s clear that Sans hasn’t gone into any detail. The attention falls on you as soon as you enter and even though the number of bodies hasn’t changed, the room feels smaller than before.

“You have an update for us?” Papyrus asks, standing as you enter. He’s the closest to you while everyone else sits or lies scattered around the room.

“Yeah, I got a call from the-from Hightower at the Embassy.” Calling him ‘the bastard’ probably wouldn’t help anyone understand. “He heard that there were some other individuals in the area we should watch out for. Before we leave for anywhere tomorrow we should probably…talk about them.”

“Individuals? That doesn’t sound ominous, sweetheart,” Red laughed, flashing his gold tooth as he grinned. The comment is, of course, sarcastic.

“Well, hopefully it isn’t so bad,” Blueberry offers.

“Regardless, it’s a good thing to talk about. You have information on these people?” Stretch asked right after his brother. His eye lights were on you, but he also glanced sideways atSans who was shuffling from one foot to the other with his phone out. Apparently his disappearance hadn’t gone as unnoticed as first intended.

“That is what we're here for,” Red laughed like the suggestion was something obvious before winking at you. “Tactical shenanigans and all that, right sweetheart?”

You opened your mouth, but before you could say anything Sans exclaimed from the back corner. “Got it!” a second later the television screen blinked with a familiar document. Sans phone had casted to the monitor and all his emails showed up in the background with the first one open and extended for easy reading.

What’s a presentation without a few visual aids?

You heard a few murmurs before squeezing past Papyrus, cradling his elbow as you passed, to stand adjacent to the large monitor where everyone could see you. It helped you not feel so overwhelmed when you remember you had been sharing space and close companionship with each of them for two and a half weeks if not more. They were friends.

“So yeah, there are some new faces that we found out about and it would be good to give it all a rundown right now while we’re together. These new guys are like me and FourB, they’re from the Embassy’s Defense Project.”

**Monster** Defense Project.

Red and Edge shared a look between them and then it was Red who shot his hand up in the air like some school kid in the classroom.

*Shoot, that was cute.*
“Hold up there, before we talk about ‘em other kids, you wanna slow down and mention something else we’ve been meaning to ask you?” Red asked.

“Is it about the—oh no, never mind. Yeah, sure. Shoot, Red.” You’re a little thrown, but it’s Red.

“You mind giving me a run down on how the whole project got started and how you got messed up with it? What made you choose it?”

Choose?

Your monetarily thrown and the words don’t come as fast as they should, but Sans, of all people, steps in. The screen changes as a new file is pulled up—yours.

“Kids don’t sign up for anything, do they?” Sans asks in a lighter tone. On the screen he scrolls until the section about your birth and adoption. There was a link to a photo of the adoption papers with the date and transaction number and everything. “I mean, not a lot of choice when there is no alternative, is there?”

You’re not surprised that Sans has your file—even a redacted one.

You swallow and find your voice again. “Most of us were from orphanages like this one. We were raised this way but some of the kids didn’t stick with the program the whole way. They were put into foster families because that had always been an option, but I hadn’t wanted to quit. At the time I believed what I was doing was the right thing. I thought I was going to need to be the way I am now in order to protect people.”

You forced yourself to face Red, unwilling to look away or run away from the truth. It tastes like metal in your mouth, chaffing and cutting but you lean into it. “I knew what I was doing. I didn’t run away from it. I made the choice to stay with the program for as long as I did. That’s on me.”

You think you see Sans deflate from the back corner but you don’t look away from Red as he watches you. His expression hasn’t changed a whole bunch and it was hard to tell what he was thinking. He was good at being unreadable when he wanted to be.

“Good.”

His voice made you blink in surprise.

“Good?” you echoed dully.

“Yeah, good for you. It wasn’t a bad idea if you’re thinking of it objectively. Yeah, in this world everything turned out peachy because people were willing to work together and trust in one another, but you know what our world was like? If that barrier had come down and we hadn’t been welcomed with open arms, yeah, there would have been war.”

Blue scoffed with a sound of disbelief and Edge purposefully averted his gaze, red eye lights sparkling brighter as they narrowed.

“It wouldn’t have been so bad,” Papyrus interjects. “The humans of the surface, yes are not all universally good and understanding, but so many of them have welcomed us with arms wide open. They would have tried to work with you and your world.”

“Not the way we came out of the ground swinging,” Red laughed with something that sounded like the laugh of someone at the gallows. It was dark and humorless. “Not with the way our world was. We made war with each other from time to time, humans would have just been another easy
conquest."

“Not easy,” you replied.

Red’s grin grew again and the gold glittered.

“Nah, you wouldn’t have rolled over so easy for us, sweetheart, but we cut our teeth on the fight day in and out. The rest of your people, Ma and Mini and all those families…they wouldn’t have made it.”

“You don’t think that, even now!” Blue exclaimed, popping up out of his seat. “Don’t tell me you believe it. You wouldn’t have.”

“Me?” Red blinked and switched his attention to where Blue and Stretch sat next to one another. “I would have been out there, right behind my brother, doing everything I could to keep him alive as we followed the orders from the top. Family comes before strangers.”

“Bu-but Mini and Ma aren’t strangers to you,” Blue pressed, eye lights small and shaking in his sockets. “You would have fought them just because your king told you to? You wouldn’t have questioned it?”

Red didn’t even hesitate to answer. “Yup, pretty much. That’s how it was.”

Blue looked like he wanted to say something more but Stretch reached up and set his hand on his arm, tugging Blue back down into his seat. When he was close enough Stretch leaned over and whispered something that seemed to appease the smaller of the brothers.

“But that isn’t how things are, not here in this world, and that’s how it’s been this whole time. We’ve been cohabitation the surface for years now,” Sans interrupted, drawing most of the attention in the room his way. “And that’s the way we’re going to keep things. New monsters from other worlds risk that balance and that’s why we’re hunting down this FourB guy.”

“Yeah, figured that was his MO with us. He was lucky he pulled us through together and not King Asgore or his wife,” Red chuckled. “No point in putting the effort into something we weren’t personally invested in. ‘Sides, we came through rough and even we wouldn’t turn around and bite the hands that saved us. No honor in that.”

“We might not get so lucky with the next set that comes through if we don’t nab this guy,” Papyrus sighed, sounding resigned. His usual bravado didn’t color his words.

“That’s the gist of it. Maybe a rundown of the original perpetrator?” You looked over at Sans and nodded meaningfully. When you look back at the television screen FourB’s file was pulled up.

“He’s pretty formidable. Unlike me he can manipulate space magic and even time magic and some combination of those two is how he was able to pull boss monsters from other worlds to ours. In addition to you guys we also identified a sushi fry cook fire elemental that went by the name Grillby.”

Blue and Papyrus looked up in surprise at that.

“Grillby?!” Blue gasped. “When?”

“A few weeks back,” Sans answered, interrupting. “He just got cleared and they set him up with a new place to run his business out of.”

“We can go make a visit out of it later on if you’re up for it,” you say softly. “I just found out
recently myself. No news on a Grillby or any other boss monster from your universe,” you add looking to Red and Stretch.

“Damn, my tab is too long to feel too bummed about it,” Red muttered while Edge eyed him knowingly. Red was still a Sans and he was sure to miss his Grillby’s if his job at Ma’s was anything to go by.

“But back on topic, FourB was pulling monsters from their homewards for a purpose, specifically Boss monsters. He wanted to start something or provoke a fight of some sort.” You ran an absent hand through your hair. “It was what he was raised for. When the monsters surfaced and peace was established a few of the other kids didn’t take it so well. A lifetime’s worth of training and instruction amounted to…nothing. He’s trying to find purpose.”

“What a way to go about it,” Red sighed.

“There are three other people who broke off from the Embassy and are nearby, FourB, FiveG, FiveH and TwoK.”

“The names are gonna give me a headache. Why didn’t they just get nicknames?” Stretch interrupted.

“If…that makes it easier. FourB’s name is Raven. He was, well, we were all pretty close growing up, but FiveG is…. And you wait until the picture on the screen changes to a girl with dark curly hair and a cutting glare you had always admired. “Thrive is her name and the two of them were closer.”

Sans pulled up the other two files, FiveH is a taller, thicker male version of his sister and answered to the moniker Tank. TwoK was older than the other two by a handful of years. Her face didn’t have any wrinkles yet, but there were dark shadows in all of her pictures no matter what her hair color had been dyed or bleached. In the latest photo it had been a little mermaid red and chopped off just below the jaw. Her casual name was Esperanza or Esper for short.

Blue listened intently, seemingly committing every detail to memory while Edge still looked away, listening in his own manner. At least you hoped he was listening.

You gave a quick rundown on the different proclivities their magics took. Each one was a bit different. Like you leaned towards fire, Thrive liked magic that had to do with vegetation or the manipulation of plants. It was a unique skill that none of the other kids could replicate and that set her apart almost as much as Raven—the dark bird that he was. Sans called Raven’s combination of time and space magic voice magic. Several others agreed, mentioning their ability to use shortcuts being much the same.

“It’s funny how you aren’t all the same. I thought humans would be more uniform,” Stretch said, speaking up. “You seem more alike than monsters at least.”

Behind him Sans snickered and Papyrus blustered about ‘not being racist’ and how humans were all unique and different, no matter how similar they might appear at first. You waited patiently until they were done exchanging their comments before pushing forward to add any new information.

Tank and Esper were pretty basic fighters. Tank was, to no surprise, pretty strong and could go a few rounds with the best heavy hitters. Esper’s magic was actually pretty sub par in comparison, but she was smart as a whip and good at other things.
“Is that because her number is so low?” Sans asked.

“Her number?”

He wagged his finger in the air. “You know, Seven A, Four B, Two K? What’s with all the numbers and the letters. What are those for?”

“Oh, it wasn’t obvious. That’s for our magic. When humans develop magic outside of their own souls it kinda leaks. The first few kids to go through the process were all Ones because their magic just came from one reserve. Then there were a few kids who had either unstable magic or too much magic and it was too much to store in one chamber, so their magics naturally split into two chambers. Esper has two chambers or reserves of magic. You see here where it says her total magic? If you checked her in battle it would show you half of that because she hasn’t used the other one.”

“So the higher your number the more magic you have?” Stretch asked.

“No…exactly. Raven and I have almost the exact same amount of magic in total, but his is divided into fourths and mine is split into sevenths…making it a little harder to do things. I also suffer exhaustion faster and need to eat a butt-ton to keep up my calorie intake. That’s not as big of a problem for the others.”

“Don’t worry darlin, you’re still plenty of bad ass!” Red cheered, laughing from his seat. Edge glanced up but didn’t move to whack at his brother.

You feel some of the tension in your shoulders abate and you take another deep breath. “Thanks for the vote of confidence. I’m pretty sure I could take most of these yahoos out in a fight. Raven’s magic makes him hard to catch, but he’s a wet noodle. Tank is strong but his magic isn’t the best. Esper is smart, not much more.”

“And Thrive, the girl?” Stretch asked.

You winced. “No problem. Plants or fire, who would you bet on?”

You don’t mention her utter seriousness or drive from the fights you had seen her in. She was intimidating as hell to see charging across the field at you and she was a well rounded fighter with plenty of tricks to fall back on that worked even if you saw them coming.

“Then tactics should be the next issue of discussion. Our odds are far better, we outnumber them nearly two to one,” Papyrus said.

Blue nodded vigorously. “Yes, and with each of us already compatible with our own brother it would be ideal to set ourselves us together. All that is left is to decide who takes which human.”

“Oh, it is just that easy?” Edge sneered, sounding a bit more jaded than you were used to hearing. Only hours ago he had been kind and soft with you in the corner of an alcove, talking to you about consent and comfort. That kind side of him was gone, replaced with something harsher, more bitter. Beside him Red’s ever present grin was a tad strained.

“As captain of the royal guards it is just that easy,” Blue huffed, holding himself up.

“I was a captain just as well, but in my world it actually meant something. Have you stopped to consider what it might mean to everybody else if we actually do fight with these-”

“Renegades,” Sans cut in. “If they’re doing what they’re doing to incite terror then call them what
“They’re still humans,” Edge bit back, sounding angrier than before. “Can you really say they know any better?”

“They’re endangering other humans so yeah, yeah I can,” Sans said, keeping his tone even.

“They’re not confirmed to be anything just yet. So far all they’ve done is brought a few of us over to this prime, ideal world and as far as I’m concerned that’s a reason to thank them, not try and murder them.”

“It’s weird to hear this coming from you of all people?” Sans laughed, though it was a sound without feeling. “Didn’t you-”

Edge stood so abruptly and reached for Sans that the words stopped there. It wasn’t an encounter or anything so civil or uniform, but he reached for Sans with his hands and nearly had the smaller skeleton between his claws before a shortcut winked Sans away to the far side of the room, behind you. Edge looked enraged and it takes both Red and Blue to hold him back while Papyrus leaps to protect his brother with his own defensive stance. Stretch stays where he was, watching everything.

“That’s enough,” you shout.

You reach out and push Papyrus aside to stand in the middle of the room, ready to use your own magic in constructing barriers if you have to. You have a good idea of what Sans was going to say and you don’t blame Edge for his rage. The fact that he and Red killed humans in his world wasn’t a pleasant memory for either of them to face, not after how close they had grown with Ma and Mini. You can’t help but think his voice sounded stiffer than normal.

“We’re not fighting or baiting anyone here in this room, got it?” You add when no one else looks ready to move. “Table it and get back to where you were. I’m not done here.”

Slowly, staring with Blue and Red releasing Edge, the skeletons stiffly amble back into their original places, eyeing one another warily. You tried to catch Edge’s eye lights but his gaze was turned down and away. Red gave you a little shake of his head and you decided it would be wiser to drop it for now.

“I don’t want any of you to have to fight at all. These kids were trained to take down monsters and yeah, you’re all bosses and pretty neat on your own, it’s still too much of a risk and I’m not ready to gamble with your lives. I want to avoid these encounters if possible or manage them as peacefully as can be if they turn out to be unavoidable.”

“A wise call. The human ambassador to monster kind themselves would agree that mercy and understanding are chief instruments of change,” Papyrus praised.

You can’t help but think his voice sounded stiffer than normal.

“Yeah, well it’s a little more than that. I don’t… want to hurt any of them. They’re misguided, that’s for sure, and if they do anything to hurt or incite I’ll stand up to them, but…they’re just messed up people who are a little lost.”

“So, you’re not going to fight them?” Stretch asked from his seat, studying you carefully.

“I’ll beat Raven’s ass into the dirt because he deserves it but I don’t want to do more than that.” You rubbed at your neck, awkwardly remembering the boy who had followed you out of the orphanage all those years ago. “But I still don’t want to risk any of you. It’s….”
“It won’t come to that, doll face,” Red cut in, sounding softer and calmer than his brother.

“We can more than take care of ourselves,” Blue agreed loudly, standing up in his chair and puffing out his chest. “You couldn’t be in safer hands to communicate with domestic terrorists.”

Numbly you nodded before glancing back over at the screen just past your shoulder. The picture of a boy a few years younger than you was still up. It was old. Raven was the same age as you but there wasn’t a more recent picture. He looked too much like you from that age apart from the hair, eye, and even the skin tone.

It was hard to see him and think domestic terrorist, but Sans was right and you were determined not to let your sentiments keep you from doing what was right. It wasn’t what you had envisioned for yourself, but years later, you were still trying your best to be a hero to someone.

“It’s late,” Stretch interrupted your thoughts. “Maybe we should turn in for the night and get the rest we can. Tomorrow morning will be busy, won’t it?”

You nodded. “I want to try and reach Raven before the others can meet up with him. So far there is still plenty of room between them.”

“Then we rest,” Papyrus said, reaching for your shoulder. You felt the warmth of his hand squeezing in encouragement. You glanced up and smiled, letting him know you appreciated the gesture for its kindness by patting his gloved hand in affection.

Sans blinked and was gone while Red and Edge shuffled out, neither saying a word to anyone else. Before they passed you tried to catch Edge’s eye but still couldn’t. Red made an apologetic expression and shook his head before closing the door behind him and his brother.

You pat Papyrus’ hand on your shoulder once more before walking out with him into the hallway.

You were just in time to hear Red shut their room door.

Behind you Blue loudly wished you ‘sweet dreams’ and then let their door shut too. You stood awkwardly in the hallway, alone with Papyrus, still connected by his hand on your shoulder.

“You worried about me?” you teased him, sounding tired even to your own ears.

“If the leaking of your magic is anything to go by, consider me apprehensive but optimistically engaged with your well being.”

His manner and way of speaking made you smile.

“I’m soul weary if that makes sense.”

His hand slips past your shoulder, down your back and you feel the touch of magic on you. Papyrus is checking your stats, you realize a heartbeat later. Outside of an encounter physical touch was often required for monsters to access that information. He must have seen something that displeased him since his smile fell off.

“Your description has changed. You’re worried about...us?”

You feel your face flush and smack both hands over your blush to cover it. “Shoot, did it say that? Man, Paps don’t look at me when I’m embarrassed like this!”

Your pulled into one of his all enveloping hunts before you know what’s what. He folds over you a fraction and stretches his arms all the way around you. It’s a tight embrace and you are tempted to
snuggle further into his touch. What would it be like to lie down and cuddle with such warm arms around you?

Before you can get lost in your own thoughts much more he lets go and moves only far enough to turn your face up to meet his. His expression is soft and open and you…you feel overwhelmingly safe for some reason. Strength has nothing to do with it. You soul is safe. Emotionally you’re as content as one could hope to be after what you’ve had to dredge up in front of so many faces.

You hear his signature laugh, though it’s soft enough to be considered a chuckle. “I apologize for flustering you my dear, but I’m too enamored with all your cute human expressions and want to see them all. You are…truly a treasure. Do not worry about us.”

“I worry because I care. It’s not something I can control at this point,” you sigh, feeling free by the truth of your confession.

You do care about all of them…a lot. More than you should. It had only been two, maybe three weeks and already you were so attached. You had known the other kids all your life.

Why did it feel like when you shared your soul with one of the skeletons it felt like knowing them for lifetimes?

“I didn’t think so,” he laughed.

You felt him tug you in for another hug but instead his face cuddles into your hair, messing up the style and shifting it loose. You don’t care about that as much when you hear the warm hum that comes from his nebulous absence of a throat.

“Thank you for sharing your soul with us. It’s something I will always treasure, no matter how embarrassed it makes you.” He pulled away and bopped the tip of your nose, laughing at the way you wrinkle it to his touch. You wonder if he can see the freckles dusting your skin from so close. The reaction seems to please him. “Now go to bed. Sleep and rest. We will talk more in the morning, but not until then.”

You made a sound of displeasure but leave his warm embrace and key into your private room, suddenly colder than you wished you were.

When you hug yourself it doesn’t work as well and you fall asleep wishing to find some fulfillment in your dreams.

You don’t hear what goes on outside your door.

Chapter End Notes

Cool, so some more insight into what makes these boys all different. They may have the same natures but they’ve been nurtured and shaped by very different worlds and it shows. Still, at their core there are some similarities, like...who they’re attracted to.

Sans Pro tip: if you want your crush to notice you, insult their friends.

I bet you’re relieved that they didn't end up fighting each other in this chapter.
*FourB is called Raven, FiveG is Thrive, FiveH is Tank, and TwoK is called Esperanza - Esper

In other news, November (NaNoWriMo) is virtually over and I am not ready for December. Ha ha ha *cue nervous laughter*
Sans looked up when he heard the door to their room finally open and close. Papyrus strolled in, soul thrumming with vibrancy and a dusty coloring high on his cheekbones. Even down to the way his brother walked was a bit more buoyant than normal.

“someone’s got a spring in their step,” Sans commented, falling loudly on his bed so that the springs inside the mattress groaned.

Papyrus stopped on his heel and scoffed loudly at the pun. “THERE IS HARDLY A REASON TO MAKE UP SUCH A USELESS PUN IN MY PRESENCE. I NEED TO SHOWER AND WASH MY BONES. I’M SURE I STILL SMELL LIKE THE BLASTED POOL WATER. HOW EMBARRASSING.”

With you absent the brothers felt free to slip back into their old way of speaking. There was no reason to pull the magic out of their words anymore and it felt good to fall back into the habit.( Even if it was a habit he was willing to kick if that’s what it took to make you happy.)

Speaking of you…

“…so paps, what took you so long. I know I’m the one with a shortcut, but you looked like…” Sans peeked into the shower room and saw steam, “you were walking on clouds or something, eh.”

“DON’T BE NONSENSICAL ABOUT YOUR PUNS, SANS. I WALKED IN ON NO SUCH CLOUDS. IF I’M IN A RELATIVELY CHIPPER MOOD IT MIGHT BE DUE TO THE FACT THAT I DIDN’T PROVOKE A FIGHT WITH THE MEANEST LOOKING SKELETON IN A CONFINED SPACE.”

“meanest looking?” Sans echoed, “who you talking about, Edge?”

“YOU KNOW EXACTLY WHAT I’M TALKING ABOUT!”

Sans rolled his eyes as he heard the shower door pull back and close. The steam trailed out freely, unhindered by the open door between the two rooms until it was too thin to see. The decorations in the room reminded him too much of farmlands, as the art above the bed (a picture Papyrus confessed to adoring), was of a red barn complete with a silo, set back against a field filled with animals. It was funny to think about Papyrus confessing to liking the idea of farm life with his proclivities for neatness.

Papyrus was the neat freak between the two of them, taking a good deal of time to wash and lather his bones until there was a new smell to them, something fruity or floral that came in a bottle. Paps had always been like that, but it had changed a bit more once they surfaced. Papyrus was more meticulous and groomed far more frequently. Almost as if he cared what others would think of him.

Sans rolled over on the bed and grabbed for one of the pillows to hold in his arms. It squished nicely and would be perfect to fall asleep holding. The bus didn’t have nearly enough pillows for all of the cuddle obsessed skeletons to get away happy.

A few minutes later Papyrus’ shadow spilled out over Sans.
“DO NOT THINK THAT WE ARE FINISHED WITH OUR EARLIER CONVERSATION REGARDING YOUR BEHAVIOR. WHAT WERE YOU THINKING YOU WOULD ACCOMPLISH?”

“relax, i knew you’d keep me safe, there was never anything to worry about.”

Papyrus reached for the pillow and pulled it free before smacking Sans in the face with it.

“I AM YOUR BROTHER AND I KNOW BETTER. YOU WERE ATTEMPTING TO STEAL A MARCH.”

“-steal a what now?”

“YOU WERE TRYING TO-UGH, FOR BEING SO FRIVOLOUS WITH YOUR PUNS YOU DON’T KEEP UP TO DATE ON THE IDIOMS OR EXPRESSIONS OF THE HUMANS, DO YOU? IF YOU STEAL A MARCH ON SOMEONE YOU GET AN ADVANTAGE OVER THAT PERSON BY ACTING BEFORE THEY DO YOU NUMBSKULL BROTHER OF MINE.”

“i know what the expression means, but what does that have to do with what was said ‘cause it doesn’t make that much sense to me?”

“FOR BEING THE ‘SMARTER’ OLDER BROTHER YOU CAN BE INCREDIBLY DENSE SOMETIMES. YOU WERE BESMIRCHING EDGE’S REPUTATION WITH PURPOSEFUL INTENT.”

Sans had a feeling he knew where this conversation was going and he groaned, rolling over. He wanted to take a shortcut out and hang out at the lobby’s bar or something, but that would only result in prolonging the inevitable and he had promised himself very recently that he was going to TRY and be better about his habits to avoid confrontation with his brother. That had been one of the reasons they grew so far apart from one another in the first place. Still, he hated being read like an open book.

“edge was just being mouthy, no biggie…”

“AND THAT REALLY HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH Y/N BEING IN THE ROOM?”

Sans had his face turned down into the mattress, hiding his micro expressions from Papyrus, but he didn’t doubt his brother was able to see enough to know. He mumbled his next words into the mattress, hoping Papyrus wouldn’t be able to hear them.

“I AM YOUR BROTHER SO OF COURSE I KNOW. DO YOU THINK I BLAME YOU?”

Sans really wanted to run away. It would be so easy. All he had to do was avoid Papyrus for a handful of hours and then in the morning they would be in a huge group again and societal convention made Papyrus more of a prisoner than any physical trap so of course his brother wouldn’t bring anything up. It was like watching a Perry the Platypus Perrysode.

“SANS.” He looked up when he heard his brother and sighed at the sight Papyrus cut, arms crossed, eye lights smoldering, all while wearing an extra fluffy white bathrobe.

“what do you want me to say?” Sans sighed. “i might have been out of line but edge was the one who tried throwing the first punch.”

“HE DIDN’T EVEN BOTHER WITH AN ENCOUNTER.”
“…so?”

Papyrus rolled his eye lights. “SO HE WASN’T PLANNING ON USING ANY MAGIC.”

“cool, I would have been fine, don’t see why you’re having a cow over it.”

“GAAAAAH! YOU HAVE ONE HP POINT OF COURSE YOU WOULDN’T BE FINE, HE WANTED TO HURT YOU, NOT KILL YOU, AND HE WASN’T STUPID ABOUT IT YOU ABSOLUTE BAFOON. WHAT MADE YOU THINK PICKING A FIGHT WAS WISE?”

“i wasn’t-”

“YOU ALMOST BLURTED OUT THAT HE HAD KILLED HUMANS. WHAT DO YOU THINK THE ONLY HUMAN IN THE ROOM WOULD THINK IF THEY HEARD IT?”

Sans tries not to be bitter about it but he still sounds sour. “i don’t think they would’ve minded seeing as how close they’ve been…probably already knew about it.”

“YES AND I KNOW PLENTY OF TERRIBLE THINGS ABOUT YOU BUT IT IS STILL UNPLEASANT TO HEAR ABOUT THEM IN COMMUNAL COMPANY AND YOU KNOW BETTER.”

“so do you Paps, so why you gotta call me out like this?” Sans tried to chuckle. He hoped Papyrus would just, for lack of better words, throw him a bone, and spare him the inquisition.

Papyrus sighed once more, this time deeply, before rounding the be to sit on the edge and face Sans head on. He clasped his hands in front of him and bowed his head enough for Sans to understand that his brother was being serious. They had grown up enough to have their usual tells for moments when jokes and japes, and puns all fell away.

“I LIKE THEM AND I KNOW YOU DO TOO, BUT PLEASE DON’T BE SO ANGRY ABOUT IT.”

Sans REALLY wanted to shortcut out of the room and find the bottom of a bottle at that bar in the lobby. It would have been so much easier and to be honest, he had run away from far less uncomfortable conversation. The only thing that made Papyrus’ call out worse was that tacked on confession. How much worse could things get?

“that ain’t what this is about, paps,” Sans tried to laugh, but even he could feel the magic bead and leak off in sweat drops around his skull. Why was he so good at running away if he wasn’t supposed to?

“I KNOW THIS IS SOMETHING DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO HEAR AND I KNOW YOU WANT TO RUN AWAY, FRANKLY I’M NOT SURE WHY YOU HAVEN’T, BUT I APPRECIATE YOU CHOOSING TO STAY. YOUR FEELINGS ARE IMPORTANT BUT THEY SHOULDN’T BE THE REASON FOR ANYMORE STRIEF IN OUR MIDST.”

“i don’t have-”

But Papyrus has already initiated an encounter and the room around them dimmed as the natural barriers fed by magic stretched thin. Papyrus as the initiator bowed his head and readied himself for his own turn while Sans floundered. Mercy wouldn’t work, he didn’t want to fight, and his items were shit. Not knowing what else, more as a reflex, he checked his brother and saw the bold details everyone else could see.
That’s what his status was? Everyone could see that?

When Sans checked on his own as a Judge he could see plenty, but there wasn’t a person he didn’t know better than his own brother so he hadn’t bothered to check Papyrus in a while.

But that was his turn and it was back to Papyrus. Sans felt dread down in his gut as Papyrus skipped over the Mercy and Fight options. Sans couldn’t see it, but he knew when his brother could by the way Papyrus’ expression changed.

And then the turn came back to Sans and Papyrus was content enough to spare with a highlighted Mercy option. Sans chose that and sat back, bracing for what would come next.

“…so….”

“WHAT DID YOU SEE WHEN YOU LOOKED AT MY STATS?” Papyrus asked first.

“that you also like ‘em?”

Papyrus laughed unabashedly. “THAT IS THE TRUTH AND I’M NOT ASHAMED OF IT. WOULD YOU LIKE TO HEAR WHAT YOUR OWN STATUS SAID?”

“not really.”

“TOO BAD, YOUR STATUS SAID YOU-”

“-don’t.”

“REGrets NOT INTRODUCING HIMSELF MONTHS AGO.”

Sans fell back into the mattress but rolled enough to catch the edge of the bedsheet and flip it over his burrito shaped form. If he couldn’t shortcut himself out of the uncomfortable talk he could hide from it. Wordlessly he groaned into the comforter.

“I DON’T THINK THE OTHERS NOTICED, BUT THAT DOCUMENT WITH HER INFORMATION WAS DATED AS NEARLY A YEAR OLD.”

“that was because it was a part of the information exchange between the embassy and King Asgore’s open borders treaty…there were plenty of files, that one wasn’t…it wasn’t supposed to matter.”

“A FASCINATING STUDY, I’M SURE.”

Sans groaned again and rolled further across the bed, rolling himself up even more. He was tangled up and shortcutting out of the bedsheets wasn’t impossible, but would be messy. It was taking every last ounce of his self control not to run away again.

It wouldn’t do him any good if he ran off now. Papyrus already knew, had already seen the proof, and if he booked it out of the hotel room now it would only result in more miscommunication and distance between him and his favorite skeleton.

As hard as it was to face the music, Sans didn’t want to lose his brother again. His absence was too easily filled with adoring fans and media relations and monster interviews.

“…what do you want me to say, paps? yeah, it was a fun read and there were plenty of others so i
can’t tell you why it was just that one, but it was…and then nothing came of it so it was harmless
and that was all it needed to be but…” He needed to take a break, he needed to pause and reconnect
the thoughts that flew loose in his brain like wild constellations. “then i fucked it up real bad…it
didn’t feel good to know that the others could get a pass so easy.”

“LET’S START BACK AT THE BEGINNING. HOW DID YOU MESS UP, BROTHER?”

So Sans told Papyrus. He started way back with the file and how he had tried digging deeper when
he realized parts had been redacted, eased, and just not included. He had kept those salvaged parts
to himself and no one had seen them during the presentation, but every video, every test, every
interview for ‘emotional stability check’ made him think ...made him feel closer to a person he had
never met.

Then he had dived deep into some of the other files and found nothing half as interesting. They
were pretty much the same videos and documents, but they lacked the part that made Sans keep
coming back to your entries.

Back then your hair had been longer, soft and full enough to tempt his wandering fingers—but he
didn’t admit that to Papyrus.

When Sans asked Papyrus if he wanted to see the videos Papyrus pulled back physically and shook
his head. In just as many words Papyrus explained that he didn’t want to know or see anything of
you without your explicit consent, and that made Sans feel all the more guilty.

“AND AS BAD AS THIS STALKERISH BEHAVIOR IS, I’M AFRAID TO CONFESS I KNOW
YOU TOO WELL TO KNOW YOU DON’T SEE THIS AS YOUR…SCREW UP.”

Paps really did know Sans best.

“it was too suspicious when they turned up and that guy told us we would all be working together.
it had been such a messy split so what would the reason be for bringing ‘er back other than…?”

Papyrus grabbed for his face with both hands and groaned into his gloves. “YOU DID NOT
QUESTION THEM, DID YOU?”

If only.

“…not….exactly, but there was an ugh-an encounter.”

Papyrus’ fingers split enough for his single eye light, so dark and subtle it was nearly impossible to
make out when contrast against the rest of his skill. With enough emotion it flared to vibrancy.

“SANS…”

The tone was warning enough but Sans was already in his burrito of shame and he hadn’t left so
far. He was going to try being determined for once and stick this out.

“it wasn’t as bad as you think, but it was really wrong of me to suspect them in the first place! they
sort of um, didn’t-i thought they might fight back but it was a lot like fighting frisk.”

“YOU NEVER FOUGHT FRISK SO DON’T TRY TO USE MY EXPERIENCES TO
ILLUSTRATE YOUR OWN MISTAKES.”

Sans didn’t correct his brother about the failed timelines and all the other resets. He had fought
Frisk enough times to tire the kid out and send them all the way back to the beginning where they
made the right decision and stuck with it all the way through. He remembered that well enough but no one else ever would.

He wondered, for a brief blip of time, if that kid you had called Raven had the same sort of abilities that not even Frisk understood how to manipulate. Since going topside there hadn’t been a single reset in years, a new record, but that didn’t mean it wasn’t possible for there ever to be another one in the future….

The thought chilled him to the bone.

“well, back on topic, it seemed like all that cause they never fought back and were pretty adamant about being a ‘good guy’ whatever that meant” Sans chuckled nervously.

When Papyrus pressed for more clarification Sans didn’t hold back and gave his brother the details, revealing a bit more about himself than he meant to, but it didn’t seem to matter to his brother as much as the fact that you had been…hurt.

“YOU HURT SOMEONE YOU LIKED?!”

“it wasn’t like that-okay no you’re right it was like that, but i couldn’t believe it cause when does something that perfect ever happen to us?”

Sans must have said something that struck a cord with Papyrus. His older brother sagged in his seat, deflating a bit form his righteous fury of moments prior.

When asked if he checked your soul Sans had to look away when he admitted it. “that was when i-i knew i couldn’t do it anymore and it was true so that’s where it ended and i’ve been trying to make it up to them ever since.”

“How, by avoiding her and antagonizing her friends?”

Sans plopped face first down on the mattress again and groaned out loud. “i know-i told you i fucked it up didn’t i!”

“Well, you admitted to it so that’s step one.”

Sans didn’t look up, but he blustered through an explanation of all the conversations he had held with you, of what you had said to him, and what he had done to try and fix his mistakes. That seemed to appease Papyrus some but it wasn’t the end of their conversation by a long shot.

“You also owe an apology to edge.”

Sans snorted. “I’m sure his big edgy bad boy feelings aren’t hurt that hard. He seems like the stoney sort. doubt i rocked him too hard.”

“Well at least your awful puns are back, but that’s not the point of what i’m trying to say. edge is important to her and you don’t like it but that’s a fact, so you have to apologize to him for that reason, but also because it is the right thing to do.”

Papyrus stood and gestured to the door with a flourish of his arm and Sans felt himself drain magic. If he had been human he would have going pale, but it was the same sort of feeling.

“…now?”
Papyrus wordlessly reached for his phone and began to type something out. A minute later the screen lit up with something new and it seemed to satisfy the younger brother.

“YES, NOW. THEY ARE BOTH STILL AWAKE, LIKELY DIGESTING ALL THE COMPONENTS OF OUR EARLIER TALK. YOU’RE GOING TO GO OUT INTO THE HALL AND FACE EDGE AND YOU’RE GOING TO APOLOGIZE. RED IS SENDING HIS BROTHER OUT NOW SO…”

Sans struggled out of his shame burrito, throwing the blankets off into a wrinkled mess on the floor. “b-but now?” he repeated in a higher pitch.

Papyrus didn’t use his blue magic, but he held open the door and pinned Sans with a look that no brother, older or younger, could refuse. With great effort Sans picked himself up and trudged over to the door, hearing another door open and close somewhere down the hallway.

Why did being a good person have to be so hard?

Edge was already outside, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed and one heel braced against the waistcoat molding halfway up. He was taller than his own brother, the tallest of the three Papyrus iterations, and with his heels he only seemed to be made of even more leg.

What did you see in an edge-lord like him?

He remembered, against his better judgement or maybe in spite of it, the way you had laughed so free and full into his chest only hours earlier, and the way Edge had held onto you while your body shook with cute little shivers and shakes. You had laughed a couple of times in the videos but never like that and it was because of something Edge said?

What the fuck had happened in his life to get to this point?

Edge looked up and pushed off the wall, dropping his hands to his sides and standing at his full height. Sans shuffled out in his slippers, hands stuffed into the pockets of his favorite hoodie, and pretended the smile on his face meant something.

“I apologize for trying to strangle your fat little neck,” Edge spoke first, lifting his chin and staring down his nasal ridge at Sans. “That was uncalled for.”

From one of the closed doors Sans heard Red curse.

“Eh,” Sans began, making sure to pull the magic out of his words the way Edge had. “All water under the bridge. Sorry for yanking your chain, you just have so many of them.”

Edge flinched in irritation. “What?”

Sans held up his hands in a pose of mock surrender. “Thought it was just part of the bad boy look or something. Didn’t know you were trying to fool anyone.”

Papyrus made a sound of frustration on the other side of his door and Sans rolled his eye lights.

“Sorry for my part in this…misunderstanding,” he added.

“As…am I,” Edge ground out, hands curled into fists at his side. “We will speak in the morning, marshmallow.”

“Looking forward to it,” Sans cheered before he blinked out of the hallway and back into his
bedroom.

Papyrus turned stiffly around from where he had been listening at the door and sighed at the sight of his brother. Sans shrugged and held up his hands in a ‘what can you do’ sort of pose that only made Papyrus deflate further.

“I SUPPOSE THAT WAS THE BEST I COULD HAVE HOPED FOR. YOU BETTER SHAPE UP BEFORE TOMORROW THOUGH OR ELSE THIS WILL IMPACT OUR SUCCESS WITH THE PLANS.”

“eh, you don’t have to worry about me. just get some sheep. we’ll all feel better about it in the morning.”

Sans didn’t believe it, but Papyrus didn’t fight him on it and in mere minutes the lights were off and the floor was ...mostly silent.

Chapter End Notes

No reader this chapter, but plenty of character development for the UT brothers. (It balances out the next part since that’s the ‘mission’ chapter.) Sans is trying not to be such a gremlin trash boi and Paps isn’t stupid.

Sorry for this chapter being a bit more rough and unpolished, I had to edit and post from my phone due to circumstances and I was not blessed with magic thumbs so, ta da~
You were surprised by who you found first. Papyrus and Blue were notorious early risers, and Edge was pretty good about it too, citing a number of health benefits that didn’t even apply to skeleton monsters. But lounging over the railing on the rooftop Stretch smoked a single cigarette and slouched into his arms, staring up at the early morning clouds.

“Hey,” you called out, startling him.

You heard him fluster out your name before cursing to hurry and put out the cigarette. He had remembered your dislike of secondhand smoke and you appreciated that.

“Hey,” Stretch lamely replied. “I guess this isn’t early for you, huh?”

“I’m surprised to see you awake, were you even able to sleep or did you just stay up the whole night?” you teased. You crossed the rooftop to where he stood and leaned over the railing yourself, looking out.

“I slept, not a lot, but I was able to get some shut eye.” He eyed you wearily. “What about you?”

“I look that bad?”

“Eh, I was searching for it. You got some worries about the teams?”

You turn around and rest your elbows on the railing, leaning your head back to stare up into the sky. It was early morning, but some of the clouds still carried a golden orange under-glow that reminded you of the skeleton beside you.

“Not the way you’re thinking. I know we talked about strategy and tactics and have intel on their powers, but I grew up alongside those kids and I know they’re a…I know what they’re like. They’re all lost and empty.”

Stretch reaching into his pockets for a honey stick to replace in his mouth. “What makes you say that?”

You laugh but it’s not strong enough to convince Stretch and you know it doesn’t reach your eyes. “Experience? I don’t know, it’s just a feeling. I don’t want to get into a fight with any of them.”

“That’s understandable,” Stretch hummed. “If you all grew up together then aren’t you all like a family of sorts? I’d die before I did anything against Blue, but I think I trust his sense of justice and goodness more than my own.”

You know why Stretch’s words hurt, but it’s been years since you thought that way and the last time you had seen any of them, especially Raven, it had been as messy as it was unpleasant. There
had been no kind words left for you before differing ideologies drove the last nail in the coffin.

“Blue is a great person to believe in. I’d put my faith in him too,” you admitted after a longer pause. You could feel Stretch watching you but didn’t turn to face him. His eye lights could wander all over your face and he wouldn’t find anything you were ashamed of.

“Yeah, my brother really is the coolest. It makes sense why you’d like him, but don’t you think you’re being a little harsh on Raven?’”

Stretch using FourB’s chosen name made you turn to face him.

“Why?’”

Stretch worked the plastic between his teeth before pulling free the half finished stick of honey. “I don’t know, I just figured you’d feel different since that guy’s your brother.”

“My…brother….?” you echoed.

“Not like how the others are a family to you, I mean…” Stretch waved at his face. “You have a lot of the same features, they’re subtle but they’re there. You got the same dusting of freckles, the same nose, and the way your ears are…it’s too coincidental. Also, I looked, you have the same birthday and you came from the same orphanage. Same age and everything.”

You sagged under the weight of his words. Stretch didn’t look at you or watch you for a reaction, but waited patiently until you were ready to speak again. It was a moment more before you could find your voice and dislodge it from where it had been stuck in your throat.

“You’re the first to guess it.”

“It wasn’t a guess, honey,” he murmured with affection. “But it’s okay, I haven’t told anyone else about it if that’s what you’re worried about. Maybe OG Sans picked up on it already, but he hasn’t said anything either. Why, you worried how others might react?”

No.

If that had been all it would have been so much easier to just…admit it at once and rip the bandaid off all those old and buried feelings with some cold, stoic facts. You and Raven had the same biological mother and had come into the world one right after the other, covered in the same blood and breathing the same air. You had been each other’s shadow for an entirely too short lived childhood and then beyond that.

But even blood and water couldn’t keep you two in sync and the fractures had started well before the monsters surfacing. That day of peace and hope had only been the catalyst to something long since festering.

“You guys all have great relationships with your brothers.” You waved a hand in a circular motion to draw his gaze. “I just can’t relate. When we last saw each other it was right before I got-before I left the Embassy and it hadn’t been a pleasant sort of farewell. He didn’t like what I was doing and I didn’t believe in what he wanted.”

“What was that?”

Stretch’s questions were too direct and too fast. You felt like they were pulling the answers from your without the work. It had been a small hell of its own to swallow down your own feelings and walk away, but Stretch got the story without the labor or the worry.
“It’s not so easy a question to answer in so few words.”

“Then you don’t have to use words, do you?” You looked over at him and Stretch had a finger raise, just one, that tapped against his skull. “Can’t you just skull drop a memory or two in my noggin? I’ve seen you do it.”

You almost laugh at how ridiculous the suggestion was. “You’ve seen me traumatize humans before and you want me to do that to you?”

“Yaaaaaaaah, but not that memory, I don’t wanna know what it was those guys saw unless I really have to. I was thinking something more along the lines of…what it was like to have him as your brother.”

You weren’t sure if he was serious with you, even though you wanted to believe it. Stretch was always so laid back it was hard to tell when he wasn’t joking.

“You… might have a bit of a headache.”

“Ehhhhhhh, what’s a headache between friends?” his voice shifted with a new layer of magic. “if you feel guilty about it then you can just chalk it up to us getting even after I rattled your noggin with my words.”

It was early morning and no one aside from the staff was even out on the roof. You two were practically alone under a fading honey yellow sky full of clouds and Stretch looked just as relaxed as ever. Considering how understanding he was being with you, it didn’t seem fair.

“Would you compromise with an encounter then?”

He blinked and the dark hazel brown of his eye lights flickered brighter. “Eh?”

“To make it fair… you elaborate, “you can initiate an encounter and I’ll use my magic to share a memory.”

Stretch had pushed himself off the balcony and the plastic of his honey stick was wrinkled between his teeth, nearly empty. “Yeah, but what’s an encounter have to do with it?”

“You don’t want to do it that way? I thought this would be what you’re used to.”

Stretch rubbed at the back of his skull. “I just never did it before with a human. Haven’t done it at all in a long while to be honest. I might…I might be rusty but if that’s fine with you.”

You offered him your hand, magic already rolling free. “That’s fine. You initiate and I can lead.”

It took a moment longer but he reached for you and met your magic with his own. You let it overpower yours and the world around you went hazy. To monsters it would look black and white for as long and far as their magic would go. Stretch had magic to spare but he didn’t waste it, keeping the field of influence small.

Your move first.

Preparing the memory you let your magic wash over Stretch, seeing the way he went tense at the touch. It wasn’t a physical touch, but to a monster made out of magic it might as well have been. You couldn’t see his soul or tell the color, but with gentle probing you could tell that it was the sort of soul that made you think of warm naps, soft pillows, fuzzy blankets, and all the good soft things you had ever touched in your life, like an oasis of calm and patience.
It wasn’t the sort of traditional ‘check’ monsters were famous for, but it was the best you could do, and you preferred it this way. Children could see more, but you liked feeling the truth in someone’s magic.

“That’s it for me,” you sighed, pulling your magic back and ending your turn. When it came back around to you the memory would be ready and hopefully so would Stretch.

Stretch didn’t say anything but you felt the familiar sensation of someone checking your stats. Any old monster that touched a human could read those, but with an official encounter details were more clear—or at least that’s what you had been told.

Last night Papyrus had said your status had changed. What did Stretch see that made him grin and end his turn?

You held the memory like a little silver box, darker around the corners, and fragile enough to pop open once it was dropped. If Stretch didn’t want it he could refuse it, but you sent it off with your magic and like most of the things in his life, Stretch didn’t fight it.

You saw the memory too, impossibly long and details in a single second.

You had been small things that fought like cats and dogs but always ended every day with love. Then you had been picked up and some of the edges blurred to focus on you and your brother, how much of an utter nerd he had been about his comic books and his action figures and his anime and his video games and all the things he dragged you through… you teased him for it but stayed up watching his shows even when he turned his nose up at your magical girl series.

When you got older there were fractures as you argued over silly things and friends who didn’t like friends, but you always ended the day with love. Even when he and another girl got close enough to make promise, you knew it wasn’t your place to interfere so you didn’t.

And then the monsters surfaced….

And then there was screaming and tears and curses between you. You had betrayed him. You were going to get yourself killed and no one would care because he told you so because he knew you better. And in all fairness you had been harsh with him too. But neither of you backed down, and then you left and he told you he never wanted to see you again, to not come back to him until you had changed your mind.

And the day didn’t end with love or affection, and neither did the memory.

When it turns back to Stretch he spares you and in mercy you both take a half step back.

“That… was a trip ,” Stretch chuckled. “It’d be easy to fall into some easy assumptions, but mind if I still ask ya some questions?”

You reached for the railing and sagged against it, noting how the staff at the counter were trying to hide their wandering curiosity. Encounters in public were pretty rare and some humans still got antsy about them, even the flirty ones. (Kids were better about it, but the older generations still hadn’t been won over.)

“Shoot, cowboy.”

Your pun made him chuckle.

“How do you feel about it now?”
“About meeting up with him again?”

Absently you used your magic to see how close or far you were from your brother. Raven’s dot was only a handful of blocks away while the other ex-embassy kids were closer, but still far enough away from Raven.

When Stretch only hummed in affirmation you took a breath and grappled the words from your heart into submission. “I’m super nervous and a little bummed out that it’s going to go down like this. I had been hoping things might fix after the peace stuck and people adapted. But that didn’t happen and now he’s a legit threat to all monster kind and on top of that all what I’m really worried about is you guys getting hurt.” Stretch laughed, and it made you turn your head and glare.

“What’s so funny?”

“No, I know you’re worried about us, but I thought that was, pff, that was funny. It’s not worth your concern.”

“Yeah it is you jerk. Don’t be a bonehead. I could kick your ass if I wanted to and if they’re as fit as they once were they can do some damage too.”

“Oh, I’m sure, but you have a lot of other things you could be worrying about and that…that’s still your chief concern?” He reaches out and grabs your nearest elbow to gently cradle. It’s a comforting touch that makes your irritation deflate completely. “We’ll be fine, hon.”

You almost answered him but a dash of red and white down below drew your eye, followed by something blue. You turned around and looked over the railing to see Blueberry and Papyrus jogging together up the path back to the hotel, looking just as energetic and eager as always. Stretch followed the direction of your gaze and chuckled when he recognized his brother.

“The others must be waking up. Think we should head down to the main cafe or wait here?” you asked.

“I can always send a text. Let’s order something and eat it up here. You like mimosas, don’t you?”

“Stretch, it’s not even,” you check the nearest clock and squint to read it’s arms stretched across a roman numeral face, “eight in the morning. That’s too early to be drinking.”

“But we should make mimo_s a this opportunity, we can get Fizzical with our enemies later.”

You laugh and groan at the same time, pushing him away to approach the bar and order some orange juice and a handful of different scones to munch on before asking for anything heavier. (That encounter had left you famished).

Stretch sent off a text to his brother who told Papyrus who told Sans and Red, who in turn dragged Edge up out of the indoor gym he had been using since before sunrise.

Once you were all assembled on the roof with a couple of tables pulled together you ordered some heavier food, charged it all to the card, and went over some more last minute specifics.

You were all checked out and on the move less than an hour later and making excellent time if what showed up on your map was anything to go by. Raven was alone, or at least not with any of the other ex-embassy kids, and from the looks of it, none of them would be able to reach him before your bus. Every five minutes you had your map up, checking it habitually until you were outside the parking lot to an old, run down looking arcade and pizzeria, the kind that eight year old boys would cry and demand to have their parties at.
“This…” Sans said, jaw a little slack and voice a little faded. “Eh, its slice looking at yeast, don’t you think?”

“Cheesus crust, it looks like a deathtrap with lights,” Stretch interjected in perfect monotone.

You reached back and gently pushed on the side of Stretch’s skull, making the rest of his body follow halfway out of his seat. “Cool it with the cheesy puns you dorks. I’m going head on in first. You guys remember to–”

“Keep watch for our marks, we got it!” Blue interrupted.

The plan had been for each pair of brothers to keep watch outside for a specific target. They wouldn’t move until they saw that person least they let said person come up behind them in a ‘disastrously disadvantages flanking maneuver.’

You spare them all one last look, but turn to head out before you can change your mind. You were closer now than before and you didn’t know when an opportunity like this would come up. Raven was too slippery with his ability to travel across space and time like all the other shortcutting skeletons. Yeah he couldn’t use his ability over super long distances and it took longer to cast with more limits, but it was just one more thing he could do that you couldn’t.

You let yourself in, unsurprised by how barren and quiet the pizza themed arcade was. A couple of games blinked and whistled with different sound effects from the back and you followed the noises deeper in.

You saw his back first.

He was playing Tekken7 on two player mode with no one. His character advanced across the screen and danced in a swirl of color before drop kicking the idle opponent. Making a noise of displeasure, you reached for the joystick and clicked the red and blue buttons to make the fighter, Nina, kick and fight back.

“Dipweed,” you hiss under your breath, abusing your buttons.

“Skank.”

“Bastard.”

“Shitforface.”

“Turn around, you’re looking in a mirror, moron.”

“No, that was just the glare from your oily ass forehead you-ugh, asshole!”

On the screen his character went down and you didn’t wait for Jin to climb back up, but abused your ability to spam him with stomp attacks until his health was in the danger zone. That’s when Raven physically shoved you and recovered his character. You shoved him back, interrupting his attack and that finished him off.

“You cheated!”

“You lost, hah, that’s worse.”

Raven curled his lip but pushed the Player 2 button and reset the game, all without turning to look your way. The second time around you chose different fighters and went into it. It was the third
round out of five when you finally spoke up with a voice lacking the bravado from before.

“What the hell man, what are you doing?”

“Currently, kicking your ass as Paul Phoenix.”

“You know what I mean,” you sighed, turning your character around to finish off her combo and win the third round. The fourth round came up and Raven went into it, fighting less aggressively and landing cleaner hits until the victory was his. On the last round you were nearly finished with mirrored red health bars before he said anything.

“I wasn’t surprised to see you show up. If they had planned on sending someone—ugh, it would have to be you.”

“Why’s that?” you asked, eyes still focused on the screen.

Raven delivered a stellar combo you didn’t bother to interrupt and that clenched the final round for him. The screen went back to load a preview while the centralmost section flashed with a plea for coins to play.

You turned to face your brother, noticing the modest stack of quarters left beside his far hand. He stepped away from the game and left his coins there.

“The pizza here sucks but the vending machine candy is still good.” Raven moved his hands into his pocket and turned away from you, walking towards the back where a couple of different machines sold candy. You followed him there and he bought a handful of different bars with a ten dollar bill. Out of all the candy he handed you one box and kept the rest in his arms before nodding to a nearby table. “Let’s sit.”

You followed him over before tearing into your box of chocolates. He ate a little slower, but slapped at your hand fast enough to keep you from stealing the rest of his stash.

“Stingy miser.”

Raven scoffed. “You don’t think I know you enough to know you have one of those fancy executive credit cards without a limit? I bet you were charging that thing everywhere for the Embassy.”

“They have more than enough money and they took enough from me so it’s fair compensation. Might as well abuse it for as long as I can,” you say.

“That’s disappointing. I thought you would be a little more bitter. Didn’t you hate their guts?” Raven scoffed. “He said you were working for them but I didn’t want to believe it. Yet here you are, in the flesh. Tell me, how did they do it?”

“Do what?”

“Make you their bitch.” Raven bit hard into his KitKat bar, ignoring the indents and breaks he was supposed to fold back. His eyes were hard and you could see the dark smudges that betrayed the illusion of young health.

“They dropped you name, and that’s all that mattered, but get this straight at least, I’m only here because I want to be and I’m on nobody’s leash.”

“Says the skank rolling in stolen money?”
You roll your eyes and flip him off. “So I make a few withdraws from their debit, it ain’t stolen and it ain’t the reason I’m here, wax-for-brains. I just told you why.”

It was Raven’s turn to roll his eyes. “Oh yeah, because you care about me?”

“Of course I would.”

“What about those monsters you’ve been hanging around, or the ones you worked with? You care about any of them too? I bet you helped them in need.”

“Yeah, if a monster needed help I’d help them, but that’s because I’m a decent fucking person, not because I hate you. Grow up.”

Raven finished off his KitKat and reached for something else. “You haven’t changed. You’re still as bull headed as ever. So what, is this the part where you drag me back and make me undo all the bad things I’ve done?”

“I’m not going to make you undo anything. Those guys don’t want it and I’ll honor their wishes even if they change.”

Raven scoffed and then bent his head over his candy. You watched as another long strand of ash white hair fell free from behind his ear. It was longer and lacked the color of his youth, almost as if he had aged to-

You cut your own thoughts short.

“Have you only been eating this crap?” You snapped, grabbing for the third candy bar before he could reach it. When he tried to swipe it back you held it over your head, out of his reach. “What about proper meals? When was the last time you ate something green that wasn’t a jellybean?”

“Lay off old lady.”

“We’re the same age.”

“You don’t get to tell me what to do-ever! You walked out on me and all of us, on everything, and you didn’t even look back.” Raven abandoned his attempts to reclaim the chocolate bar and fell back into his seat, sulking with darker eyes. “And you left me for the monsters of all things. A lifetime of training and for what? Like you never cared.”

“That’s not fair and you know it. You’re just bitter.” You tore apart the wrapper with your teeth and then passed the bar back to him. “What you’re doing right now is wrong and it’s going to end up getting people hurt. I know you want to be a good person and be a hero, but this isn’t it.”

“And you’re the authority on heroes now?”

“I’m not a hero, I’m just trying to be one.”

For a brief moment in time Raven’s expression crumpled and pinched all at once. You could see the conflict written across his face. The boy who dreamed of one day being his own sort of superman was still at war with the boy made in the image of rage and violence. He had been crafted by cruel hands and brought up for far worse horrors the world would never see.

He wanted to be good, he just-

Your head screamed as a sound like nails across a chalkboard broke in. It made you reach for the
table and brace if only to keep the room from swimming. But Raven looked up and frowned, recognizing something behind you with casual irritation.

“I thought we told you not to deviate from our plans.”

“It wasn’t a deviation. I was just talking. You were here, she wasn’t going to nab me.”

“You are full of hubris, child. She would beat humility into you if I let her, but…”

You slid off the table and out of your chair, feeling cold and hot all over as your brain burns from something it can’t comprehend. Your vision blurs and you panic, bringing up the map screen and zooming in on the room you’re in. You see your dot. You see Raven’s dot. Right behind you is a dot with a name. The name isn’t written with words though. The symbols aren’t ones you recognize and the longer you stare at them the more frantic they seem.

Something touched your shoulder and turned you around and you scrambled backwards on your hands until your back was up against the Skee-Ball arcade game. You cancel out the map and force your right eye to focus, because the other one wasn’t working.

Someone stood in front of you, and they reeked of magic. Your mouth felt like it was exploding with tang as danger and warning filled your blood and marrow. An enemy you hadn’t anticipated stood over you, tall and disjointed. They pulled back enough and you were able to focus enough to see what they were.

Another monster with a pale skull and dead sockets lit with gray light.

The name settled into your brain as did his language.

The image sharpened.

You were looking at another skeleton, but behind him you saw Raven still at the table, watching with a nervous expression. Raven’s lips moved but you couldn’t hear his words. But it looked like he formed the words ‘her’ ‘we’ ‘this’ and many others you couldn’t understand.

“No, we’ve indulged their voyeurism long enough. Now it is time.” The monster spoke and his voice still rang like a gong and a whistle in your head. It was more magic than any of the other boys were used to using their voice and you had an inkling of an idea why.

You had heard those words before.

Somewhere.

“Winn, don’t!”

Oh, so those symbols meant Winn. This skeleton’s name was Winn. Did that mean he was a Sans or Papyrus or-

His hands had holes in them and one of-

!!!

The skeleton’s fingers dug into your socket almost gently, but not gently enough to miss the edges of your false eye-the one that never glowed with any magic. He tugged once and when it didn’t give he pulled back and used his strength, ripping free the entire device and all the loose tendril-
like bits that had once worked so well with your brain.

You screamed.

Chapter End Notes

So yeah, there we go, a few reveals (FourB/Raven is really reader's brother), those other operatives never showed up, but another skeleton(?) looking monster did. His nickname isn't going to make sense until later on, though I'm sure I'm not as clever as I think and someone is going to figure out what his nickname is for early on. Also, reader knows how to read Hands...sorta.

This chapter was sorta hard to write/revise but also one of my favorites because of what it sets off and how it fleshes the reader out? There's a lot longer to go and more skeletons to meet-not al of them start out as friends.

Huge apologies to anyone going into this and wanting a very blank reader insert character, but the deeper into this the more trauma/history gets uncovered that ties into the plot. I had fun crafting and writing this story and I like it for what it is so I hope you do too.
You scream something unholy and raw and everything that’s in you goes into that sound.

It’s not just your bleeding, empty eye socket, but it's also the heat in your brain as suddenly there is a vacuum of data from one half of the visual supply. Your brain, already rattled by the voice from the void, is rattled enough for everything to blink out.

And you’re back there.

In the dark that’s darker than dark.

A place where light always dies.

And you panic.

You pull at the magic and it flares up around you, you know your hands are black and charred while the fire leaks out from your wound. It whips around the side of your face manifesting as a wild flame you can’t see.

You hear the shuffle and movement but nothing makes sense as you cover your face with your burned hands and bite into the fabric of your pullover hoodie to stifle the scream. They’re still nearby but you’re in too much pain and too disoriented to make any sense of it.

You think you hear yourself cursing but you’re not sure.

And you may be disoriented and sick to your stomach with a headache that’s only going to get worse once the shock fades, but you’re still you. So you pull up the map and see it in your mind’s frazzled eye, and just like a hallucination it’s crystal clear, showing several Sans and Papyrus moving dots, one for Raven, and the last for the mysterious Winn— a monster who wasn’t a monster— who’s name was written in symbols you didn’t know how you understood. They were still the closest ones to you, with Winn nearly on top of you.

You spew fire from your mouth, smelling burnt meat as it flared in front of your face, wider than it was farther. The dot for Winn flashed and you knew you had hit him when he staggered back. Still blind, you climbed to your feet only to pitch and fall, your equilibrium shot.

You’d be damned if you didn’t go down swinging though.

“Shit!” Raven exclaimed as his dot reached Winn. “That wasn’t our plan, he- Fuck, no. Don’t do it. You got what you wanted. She’s clean, she’s clean, so leave her be!”

The other dots were drawing closer, Sans bouncing around as he could only shortcut to places he had already been.

“H e l l i s h  s p i t f i r e ,  n e v e r  d i d l i k e  y o u .”

You watched as Raven’s dot overlapped Winn’s and then winked out, going off map. The shockwave of his spacetime magic making your mouth pucker with lemon tang.

Your head was the inside of a gong, rung one too many times and still echoing. Winn’s last
comment had been saturated in even more magic than before, making you want to hurl.

The fire in you socket extinguished but your magic still crackled under your skin and you rolled onto your side, pulling your knees up to your chest as the dots closed in.

And that’s all you could do.

You let the rest of the world go back to black.

You get the notification in the middle of the night and wake up to read the scrawling message across your old pager. You half thought it was a dream, the way the archaic technology buzzed to life the first time in four…five years?

You’ve been summoned.

The dark persists endlessly above you but New Ebott never sleeps and that’s reflected in the dozens of neon signs and city lights that color the storefronts as you make your way across the vibrant district.

The Embassy stands devoid of color, tall, stark, and white with greek column that stretch up for more than just two stories and doors tall enough for even the tallest of monsters to get through without issue. But that’s just the front. The back of the building is devoid of marble and official seals and guided banisters. The back of the building is all glass and metal.

You take the elevator and punch in the number of the floor you need to get to, watching the world as your glass box ascends. A dozen different nocturnal bodies drift through the streets and you can tell most of the time which ones are humans and which ones are monsters.

The television from the Embassy continues to play behind your head as the elevators continues to rise.
On this five year anniversary of the Mt. Ebott barrier collapse several noteworthy celebrities have shown up in attendance to show support and share in the love for our favorite new neighbors…

You can see the reflection in the glass from the television as different photos slide across the screen from last spring’s celebration. You recognize some of the faces including the monster ambassadors and the ten year old human spokesperson.

Your mouth tingles and it’s all sour and sharp so you dig in your pockets for something sweet to suck on. Suckers, mints, honey sticks, jawbreakers…

More than five years since the barrier came down, that meant it had been four years since you were last here, four years since they last needed you.

Funny how you never expected to hear back from your old boss. You figured after his business went dark he would pretend it never happened and canoodle with the monsters like the rest of the world.

A ding sounds and you turn to look as the doors stop a floor earlier and opens for someone else. Raven steps into the lift and sighs, the way you were used to seeing him sigh after something especially disappointing. His eyes are wet and glassy enough to see yourself reflected there.

Your reflection paints a different picture, one of your bruised and bleeding and hurt. Your left eye is bleeding and empty, the entire ocular orb and connecting tendrils having been removed.

Someone stands behind Raven, a monster with a human soul. His bloody hand is holding your old eye but it’s crushed and useless, falling to the floor and turning to ash before it can impact.

“These can’t happen anymore. For better or worse, it’s what we make of it now,” you say and push Raven out.

You find the wooden end of a packaged rock candy and rip the plastic off. The sugar helps ground you and lean back, resting your shoulders against the glass and wait for the rest of the trip to finish.

The lights go out.

You close your eyes and there is no difference.
It’s warm.

You’re not in your best shape, you can tell that before you even finish waking up. The specifics aren’t clear to you, but you can tell there’s a lot messed up with your brain. It still feels like someone took a cleaver to it and left it cracked open under a dozen different church bells all set to ringing.

You didn’t want to move, you felt barely held together, but there’s something warm around you and something else hovering over you.

Something with green magic?

No, someone.

You try to open your eye and it hurts too much. You hiss in pain and curl up, grabbing at the blankets around your like that will help you escape the pain. The blankets move and you’re cocooned.

You can’t make sense of the noises. You think they’re voices. You can’t be sure.

All you can do is curl up into the warmth and hold yourself together. Eventually your brain will calm down—probably—hopefully?—and you’ll be able to open your one good eye and see what’s going on around you.

But before then you just try to listen and make sense out of all the uneven sounds and noises. They’re growing clearer. The static is rain. There’s rain outside. The sounds are voices, devoid of magic—thankthestars!—and they’re going back and forth over your head.

About you.

The blankets around you shift, ever so slightly, and you turn your head down, covering your face with your hand, but still listening.

“Try it again.”

“I did,’ Blue whines, sounding frantic as his voice pitches high. Two other voices shush him
harshly when you flinch. “-but she’s already at max, we can’t get her to go above her max HP if her HP limit is different.”

“Trust me, he’s trying.”

The third voice…Stretch?

“Please,” a fourth voice, closer than all the others, sending vibrations through the blankets you curled into, pleaded softly. “I think she’s waking this time.”

“Is that…a good thing? She said not to take her to a hospital but-”

Had you said that? It felt right. Going to an unvetted hospital might have resulted in more issues than you were willing to deal with. Questions you weren’t prepared to answer. Besides…this was an old injury and you had already disinfected it with trailing fire. There was nothing more to be done. You didn’t need the help. Your migraine was dulling too.

But

If you went to a hospital Hightower would know.

...we’ve indulged their voyeurism long enough

“That’s a load of shit, we’re nearly close enough ta see one and vanilla bean can just pop her over to-”

“No void magic, we talked about this. It’s unstable now, at least around her.”

“But a hospital-”

“No.”

The chatter stopped at the sound of your voice. Keeping your good eye shut you made an effort to push up off the bed-couch-mattress? And sit up. It was disorienting, not being able to feel gravity pulling you one way while your equilibrium still struggled to balance out. Someone put their arms under you and you felt them pull you up and backwards until you were leaning against their chest.

You inhaled enough to fill your lungs and then exhaled with your whole body. You figured you were leaning up against Papyrus based on the fact that Stretch wore a hoodie-not body armor-and Edge’s jacket was unmistakable by smell alone.

“Sweetheart, how are ya’ feeling?” Red asked from somewhere nearby. “You said no hospital but we’re real close.”

“It won’t be necessary, I’m just tired. I need to rest. Can…someone tell me what happened?”

“We were hoping you could fill us in, doll face,” Red sighed.

“But on our end,” Sans interjected, “we held back as planned and waited until there was someone new on the property. None of us moved in but we could feel his magic. It warped the space around the arcade so it was like running up a down conveyor belt and none of us could shortcut in.”

“Which was a real bad sign,” Stretch interjected. You sniffed and could smell the lingering scent of tobacco and smoke in his direction.

“But then we could feel you and how your magic was all flaring up like crazy, babe, and it snapped
reality back or something—"

“No,” Edge cut off his brother, speaking up for the first time. “Before that, we heard you scream.”

Like magic, the environment went tense. You could feel their nervous shuffles and uncomfortable fidgets. You wish you could see their faces, but you didn’t want to risk it with your only good eye so soon. Your hand was still over the empty burned out socket, hiding it from sight.

You imagined you were quite the grizzly sight.

‘Ehhhh, probably no worse than Thor at the end of Ragnarok and plenty of people still wanted to sleep with him.’

“After that,” you rasped, still smelling burnt steak on your breath.

Sans spoke. “After we…heard you, we rushed in and I saw it, so did Blue and…Red? Yeah, Stretch just missed it but we saw this guy with FourB and then he was gone, the two of them winking out. You were on the floor clutching your eye but you fell unconscious as soon as we reached you and then we pulled you back here. I tried to shortcut you into the bus—”

“That didn’t work,” Red cut in.

“Space didn’t want to be folded so we did it the old fashioned way,” Sans grumbled.

“You woke up once, long enough to tell us ‘no hospital’ and then you were out like a light, sweetheart. Don’t know if ya remembered that bit or not,” Red finished.

“What happened?” Blue asked, speaking up for the first time in a while. His voice sounded so thin, not like him at all. It had been like that when he snapped at the others about how hard it was for him to heal you.

“It…went according to plan. I found Raven and we…we got candy and sat down and talked. He didn’t try to run away once. We were talking and then from behind me I felt this presence in my head and it was enough to knock me to the ground. It was really strong.” You feel the pull to disassociate and it’s a temptation you have to set your heels against and resist with an effort no one would ever understand or know.

“And?” Sans prodded.

“This person came up behind me with way more magic than anyone I’ve ever encountered. It was really cold and made my head split whenever he talked. I could barely listen to it. He said something to Raven about…”

-indulged their voyeurism long enough

Something must have shown on your face or someone saw it in your stats because Blue reached for you, climbing over Papyrus’ long legs to kneel in front of you and rest his hands, glowing with green magic, against the sides of your neck. Low on your back you could feel Papyrus do the same. Your soul wasn’t injured and green magic wouldn’t do anything, but it made you feel a little less broken and a bit more put together.

“Thanks,” you whispered, letting your head lull between Blueberry’s arms.

Papyrus’ gloved hands ran up and down your spine, tracing a pattern across your back that helped soothe your further.
“Well, yeah, there was this person Raven called him Winn, but when I saw his dot on the map his name was written in a symbolic language. He removed my false eye saying something about no more spies and then he destroyed it. It’s a little fuzzy after that since I sorta freaked and attacked him blind. Then they left.”

Someone reached for your hand, the one covering your ruined socket and you flinched away. Blue made a sound and Papyrus pulled you closer to his chest, arms winding around you in a reassuring hug.

“Does it still hurt?” Papyrus worried.

“N-no, it was an old injury. I lost my eye when I was much younger. The implant was from the Embassy and it-shit-I think they did something to it so they could keep an eye on me and that’s why they knew about it and made a point to remove it. There was enough hardware in it to hide something else like a listening bug.”

“I’m sure there were better ways they could have gone about it,” Red scoffed, sounding angry and mean before muttering under his breath. “The shortassmotherfucker.”

“Yeah, no, that creep was shady as all get out but like, I never saw him coming and he could have done a lot worse with me in that position. I don’t think Raven’s intentions are so straightforward anymore. I-I think there’s something else to this that the Embassy has been withholding.”

“I’m sure there’s tons they’re holding out on everybody, but is that enough reason to feel so peachy about a spook hurting you like that? Even if it was a fake he plucked out, we all heard that scream. It wasn’t no picnic for you, sweetheart.”

It hurt a lot more the first time you lost it, but you don’t mention that out loud.

“That’s only because it was so integrated. Him forcibly pulling it out like that on top of all the nausea from his voice and power just made it worse. Sorry for scaring you.”

Stretch was the one that cursed but Blue quipped back before anyone else. “Don’t be apologizing for something like that! Tha-that’s the last thing you should be apologizing for. It’s not like you wanted to freak us out or experience something like that.”

“One of us should have been in there with you,” Stretch added.

“It wouldn’t have mattered.”

“Still,” Stretch trailed off.

“Raven wouldn’t have talked to me if he knew you were so near. Apart from that unexpected element in the equation, it would have all worked out I think. I just…I never saw him coming. Even when he was right on top of me it was hard to see him on the map.”

“But you did see him?” Sans asked. “Could you…couldn’t you describe him to us? He was a human or was he a monster?”

You hated the memory, but with your eyes closed it came back so easily. You remembered his pale face, skeletal and cold. His eyes were empty voids apart from a pinprick of gray light in each. “He was a monster, but I don’t know how a monster could have that much magic or a soul with so much pressure to it. It was like a human’s.”

“And he looked like…?” Red prodded.
An enemy you hadn’t anticipated stood over you, tall and disjointed.

Another monster with a pale skull and dead sockets lit with gray light—
his hands had holes in them!

“…indulged their voyeurism long enough…”

You inhaled purposefully and found the words.

“He wasn’t a version of any of you from another reality, but he was a skeleton. I can’t tell you
much more than that, I didn’t get a very clear picture.”

Even in your memory he was a figure that you couldn’t focus on. Like his words and like his magic
he was just a bit more than what your brain could handle and you weren’t a fan of pushing past
your limits so soon after passing out.

“How long was I out for?”

“Not even an hour,” Sans answered for you.

Red growled softly and you heard him shuffle closer. “You sure you don’t need ta see a doctor
about that? You said you’re fine but it don’t look fine.”

“Yeah, I’m sure it was worse the first time around, but I should probably get up and treat it.” You
braced to get up but hesitated to turn back, angling your face up even if you couldn’t see him, to
speak to Papyrus. “Thank you for taking care of me. I felt safe. And for the healing magic too. I
appreciate it, from both of you,” you said, turned to where you last heard Blue. He might have
moved since last time, but you doubted it.

“It wasn’t much, but you’re always welcome,” Papyrus answered in a voice that lacked it’s usual
vigor. You don’t doubt he’s rattled, but that’s to be expected after everything went to shit on the
fan.

“We wish we could do more,” Blue chimed in.

“Could you help me find the bathroom?”

Papyrus moved around you and grabbed for you again, lifting you up and placing you down on the
ground where Blue grabbed your arms and slipped one across his shoulders as he guided you out
and into the bathroom. He sat you down on the edge of the toilet and before you could even ask for
it, he had pulled out the first aid kit and popped it open. In the room next door you could hear the
boys arguing, but they weren’t loud enough to make out.

“I might need your help with some other things,” you admitted before Blue could excuse himself.
“Just, um, I wanna see if I can …if I can open my other eye or if I need to bandage them both up for
a while.”

“Both?” Blue echoed in quiet horror. “Why? What’s wrong with the other one?”

“I just need a rest and it’ll all recover, but the other eye was connected quite ...extensively. With it
gone my brain is sort of mushy and using my one good eye is just a little too much for it to process
right now. Could you…?” you let your question hang unfinished between you as you raise up your
arm in a gesture seeking support.
Blue didn’t hesitate long, if at all. “Ready?” he whispered, sounding strong in spite of his worry.

“I got it,” you whispered back.

You felt his touch as he moved back under your arm, ready to support you as you braced on the sink’s counter and made the effort to open your one good eye.

You saw yourself for a brief moment and then everything felt like a scream as the image stretched and scrambled too bad to make sense out of. You nearly fell again from the disorientation but Blue was already under your arm, supporting you.

“Well, that answers that,” you weakly laugh. “I guess I’ll need those bandages after all. Would you… mind?”

“Of course not,” he answered softly in a voice that wasn’t a whisper anymore, but no less thin. It sounded so unlike him that you almost doubted it was really Blue with you in the room if not for the feel of his arms supporting you. Who else could hold you like Blue could?

Blue helped you with the roll, padding the gauze over your ruined socket even though the fire had cleaned it out and burned off what could end up bleeding. He wrapped it like a blindfold over both your eye sockets, twice and then a third time before taking the clasp and pinning it in place. You pulled you hair out and poked at the bandages but couldn’t find a fault in the treatment.

“You think you’re okay now?” Blue asked from just over your shoulder, likely watching you in the mirror.

“I have a headache and I’m tired enough to sleep for days, but I’ll recover with food, sleep, and time. You sound worried but don’t be. I’ve gotten out of worse scrapes than this.”

“Tha-that doesn’t make me feel good!” he exclaimed, almost loud enough to make you think he was crying. “I heard you scream and there was blood too. I-you’re a human and you’re made out of all these soft bits that can get hurt so easy. It was so fast and I didn’t do anything.”

“You can’t blame yourself for that. It was too fast for me too and I was there,” you chuckled, trying to keep the mood light. You didn’t like the way Blue’s voice came out sounding so strangled and thin. “At least I was able to walk away this time.”

“Your Max HP even went down and there was nothing Papyrus or Edge or I could do to fix it cause it was your max! That just means if you get hurt again, it-it-your soul can’t endure as much as before.”

Humor wasn’t working. You reached back and felt for Blue, grabbing onto his arm and then his shoulder. He didn’t protest but he did make a sound of surprise when you pulled him close and wrapped your arms around his shoulders and bent your head against his neck.

He started to shiver and you held him as he cried, grabbing you so fiercely you were afraid he was going to accidentally drag you into an encounter, but it was just another hug. Magic made his tears wet on your shoulder but you didn’t mind.

Stretch and Blue came from a timeline before a human hero came down to visit. All the other humans had been before their time. This was probably the first time Blue had seen a human hurt. He was kind and patient and mature with other things, but there were still plenty of experiences that were new to him, as well as experiences he would have to grow and learn from. Had your human blood been the first he’s ever seen?
“I wish this didn’t have to happen, but I’m so grateful you were there for me after it. You and Papyrus really helped me get over something painful, and having everyone else here in the bus made me feel safe. Thank you, Blue,” you whisper against his skull.

“It wasn’t worth it. This job, you never even signed the contract for it so you shouldn’t even be out here. If you’re going to suffer like this I-I want to go back to New Ebott with you.” He pulled back just enough to squeeze an arm between you both and rubbed at his face, presumably because there were tears there. “We don’t have to stay at the Embassy but somewhere you won’t get hurt like an apartment or something. I could get some work and Stretch could find some odd jobs to keep busy with.”

“Blue.” At the sound of his name he inhaled sharply, sucking in the air over his teeth. “I promise you that you’ll see a day like that, but I can’t stop now. There are still things I need to do and that’s got nothing to do with some stupid contract.”

“You’re hurt, you can’t do anything now!”

“I’ll be fine in a week or two, maybe even a few days, but I can’t stop now, even if it’s scary.”

“Why? Can’t you just leave it to someone else? What’s so important that you would wanna risk going up against that monster again?”

“Well, for starters, I found another Sans and Papyrus on the map that we probably need to get to.”

Chapter End Notes

So which was a better cliffhanger, this chapter or the last one? I can't wait to hear what you guys think about the newest set of brothers. Who will it be? Who do you think it should be, and who do you want?

Red is the most mother hen of all the boys and Blue wants to elope. Reader's max HP took a dip too. Ouch.

Also in today's news, it's my birthday, so I'm going to be off for the rest of the day running around like a little Mario man trying to score as many freebies as I can before the day is over. #AdultLife (Don't get old or grow up kids, it's a trap.)
Getting around without eyesight was a lot easier on a bus as cramped and packed as the one you were in. There had been a small argument before the boys all agreed that the large bed in the back should be reserved for you, at least for the first few nights. You were determined to argue your way back to drawing sticks because it didn’t feel fair to take the best bed just because you couldn’t see.

It was a temporary injury.

You’d get better.

Eventually.

If boredom didn’t kill you first.

Your bus had pulled over and parked next to a greenway just off the road. It was close enough to some sort of eating establishment that sold food with a scent strong enough to be carried on the wind. You were way more sensitive to smells now, it seemed.

“Food sound good to you, honey?”

Stretch was eerily silent as he came up alongside you. You sensed his magic or felt his presence before you heard him. The only other one who was even remotely as quiet was Sans. You suspected Red could be quiet...but it was harder for him and not worth the effort.

“I am always willing to eat,” you answered with an easy smile. “Do you think they do take out?”

“Considering it is a drive through, I’m sure they do.”

You paused, holding your breath to listen better, noticing the sound of cars idling in place, one after the other. That must be the drive-through Stretch mentioned.

“What ya want, sweetheart? Me and baby Blue over ‘ere can get it for you?” Red asked standing close enough to cup the underside of your elbow and let you know he was there.

“I can’t go with you?”

“It’s faster this way,” Stretch explained, sounding like he wasn’t hiding anything even if you knew better. There was something behind his words, a double meaning you weren’t getting. He didn’t lie but he didn’t share the whole truth either. That’s just the way he was.

“How will you know what to get for me then?”

“Lemme guess, sweetheart, if they got it, triple patty, if they don’t, double decker burger and fries,” Red laughed. “It’s take out, how much fancier can they get?”

“Anything with meat on it, we got it,” Stretch chuckled.

“I like plenty of other foods too,” you huffed. “I just need the carbs to feed my magic.”
“Monster food would work just as well for that,” said Stretch.

“Yeah, but we didn’t have monster food growing up. This is what I’m used to.”

“You got it,” Red laughed, squeezing your elbow again. “Anything for you babe. Just don’t forget to tip the delivery guy.”

You felt the fission as a void opened up beside you and the pressure on your elbow was gone, along with Red. You turned, trying to sense him in the distance, but without using your magic to pull up a mental map, your senses weren’t strong enough to travel that far.

“You doing okay hun?” Stretch tentatively called, sounding softer and quieter than before. There must have been something on your face to make him worry.

Since the accident they had all been a bit more hesitant and quiet around you. You appreciated how they were trying to accommodate your temporary disability, but it wasn’t as big of a deal as they made it out to be. You were fine.

“Can you tell me what it looks like?”

“The outside?”

You nodded. “I can use my map magic to see boundaries and people, but there isn’t any detail to it and I can’t... get too close.” You waved your hand out towards the wide open field next to the road you were standing in front of. “I know that space is big and open, but what does it look like?”

“It’s filled with a ton of grass, the green kind.”

“Pff, okay, but what else? How tall is it? How soft does it look? Is it thick or thin or what about flowers? I know you’re more observant than that.”

You heard him sigh beside you before grabbing for your hand to tug up. The other boney hand slipped behind you to rest on your hip and guide you as you walked with him, down a slight slope, over a dip, and into the field. You could feel the grasses he described tickling you through your leggings. You reached down to grab some and rub it between your fingers.

“What that feel like?” Stretch asked, sounding amused if his tone of voice was anything to go by.

“Tickles a little.”

“Oh?”

You heard a stalk snap and then something was brushing up against your face, making you startle and squeak in surprise. He traced the curve of your face with the fuzzy end of the grass stalk and you struggled out of his reach with little success. He only tugged you closer, his hand on your hip unyielding.

“Sta-stap-stop!” you laughed as the fuzz ticked behind your ear and down your neck. To get away from it you turned in towards him and reached back with your free hand to crush the grass and throw it onto the ground. So close you could feel his laughs as well as hear them. The fabric of his hoodie still smelled like faded cigarette smoke and tobacco even though you knew he hadn’t been smoking in a while. It wasn’t an unpleasant smell. You usually liked the way things smelled that had been on fire.

“Don’t mind me as I take advantage of an opportunity.”
“You would take advantage of a poor, defenseless blind person?”

“You’re not defenseless and you’ll be fine in a week or so, said so yourself.”

“What if I had been lying?”

“You weren’t. I can tell when you lie.”

“Pff, you wish. Don’t act so full of yourself, mister.” You slapped him playfully on the chest and that only made him chuckle again. “Don’t distract me. I’m trying to figure out my surroundings.”

“You feel any of those flowers yet?”

“No. What do they look like?” you asked while reaching out to run your hands through the grass, feeling for flowering weeds. He guided your hand until you felt something soft. “What color are they?”

“These are purple. I can see some others that are yellow and white. The white ones are fluffy and almost see through.”

“Oh, those are dandelions. You blow their seeds off and make a wish. It’s a human superstition,” you explained.

“What do you wish for?”

His question made you shrug. “Whatever you want? New shoes, a toy, someone to have a crush on you, anything you can think of. It’s just a superstition and it doesn’t do anything serious but it’s fun to wish and dream, isn’t it?”

Stretch reached over you and pulled something out of the grass. You heard the snap of the stem and waited while Stretch straightened. Beside you he breathed deep and then blew. Some of the seeds hit the side of your face but the majority scattered elsewhere.

“What did you wish for?”

“Isn’t there a rule with wishes about not blabbing about them before they come true?”

“That’s only on wishes from birthday cake candles.”

“Oh well in that case I’ll still just keep it to myself.”

You would have rolled your eyes if you could, but by the sound of his chuckles he seemed to pick up on your feelings without the visual cue. You were glad he seemed to be enjoying himself instead of just fretting and moping around you. Sans kept his distance, Blue had cried a couple of times unprompted, Red hadn’t given up on encouraging you to see a doctor, Papyrus was more quiet than usual and Edge… well, he was avoiding you.

Something about your accident had shaken him and he was still trying to pull himself together. When you asked Red you knew there was more to it but respected Edge’s privacy too much to pry or push the issue… for now.

“Here, smell this,” Stretch said, tugging you closer. You sniffed and felt his hand close to your face, crushing petals between his fingers to make the fragrance spread. “These are the purple ones.”

“That actually smells really nice.” You said, not really recognizing the scent. You had never been
“You like it?”

When you nodded he let you go and moved a few steps away. You heard him pulling at the grass and breaking off stalks. A few moments later he was trampling the grass to get back to you and you could smell the flowers he had picked.

“Here, hold these. We can head back now. Those two should be back soon with our food.”

“Good, I’m kinda starving.”

You couldn’t see it, but you heard Stretch exhale and you swore you could hear his eyesights roll in his skull at you.

In your hand you felt a bushel of stalks and smelled the fragrance of those crushed flowers. Stretch took your free hand and guided you back with his hand on your waist. You didn’t need the guidance but you didn’t mind the contact. So close you could smell his cigarette smoke again.

He held open the door and you climbed the steps with practiced ease, knowing the way by heart. Papyrus was cleaning the table with a damp cloth and cleaner you could smell the alcohol and lemon in.

“Oh, those look lovely, let me get something to put them in!” he exclaimed once you were close enough for him to see what was in your hands.

“I don’t think we even have a vase on this bus,” you said while Stretch shuffled in behind you, close enough that his arm touched yours.

“They’re just weeds too,” Stretch muttered.

“I like them though.”

“…There might be a pitcher for water under the sink we can use.”

Someone new took your hand and you recognized the gloves Papyrus wore. He led you to the table and helped you slide in, directing you to the place set for you. “Who else is going to join us?” you asked.

“Red and Blue picked up food for everyone according to their texts, but I’m not sure if Edge will finish his session in time or if my lazy brother will wake up from his nap for food. Ah, and your placemat has a fork and knife set out but don’t feel like you-you have to use them,” Papyrus blustered.

“I shouldn’t need to with a burger and fries.”

“That is…good! I will…” you could hear the leather crack as he wrung his hands through his gloves with nervous energy. “You’re feeling better today, aren’t you? Do you want any more green magic?”

You didn’t need it, but you felt how nervous Papyrus was and figured if not for you than for him. You shifted forward and smiled. “If you wouldn’t mind something quick maybe?”

You heard the shift in expression when he exclaimed how delighted he would be to help, sounding more himself. You leaned into his touch and relaxed at the feel of warm healing magic trickle...
through you, doing nothing to replace your stolen eye but helping all the same. Even if it didn’t fix anything, it felt nice to be under Papyrus’ magic.

You said as much before you could consider your words.

Papyrus blustered vocally over you and you felt his green magic falter before tapering off. He chuckled, sounding nervous before pulling away. “Don’t feel like you have to hesitate with me.”

“I won’t,” you promised.

You heard the leather of the bench seat creak as Stretch scooted over next to you. He grabbed for one of your arms and started to roll down the sleeves of your sweater. You almost flinched and pulled back, but you realized he just wanted to keep your sleeves clean while you ate. Maybe he wouldn’t roll them down far enough to notice-

“Oh, you have an opening on your arm!” Papyrus exclaimed. “Did my green magic not work on you?”

“N-no that’s not it,” you chuckled. “Um, those are, those are old, like, way old. I thought that tattoos would have hidden them better but I guess you’re just too observant for me.”

“What are they for?” Stretch asked, tracing the pattern of the white inked peonies on your forearm. You almost shivered from his touch.

“It’s, they’re not holes or wounds, they’re vents for my magic. I have other ones…elsewhere, but they’re all super old from when I was much younger. I had more magic than my body could handle and it needed someplace to go. I’m not a monster so there are some issues in controlling magic with a non-magical body.” You traced the paper thin line that cut into your flesh. “It’s… just a vent for excess magic.”

“Does it hurt?” Papyrus asked.

Not anymore.

“No, and if it was a wound your green magic would have closed it up but it’s like a piercing, so trust me, I’m all good here. Um, but maybe I don’t need to show them off?” You pawed the roll of your sleeve down just enough to keep the vent and your tattoos covered, but your wrists clean.

“If it’s a vent does that mean you still have trouble managing your own magic?” Stretch asked.

“Well,” you tried to smirk but doubted how successful it came across. “I am still human, aren’t I?”

“You do have an incredible amount of magic, but that is what we expected from human mages since your souls are so much more powerful than ours,” Papyrus hummed.

“I’m better about exercising control now. I’m able to manage so that my magic does leak out or overflow through the vents. If I wanted to patch these guys up there are pads for it I could use.”

“Oh?” Papyrus sounded surprised. “We have those?”

“They’re in the first aid kit. They look like, they’re just white stick on pads that are adhesive to magic. They’d stick all over you but on me they’d only stay in a few places.” You tapped your arm where the vent was.

Stretch was quiet beside you while Papyrus hummed curiously, no doubt musing over the new
information. Before anyone else could speak up Stretch leaned over to ask you with his teeth behind the shell of your ear—more breath than vibration. “You sound like you’ve used them before. Care to elaborate?”

But the static in the room made you stiffen and made Papyrus lean back just in time for Blue and Red to appear with what smelled like a juicy hot meal.

“Order’s up!” Red cheered while Blue zoomed to set out all the items in front of you in different places on the table. You waited until you could smell the meat and salted potato fries in front of you.

Blue was faster than Red and managed to steal the seat open on your opposite side, making you the filling in a underswap sandwich on the bench. Red settled for a spot next to Blue and Papyrus sat on the other side of the table, next to Stretch.

Lunch transitioned smoothly and before too long Edge was emerging from the back room, done with his conference call in time for Sans to pop back with a casual wave and lacklustre greeting that set his brother off on a familiar tangent.

After lunch you sat up at the front with Sans, aware of where the others were on the bus by means of sound and even smell. You could smell the condiments on their jackets and breath for some of them.

“So we got two new bone boys. Any luck on finding out new information on them?” Sans asked.

“Papyrus and Stretch were using the social media leads to try and get a better idea, but so far nada. At least on the map they’re staying put.”

“For now,” Sans grumbled.

You nodded. “For now, but I don’t have any reason to believe they’d move on. It looks like they settled the way Edge and Red settled. It’s been a few days now.”

“Well we can be hopeful I guess.” Sans turned off his phone and tucked it away. “We’re gonna have to be if you ain’t contacting the boss man about it.”

You had never been overly fond of Hightower, even when you had wished he was your father as a seven year old new recruit, but now the thought of him made you shiver.

You didn’t want to touch base with him, to be in contact with him, or answer any of his inquiries. The boys had told him you were sick and asleep any time he called in. The hidden cameras and listening devices had been cleaned out thanks to Sans— the master of paranoia himself— but none of you could be too careful.

“He knows I don’t have my spying eyeball anymore so he’s been even more persistent.”

“I don’t know what he expects from you. This fellow has been on the run and uncaught for months and he expects you to just show up and solve it like that?” Papyrus huffed loudly. You could picture him crossing his arms angrily for your sake.

You listened and inhaled slowly, noticing the absence of several other skeleton before confirming with your map. Only Sans and Papyrus were around you.
You heard your name called and turned to face Sans. Even if you couldn’t see him you could indicate that you were listening by looking his way.

“You sure you wanna go through with it?"

He didn’t indicate what he was referring to, but you knew.

“Yeah, I don’t feel comfortable going forward with so many variables. Everything has changed about this job. I—we don’t know who or what this Winn character is or how dangerous he could be. Plus, Raven and I might not win any sibling of the year awards, but I know enough about the guy to know when something is out of his hands. He wasn’t pulling the strings on this operation.”

Papyrus’ hand was on your shoulder, rubbing softly in small circles. You were tempted to ask him for another hit of green magic, just to feel his warmth, but refrained. You had heard that monsters using their magic outside of necessity was considered intimate…though you couldn’t confirm that.

You weren’t sure if you leaned into him or if you just thought about it.

Eh, just blame it on the bus moving.

“Whatever you want, we’ll back your play,” Sans said. “You sound like you’ve really thought it over at least.”

“It’s been hard not to,” you laughed.

Papyrus made an unhappy sound behind you that you might have imagined but his circles spread out wider across your back. This time you couldn’t blame the bus on how you leaned into his touch.

“You’re tired,” Papyrus said.

“Yeah, I’ve been a bit more drained. It’s just my body trying to heal.” You didn’t mention the trouble you had sleeping and staying asleep.

Or the nightmares.

“Do you need ta nap? Paps won’t even blame you for it,” Sans said, snickering at a look from his brother you couldn’t see.

“There’s a difference between resting and lazing about!” Papyrus huffed.

“Then if you don’t mind, I think I’ll take you up on that offer. The bottom bunk is still open right?”

“They’re always open for you,” Sans chuckled. “But right now they’re empty. Feel free to pick one out. Red is dozing in one of them top bunks.”

You stood and made your way over with practiced ease, feeling around for one before pulling back the curtain and backing into it. Out of habit you checked on your map to see who was nearby and froze when you noticed the dot just outside your bunk.

Slowly you moved into a hunched over sitting position with your legs out in the hallway. He didn’t say anything but you waited a few moments more before turning your unseeing face his way and nodding. “Edge? You okay?”

“Perfectly,” he rasped in a softer, quieter tone. “And you?”
“Sleepy.”

“I shouldn’t keep you from your nap then.”

You heard the way his leather jacket creaked when he started to turn away. Like a reflex, you jerked to try and grab for him but your fingers reached into empty air and grasped nothing. You tried again and still missed, but Edge must have noticed since he caught your wrist and guided himself over to you.

“I’m here,” he said, sounding worried.

“You’re not leaving, are you?”

“Not if you don’t want me to.” You heard him shift and felt like he was kneeling beside you. With his impressive height, it would make sense.

“I-you’ve been avoiding me. Is there something wrong?” you asked.

He was quiet long enough to practice taking a breath before using his voice to try and explain. “I have been, I’m sorry. I…still do not do well with humans who are hurt. It makes me remember things I wish I could forget.” His hand holding yours flinched. “And I needed some time to clean out my head. Did you…were you upset?”

“I was worried I did something wrong or that you didn’t want to be around me anymore,” you answered honestly.

“That’s not the truth, but I see why you could think that. I just needed the time and space to keep my head on straight. I do want to be around you but I don’t want you to see me if all I can think about when I’m around you is how it-on how hurt you are.”

There was something there caught in between his words that he didn’t say. You wanted to press and dig out the truth but you kept yourself from prying. Whatever Edge was going through was personal and his business. If he wanted to tell you he could, but for now you needed to respect his right to privacy.

“All things considered, it’s not that bad. I lost my eye a long time ago in an… accident and the implant was just a headache to lose. I’ll be fine with rest.”

“I know that. I keep telling myself that.”

You smiled, finding his words familiar as your squeezed his hand back. “It’s not a battle, its a war we wage within ourselves, one day at a time, with skirmish after siege after battle after fight. Keep telling yourself what you need to hear and don’t give up.”

Edge leaned in closer to you and you could feel the heat from his body, generated with magic, as he rested his forehead on your shoulder. “I’m sorry I can’t help you right now. I can’t heal like the others can.”

“That’s fine. Most people can’t do healing magic. Not even Red can do that.”

“Red has other skills.”

“So do you.”

Edge just grumbled incoherently on your shoulder but you reached up to rub the base of his skull,
appeasing him somewhat. After another minute he pulled away and then reached for your shoulders to gently guide you down onto your mattress.

“You need your rest. Sleep here, we’ll stay quiet.”

“And you won’t avoid me anymore?”

Edge hesitated but answered. “I will try my best to be there for you.”

“And I’ll try my best to remind you I’m okay.”

You felt his hand on your face, stroking affectionately. “Sleep now.” Then he pulled away and drew the curtain on its rings to close you in.

You turned over and curled up, feeling your face where Edge’s fingers had just been. You couldn’t help but feel like you wish you could just grab him back and hold onto him until he wasn’t so hesitant or cold with his touches.

You itched to hold his hand again, but folded your fist up across your chest and curled up in the bunk, knowing full well that you wouldn’t be doing anything more than dozing. The rhythm of the bus on the highway was lulling, but so were your nightmares.

Instead you laid awake with your eye covered and your body still, thinking yourself into a circle of doubt. You didn’t know what you were going to do next. You didn’t know what you should do. You had talked to Sans and Papyrus about it and trusted their input, but your gut wouldn’t settle down.

After a while when you felt the time had passed your heard voices soft and close by that you recognized.

“Edge?”

There was a pause and then some shifting sounds from behind the curtain.

“I am fine, Blue. I apologize for causing you any measure of concern,” Edge answered. On the other side of the curtain you heard soft shuffling that you recognized as shoes on short carpet. Shoes, not boots. Those sounded different.

“You’re…keeping watch?” Blue guessed.

“Of a sorts.”

“Need company?”

“…I…would not mind it.”

You think you hear Blue settle down somewhere close to Edge and the pair of them linger in silence which is more impressive for Blue than it is for Edge, but somehow still feels comfortable. The bus continues to sway hypnotically with its casual rhythm of constant running.

Eventually you hear Blue break the silence with a question. “Are you worried?”

“Always. Of anything specifically? No.”

Blue chuckled. “You could have fooled me. You look like nothing rattles you.”
“Don’t try joking with me, Blueberry, it doesn’t suit you any more than it does your brother,” Edge playfully chastised. “Plenty of things are worrisome.”

“Does that mean you have to worry about them?”

“No. People and monsters both chose what they worry about, maybe not with their heads but with their souls they do. It’s what defines us each.”

“Oh, I’m not sure it’s so much a choice, really. I couldn’t help this if I tried,” Blue chuckled.

“No, and you never could. I didn’t say the choice was yours to make, only that it was a choice. I’m as helpless to it as you,” Edge hummed.

“That almost makes more sense.”

A comfortable silence lasted between the two and you almost drifted off to doze again before you heard the next thing said between the pair.

“I’m still worried,” Blue whispered, almost too quiet to hear.

“As am I.”

“The HP thing…she got perma-hurt.” Blue’s voice almost squeaked as it struggled to stay a whisper. “That’s not something I can fix unless she gains more HP but…”

“Did you Check her while trying to heal her?”

“Of course, I needed to know how to help her and to see if what I was doing was any good. I’ve never healed a human before! They’re made of more than just their bodies, it’s so messy and complicated. With monsters we’re just…it’s all the same, our bodies and attacks and health are all made from magic so it’s all connected. Human bodies, even if they use magic like with Mages, don’t follow the same rules as the soul. My healing did little good.”

Edge made a noise of understanding. “I’m sure she still appreciated the care and comfort you provided her with. She’s doing much better now and she even said it was an old injury.”

“It’s still hard for you too,” Blue grumbled. “Don’t make it sound like I’m the only one struggling here.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“You were trying to comfort me, just like Pappy would if he was here. He says that same thing all the time whenever I bring it up.”

Edge almost chuckled. “Maybe that’s because he’s right?”

“I’m the older brother here, I know that!” Blue exhaled comically, causing Edge to chuckle before recovering enough to remember your napping and shush Blue. When Blue speaks again his voice is more controlled. “It’s just scary. I’ve never almost lost someone like that. Pappy is my treasured family too and if anything ever happened to either of them I don’t know what I’d do.”

“Keep going.”

“Hmm?”

“If you’re ever so unfortunate to lose someone close to you…someone you care for…keep going
because there is still someone else you have to stay upright for. If you stop to dwell on it you’ll dust, so just…keep going.”

From on the other side of the curtain you hear Edge stand and he moves before rustling the curtain as he passes, only moving it enough to no doubt peak in, but you were bandaged up and he couldn’t tell if you were asleep or awake, only safe. You heard him whisper a soft ‘good night’ before leaving Blue behind.

No more than five minutes later you heard the curtains being pulled back a fraction and smelled Blue. He smelled like soap and cotton, fresh and neat and distinct. He was close and you shifted towards him, making a groggy sound in the back of your throat.

You heard him stiffen and then a panicked whisper of, “Did I wake you?”

“Blue,” you mumbled, sounding more sleepy than you felt.

He made a noise of acknowledgment before pressing up against your side. The bunks weren’t enormous, but they were big enough for you to roll over and open your arms, inviting him in. He didn’t hesitate to follow you, nuzzling up to your side and then running a warm hand down your back, starting at the base of your skull, pulsing with green magic.

You called his name again, ducking your face towards him. It sounded like a question, even to you.

“Shh, shh, shhh, I’m just…just being careful. I wanna make sure you’re all good.”

You looped one arm around him and pulled him closer, feeling yourself go limp with exhaustion at the contact. He was warm and his magic was soothing, but more than just that, you felt a stirring in your soul that made you feel safe. You were with Blue, he was with you, you were together. You were safe in his arms. You were safe. You could sleep.

“Night Blue, don’t…don’t leave me here,” you whispered on the edge of sleep.

You were near boneless after his magic passed through you a second time, warming you.

“Never,” he promised too easily.

You believed him and fell asleep.

This time there were no nightmares.

Chapter End Notes

See, there are plot reasons for the cuddles. Reader gets nightmares without a bone buddy.

This is one of those chapters I wrote up after finishing the arc during revisions because the jump from last chapter to what happens next felt too sharp for me? There's one more chapter on the bus that's just...a Red chapter cause I love him, but I realized during edits I needed to address what was going on with reader during the time she was blind and explain things. More insight into Edge, foreshadowing with Sans and
Papyrus, Blue raising some noise on that perma-hurt issue reader is dealing with....yeah. There we go. Enjoy. :)


Red woke up in the middle of the night and turned over, reaching for the curtain to pull back. It made little sounds as the rings slid back on the rod, but in the still of their parked bus, every pin drop seemed to carry. He could see your bed, or where you had been slotted to sleep that night, empty with rumpled sheets trailing out over the edge.

He rolled over enough to lean out and look up towards the front and, sure enough, the driver’s seat was cranked back and swiveled to accommodate your draped form. No one was in the passenger's seat. Without hesitation he shortcut himself into Stretch’s favorite chair.

You don’t flinch, and he hopes that’s because you’re asleep. It’s almost impossible to tell with the bandages still over your eyes. It’s been days and they’re still in place. Red wanted to take you to a real doctor and have you checked out but no one else had been willing to force you into something you were so strongly against. And at the end of the day, as much as he hated it, that was what was most important, your consent.

Red watches your figure a little longer before smirking to himself.

“Couldn’t sleep either?”

“It seems I’m not the old one.” You turn your face to whisper, but you don’t turn enough to meet Red head-on, even if you know exactly where he is.

“Yes, but you know I nap enough during the day to make up for it, sweetheart.”

“And you know I’ve slept enough this past week to make up for a dozen sleepless nights.”

“Yeah, your body needed it. Ain’t no point in trying to get around that.”

“Coming from a certified lazybones himself.”

Red flushes at the nickname, but you’re not able to see it so he only worries about the way his voice comes out. His brother had called him worse plenty of times, but there are a few things that change their meanings when spoken by a person who could be a potential… something or other. What would be the appropriate title for what he was thinking of; girlfriend, date mate, significant other, the echo of his very soul???

“Hey, there’s a reason it’s such a popular past time, doll face. Don’t knock it down so hard. Maybe next time we could try it together. And hey, we may not be socks, but I think we'd make a great pair.”

You laugh and it’s so soft and quiet in the cabin he knows it’s something you’re trying to keep
trapped behind your lips. He can see the way you curl them in and duck your chin while your shoulders rattle. It makes him wish it wasn’t nighttime so that he could hear your laughter. It’s been a bit too long since the last time you really let it loose.

“Good one,” you wheeze. “But I’m gonna have to turn you down. I have to try and get back into the habit of being awake. I’ve been too spoiled with all the fussing.

“Spoiled? Nah. You don’t know what you’re talking about. Don’t you know we skeletons are natural protectors and provider types? I’m sure ‘the great Papyrus’ has gone over it with you already, but we’re all good types to have around if you need a cuddle. It’s the calcium in our bones.”

“I’ve…appreciated it. I really have. It’s helped since I need to touch to see and waking up can still be disorienting,” you say, relaxing back into the stretched out chair.

“You shouldn’t be sleeping alone then,” Red blurts before he can think twice about the way his words come across. But even once he realizes it he doesn’t care. His filter ain’t the best, but if that’s the worst of his flaws, then at least it’s an honest one.

“I’m not going to bother someone with it every time I go to sleep. That would be irritating.”

“Shit, you kidding me, I’m sure we’d all fight over it and end up having to draw for it like the bed. Ey, ey, don’t make that teeth clicking sound with your tongue at me, you know I’m right about it.”

“I know exactly how right you are, that’s what the sound was for. Still, it’s a bother even if you’re all tripping over yourself to be kind and helpful. I should…learn to get used to these things.” You say as you turn your head into the leather of the seat cushion and nestle into it. “Besides, I’m a restless sleeper in case you haven’t noticed.”

Red felt an echo of fear ring out inside him. He didn’t like to admit it, but the sight of your bandages made him nervous and was part of the reason he was so eager to pay a doctor a visit. He didn’t like the sight of you hurt, and he hated the idea of a hurt lasting so long. He knew what happened to monster who fell behind and suffered from injuries.

Back there…. back in his underground, if you had suffered in his world and been rendered blind by an enemy, no one would have helped you. The guard would take one look at you and decide you were better off as a meat shield. He had seen it done before. People who formed attachments on the weak were cut down for it. It had been dangerous enough for Red to have his brother.

For not the first time Red thanked the bastard you called Raven for bringing him and his brother out of that hell pit and into the light. They were on the surface, they were together, and most importantly, there was you and Ma and Mini and people he could afford to care about. He would probably wanna maim that kid if their paths ever crossed again, but for his lot, Red was thankful.

“You’re not the only one who’s got a case of the wandering feet. Some of us know that better than others,” Red sighed, keeping his voice quiet as he dragged himself out of his own thoughts.

“I know.” You answer with the cutest little smile that looks like it holds back a secret just for you. It’s one of Red’s favorite sights.

“Oh do you now? And how would that be?”

“If I wake up in the middle of the night, the three most likely to be out of their bed and sleeping or at least laying somewhere else are you, Sans, and Stretch. Considering that you are all iterations of one another, it makes sense if you all shared a trait like that. Your natures are near identical, but
the nurture part of your development...ah, that’s all on you.”

“Oh really?” Red chuckled. “And you just happened to wake up and notice this early on or what?”

You reached up to tap at your forehead, right above the bandages. “No, I see it on the map. Your dots are always the most active at night, blinking out to places I sometimes can’t even find. Once or twice I’m sure Sans has blinked back to Grillby’s for the food, but I couldn’t be sure since my map wouldn’t stretch that far.”

“Wouldn’t...as in, past tense?” Red echoed.

You shrugged with your free hand over the bandages covering our eyes. “It’s a skill that’s only become more developed since this happened. Without my sight, the things left in its place have all had to work extra hard to make up for it.”

“Well, I guess that’s a silver lining if you want to believe in things like that.”

You shifted in your seat, sitting up a bit more and facing Red more purposefully. It made him think you had something to say to him. It was hard to tell without your eyes, but Red was getting real good at reading human body language; or more specifically your body’s language. You had all these quirks and tells that he was cataloging as he noticed them.

“Hey,” you whispered across the space to him. Red smirked at the conspiratorial tone in your voice. “Did you know that this actually happened to one of my favorite story characters?”

“They lost their robot eye in a fight with their long lost but less attractive brat of a brother?”

“Almost. But I was thinking about it recently and talking to Blue and Stretch about it earlier because they both like comic books. One of my favorite runs is for a superhero duo named Cloak and Dagger. Cloak has a magical cloak-”

“You don’t say?”

“Shut up,” you chastise Red with a laugh. “His cloak lets him open portals kinda like you and your shortcuts. He can teleport himself and those around him across great distances for a burger or for, you know, scary revenge tactics. His counterpart is this girl named Dagger and she’s pretty awesome.”

Red listened, less interested in the content and more entrapped by the life in your voice. You were blind, tired, and restless in your own skin even though you took great pains to hide it, but here you were in the middle of the night, sitting up in a bus with a guy like him, gushing about something you loved.

It lit you up inside and made Red feel something buoyant in his soul. It was disorienting if he thought about it, and most days he didn’t, but at night he couldn’t help but let his mind wander. You had always been an attractive figure he was drawn to, and he was afraid to admit how strong that initial pull was. By the time he had realized it, feeling your magic, learning your quirks, and hearing your - goddamnaweful- scream, it had been too late to turn back or put on the breaks. There was nothing but the decent left for him now. Maybe he wasn’t completely lost to you yet, but he knew better than to think it wasn’t anything but a matter of time.

You bit the edge of your lip and chuckled about something and it was enough to spur him to movement. He wanted to cross the distance between you both and cuddle you up the way Papyrus or Blue would at night when you felt ill and needed their healing touch to stabilize.
Watching another skeleton entangle himself around you and then duck his head to listen to your breathing, Red had never wished for the green magic his brother could sometimes summon more in his life. That first night when you had left to get bandaged with Blue, they had all heard you get sick and both Papyrus and Blue had cuddled up on either side of you, making a tag team out of it.

It would have been nice if that had been him and his brother, but he was useless at anything other than the ‘angry’ magics and his brother’s healing touch was…. unreliable to put it mildly. They wouldn’t have been good nurses, but they could have been comforters in their own ways. You’d feel safe with them, and then Red could fall asleep and wake up seeing his favorite human face each day.

“And-Red, you went quiet.”

“I’m listening, doll face. You were talking about the ballerina with the light daggers who goes blind just like you,” Red answers seamlessly.

“Yeah, I remember reading about her struggles to deal with this new disability and it was a major theme of the series that was painstakingly illustrated in an action type of comic, which I thought was interesting. All the other comic books my brother read were a bit more fierce and less… soft I guess? In the comics they did a lot to show off some of the coping techniques used by blind people, and there are whole pages just dedicated to that. Later on Dagger gets some of her confidence back and her sense of spatial relations is so much more precise for when she recovers her vision.”

“And that’s totally gonna be you, sweetheart. You’re gonna be just fine and once you get those bandages off you’ll be fiercer than ever. You’ll be a-a bigger better version of this dagger gal. No one’s gonna wanna mess with you then,” Red encouraged.

The cabin is dimly lit and the stars don’t give off much more light than the half moon in the sky, but Red can see enough to see the way a light dusting of pink colors your cheeks. He hopes its because of him and his words. He wants to see you open like a flower, turning towards him at the sound of his praises and soaking them up like sunlight from the sun.

“I hope so.” You picked at the edge of your seat and duck your head again. “It wasn’t easy to get a hold of those comic books but when we could they were precious to us. There was a Spiderman series that Cloak and Dagger showed up in as side characters, and it was out of order but it was the first time I had ever heard about these characters and…and I read it and I knew she was gonna be my favorite. She was strong, yeah, and she had powers like me, but she was… she was good. And fighting wasn’t her first option. And for a kid being raised on nightmares each night that tell you ‘you have to be fiercer than these nightmares’ it was a forbidden hope of mine to be like her-be someone who could look at their enemy and try to help them before she hurt them.”

Red missed the sight of your eyes. He wanted to see them, if only to catch the way they would look far off and glisten with the emotion that lived inside your voice. He wanted to ask more details about that story, about what made you sound like that, but he kept his voice in his throat and drank in the sight of you. Even with your eyes bandaged your face was made out of peace and he couldn’t understand it after all the pain and that-

goddamnawful-
scream.

When Ma and Mini talked about peace and forgiveness and freedom he had possessed no frame of mind suitable for understanding it. But looking at you, hearing your voice, maybe Red could dare to understand the unfathomable.

“You got any other favorites, sweetheart? You make me want to crack open a book and give that whole reading bit another go.”
From your seat you snort and he soaks that up too. “Please, like I don’t know you’re already a genius mechanical engineer. You can like burgers and beer and still know how to build a custom engine on a motorcycle that’s missing half its parts.”

“Blue’s bike was only missing one thing. I just enhanced the other bits. He deserves something nice and it wasn’t any skin off my back.”

“Thanks for looking out for him. That’s kind of you.”

“Hey, out of all of us, Blue is probably the one with the most besties. It’s hard to not like that guy. He’s just kinda cute at first, but damned if he ain’t resilient in other ways. Plus, it’s easy to like a guy that’s all over you and your brother’s style. Who doesn’t love a fan?”

“Respect.”

The pair of you sat in silence for a little longer before Red decided to move. He blinked out and was gone without an explanation or an excuse. A few minutes later he was back with a couple of mugs in his hands. The scent was hard to miss.

“That ... tea?” you ask, sniffing at the air.

“You got a nose like a lesser dog’s, I’ll give it to you. Yeah, I went out to make us a couple and came back with em. This way no one wakes up from my clowning around in the kitchen.”

You tilt the mug back and sip at the warm liquid before pulling back to blow. Red doesn’t wait, having far less sensitivity to these things. He had a little of monster-made famous sea tea, but for you he had made up a cup of relaxing chamomile, hearing it was a good enough tea for sleepless nights. Ma had plenty of those and Red had learned from them.

“Hey, if there’s something else, something keeping you awake that you haven’t mentioned, you know...you know you can share that with me if you want to. I got a couple of shoulder bones you can lean on and I’m pretty decent at listening too, even if the lack of ears makes you think otherwise. And hey, if not, my shoulder bones are good enough for just leaning on.”

“...Were you worried about me, Red?” you ask, lips still hovering over your tea. Your breath makes the surface ripple.

In another life Red would have lied, said no as loud as possible, and run for the hills.

“Yeah, I wanna worry about you. Let me?”

You sipped at your tea and then when it didn’t scald your tongue you drank it down until it was half gone. “I’m not going to ever stop you. Worry all you want, but just let me return the favor when it’s my turn.” You take another sip and then mumble into the mug. “But thank you.”

“No problem, sweetheart.”

He downed the rest of his monster tea and blinked out just long enough to return the mug before he was back, like he had never left. When you finish your tea he takes it for you and then he’s back just as fast.

Leaning against the dashboard, no longer interested in the passenger’s side seat. He asked you some more questions about your thoughts on the events leading up to that last encounter, and then segwayed into questions about the Embassy and Hightower, a boogie man like figure he had only heard about but never seen or met himself. Even if Blue and Stretch claimed he wasn’t as terrible
as Sans suspected him of being, Red didn’t like the idea of entangling himself with such a person.

The more he heard about this skunk from you the more justified he felt.

After the whole mission was over, after they somehow tracked down your brother Raven and stop him from summoning any more boss monsters, like the other Grillby or another set of skeleton brothers, he asked what you wanted to do.

And then you ask him what he wants to do before you ever get to your answer.

“Don’t know? Settle down somewhere with a house I can come home to, or live somewhere I can get a couple lazy jobs on the side? What else could a monster ask for? I’m not fighting for my life every morning. Me and my brother are safe. Maybe I’ll live somewhere close to Ma and Mini, though I expect they’d appreciate their own space.” He kicked at your foot with his. “Now it’s your turn, doll face.”

“I like your idea. Imma steal it. That’s it for me too.”

“You can’t do that. You gotta come up with your own,” he complains even as his brain hyper fixates on the idea of sharing the same house, of coming home at the same time, or one before the other, and building a life together in simple, modest ways. It’s all his soul wanted.

“I’ve not thought about it enough, don’t bully me. I never thought I’d get this far. Maybe…maybe just learn to work something with my hands for a job. I like doing that sort of stuff and I don’t get burned—I feel it—but I don’t actually burn, so that might be a good avenue to explore.” You shrug and shift around in the oversized seat that’s big enough to curl up in and still have room to spare. “This mission is too much of a pain not to think about though.”

“Whacha mean?”

You shift in your seat again and he thinks you might be tired. “I don’t know. It’s just…I don’t know where I’m going two days from now, much less two months or two years from now.”

“You against company that far off?”

“No,” you answer simply and easily before you can even think about it and Red trusts the honesty in it.

“Then don’t worry about it. One step at a time. Whatever you decide it’s all good,” he says just as easily and honestly.

Silence stretches between the two of you and Red smirks at the small yawn and muffled murmuring you let slip as you readjust yourself on the chair, not unlike a cat seeking the perfect comfort in her bed.

“I ... wasn't planning on falling asleep…” you mumble into the chair.

“Is out here not comfortable? I could blink you back into bed no problem, doll.”

You fidget in the chair. “No, it’s not that. It’s all the same to me but…I, um…”

The blush was back and Red was worried it was something you couldn’t talk about that made you hot under the collar. Was he overstepping?

“Sweetheart? There something I can do?”
You sift some more but reach out with one hand for him. “Don’t laugh, but I-I-um would you just hold my hand until I fell asleep. *Itssostupid,*” you slur, turning away. “I’m not a baby but I just-no, forget it.”

Red took the hand before you could retract it and held it with both of his. You were much smaller than him and when he looked at where you were connected it wasn’t more obvious. Your hand and fingers almost all fit in his palm.

“It’s not stupid. We all feel a little alone from time to time. You okay with me?”

“Yes. You’re safe. Thank you.”

You squeeze his hand in response and Red nearly feels his soul burst in his chest. He’s not sure if he’s literally taken damage for it, but he’s nearly overcome with the thrill of adoration he feels for you.

“Then-her, hang on,” he says before moving.

You make a soft sound of surprise as he pulls you up into his arms and then turns around so he’s the one falling back into the driver’s chair. Unlike you, a smidge of a thing, he fills up the whole thing. You’re small enough to fold up in his arms so that’s what he does. He pulls you close and closes his arms around you, caging you in.

You don’t fight it. Instead you pull up your legs and arms and fold into him, burying your face in the crook of his shoulder right under his neck. You tug at the corner of his jacket and he helps you pull it up over you, folding you flush against his shirt and ribcage. If he wanted to he could connect both ends of his jacket around you and zip you up to keep you close to him, close to his soul.

“Red?”

“Hmmm?”

“....Thanks.”

His soul sang and he knew he was done for.

“Anytime, sweetheart.”

But that was okay. There were worse things in life than happiness.

You’re warm and so is he but on a cool night it’s exactly the sort of thing that’s pleasant enough to lull one into a sleep too soft and peaceful to be filled with dreams.

Chapter End Notes

Disclaimer: I love all the skeletons and I have no favorites.

Red is a soft boi, a cuddle boi, a big boi, a sweet boi.
I’m so pleased with this chapter and how soft the characters are for a change. It doesn’t add much to the plot but dang if this wasn’t one of the most fun ones to write. I love skeleton cuddles the most. It’s my personal brand of crack.
If this was interesting I might make a few more POV chapters for the other guys or I'll
just stick with standards second person pov.

The comic book series mentioned in this chapter is Cloak and Dagger (October, 1983), a true old school Marvel classic that's my personal fav.

Also, as a side not if it wasn't clear earlier, like the little corner maps you see in many video games- reader can mentally manifest that and see where people are if she's met them before. It's magic and happens in her mind so she doesn't need eyes for it to work.
“Nah, that’s why I’m asking you if you have a way to track her?” Sans asked into the phone, watching the other person shift nervously. Hightower wasn’t a man subject to many tells, but Sans had been angry and irritated enough to rattle the official.

“That’s not something we are at liberty to divulge, Mr. Sans. After last night we’ve no data or knowledge as to where SevenA could have gone off to.”

“Well it’s been a whole day since your damn stalker GPS heard her last, so I wouldn’t be surprised if you had a bug on her person,” Sans snapped.

“Her phone-”

“Oh this one?” Sans held up the phone and shook it. “The one you gave her, yeah we have it. She left it behind when she went off. I don’t think she’s stupid. What else you got?”

“We’ll be scanning social media channels for any sightings and reaching out to her previous contacts for any developing information. When we know something we will let you know.”

“That’s not good enough, Hightower. How are we supposed to do anything when our one human, our map, goes AWOL without a word of warning.” Sans kept his voice even and level but that was a challenge. “You went far enough to bug her freaking eye, why wouldn’t you have something dirtier up your sleeve?”

Hightower didn’t respond to that and Sans didn’t care. He already knew the answer to his own question. Why would you bug the same person thrice? Even if her phone was bugged it could be discarded, but an eyeball that was connected so intricately to the person’s body? There was no reason to take any other measure beyond that.

Until now.

“We will report what we find. Until then we will consider SevenA a possible colluder with the renegades. Unfortunately not even spitfires are immune to sentiment.”

“Great, but what does that do for us? We’re sitting on the side of the road without even a direction to follow,” Sans said.

“As per the contract this will be the completion of your mission to the ‘best of your abilities.’ If SevenA does not return within twenty-four hours the bus’ AI will auto update with directions to bring you back to the city. Once here we can-”

“I have my own life, Hightower. Me and my brother have been living independently for years. We don’t need you to hold our hands.”

“Then the others-”

“Also good on that front. We’ll keep an eye on Blue and Stretch but Edge and Red had humans back in the Heritage Village where they want to go back to. They’re leaving in the morning and there ain’t a contact we can stop them with.”
“They haven’t been vetted.”

“They got their IDs and they’re registered. They passed their citizenship exams so if you wanna talk to King Asgore or the Queen about keeping those two against their will then go ahead. It’s too much of a bother for me to get involved in,” Sans groaned.

Honestly, this was too much of a bother for him. He wasn’t used to talking so much with so little creativity. He felt like he was feeding lines to a machine. Hightower wasn’t his favorite person to have to call.

After a brief pause Hightower spoke up. “…Where are you staying now?”

“You can read credit card statements, can’t you? The name of the hotel is there.”

“And you’ll depart separate from the bus tomorrow? All of you?” Hightower asked.

In San’s phone he could see the way Hightower looked off to the side as if reading from a separate screen. No doubt it was a screen with all the information concerning the recent credit card charges. In twenty-four hours the card would be dead, cut off as per the agreements of the contract.

“That’s the plan unless you have some other agent in your back pocket that can tell us where the hell to go next. You got one of those?”

Like the asshole he was, Hightower ignored the question along with the jab and instead plowed on, facial expressions betraying little apart from his own irritation. No doubt with the recent developments he would have to scramble to salvage what he could of the effort.

“We will be in contact shortly. Until then, please enjoy your night.”

And then the video call went dead.

Sans scowled but turned over the phone and tugged off the back. The innermost components spilled out and he dropped them all into a plastic baggy that he carried through his shortcut to the end of the laundry chute. He stuffed it inside some poor sap’s spare jeans and then blinked back to his room.

Papyrus was out of the room, checking out the gym downstairs but the light from the bathroom was still on. Sans heard the toilet flush and the water run on and off. A second later you open the door and step out.

“Coast clear?” you ask.

Sans didn’t want to say he felt giddy, but…

“Like a beach,” he quipped back.

You make a gesture like you’re rolling your eyes and poke at his nasal ridge, pushing him back with your finger on the last tip of bone before emptiness. He staggers less from the strength and more from the abruptness of it. He was still getting used to how handsy you had grown since the accident.

You were going to try removing your bandages tonight and he wasn’t the only one nervous about that. But before you could do that, the two of them had to put some pieces into play.

“You think he bought it?” you ask, dropping onto the edge of the bed and flopping backwards.
“He’s a hard egg to crack.”

“He looked fractured.”

“Really?” that made you sit up and turn towards Sans. “No way. He must be so pissed off right now. Serves him right.”

Sans shuffled around you and your bed-the one Papyrus said he would share with you—and sat on the edge of his mattress. You turned in his direction but your face wasn’t turned around enough to be pointed in his exact direction. Still, Sans knew you were listening.

“I heard something from a friend back in the city, she’s a monster working closely with the Embassy as well as several other organizations,” Sans said. “They’re looking for new workers to fill in a couple of the roles left behind by the last batch of renegades.”

“That’s…yeah I can see why that would rattle a guy like him. It’s a development he can’t manipulate to his advantage. So many of his pawns are leaving out from under him.

“Like rats on a sinking ship,” he mused aloud.

“More like horses out of the gate.” When he made a sound of confusion your clarified. “I think there were a lot more kids scared to leave than those just loyal to that man and his cause. Without a threat or a reason for all we went through, it was harder for them to control us.”

Before Sans can say anything else there is a knocking at the door.

“Knock knock,” Stretch lazily drawls from on the other side.

“Who’s there?” Sans calls back.

“A broken pencil.”

“A broken pencil who?”

“Never mind. It’s pointless.”

You snort and Sans opens the door. Stretch turns his pockets inside out as he steps into the room and smiles when he sees you on the bed.

“That joke Stretch…it was a little dull,” you snicker.

“Oh darn, I’ll try and sharpen my wits for the next one.”

Behind you, Sans chuckles at the door, more entertained by the cycle of jokes than any one single comment. “So good of you to lead us your time, Stretch, but we’re not all meeting in here.”

Stretch shrugged and sank down onto the mattress next to you, bumping his shoulder up against yours. “That’s okay. Blue is out and I got nowhere else to be. I thought I’d just crash and get the download early.”

“And make me have to repeat myself?” Sans scoffed, turning over and curling up on the bed, content to laze about instead of entertain his friend.

Stretch called your name. “What about you?”

“Hmmm, what about me?” you hummed with a near conspiratorial smile that flavored the sound
of your voice.

“The pair of you are insufferable.” Stretch flopped backwards onto the bed and draped one arm over his eye sockets. “Fine, don’t tell me anything.”

“The pair of you are quite a sight,” you joke.

San’s huddled form convulses on a wheeze born out of an unexpected chuckle.

“Eye am not sure what you mean,” Stretch replied around a yawn. He lifted his arm a moment later enough to peer out with one eye light. “But all joking aside, how well can you make us out on the map now?”

It was the same sort of question Sans had asked the night before when you had put into motion the first steps of your plan. You were using your map near constantly to scan for nearby threats, but he had doubted it being any use on someplace as compact and small as the bus.

“I can’t see your expressions or much detail, it’s all devoid of color and shade, but I know where you are in this room, especially if you’re laying or standing or crouching between the roof beams.”

“That’s nifty.”

You just shrugged.

“Can you see if I’m about to touch you?”

You hear Stretch roll over and push up off the bed.

You smile but Stretch doesn’t give you the chance to respond before he falls onto you from behind, wrapping you up in his arms and pulling you backwards onto the bed. You struggle with half hearted attempts to break his hold and his grip is surprisingly ironclad. The best you can manage is to twist around in his arms so you faced his chest. When you tried to crawl out he let you get away enough so that his head was at your shoulders before trapping you again-pulling you close enough to bend his head to.

“What are you doing?” you huff in exasperation.

“…Trying to decide if that’s your lungs or your heartbeat I’m hearing,” he answered after another long moment.

From his bed you could hear Sans turn around. On the map you could feel his face turned your way, watching. You couldn’t tell if he was upset or amused or something else but it was Stretch who’s behavior baffled you more.

“You know, it’s probably just my stomach you’re hearing. It’s the loudest thing considering it’s almost time for dinner food,” you joke, casually.

You thought he might accept that and let you go, but Stretch turned his skull to press the side of it up against your chest and listen. You can’t tell what sort of look is on his face but you can feel the intent behind his grip as he doesn’t slacken. His breathing, something that is optional for skeletons, grows and swells until it matches yours and then his eyes shut. Along with the rest of his body, his head goes slack against you and he seems to fall asleep.

When you move to pull out his voice stops you. “Your heart. It’s so small.”
“Yeah, it’s just a part of me. You could probably hold it in your hand and have room to spare.”

Stretch made a sound into the side of your chest, rustling the fabric of your pullover. “I probably could, but you couldn’t live without it. It’s scary. Doesn’t that ever…frighten you?”

You can’t see it, but you know Sans’ eyes are on you.

Stretch’s question gives you pause. It was almost silly, but you had to consider the fact that he was a monster made out of magic with no need for lungs or a heart or anything internal aside from the pit that was a void for his mouth and stomach. In comparison, humans were so terribly more complex with so many different parts that were necessary for life.

You thought back to your nights beside Papyrus or Blue using their magic to heal you and finding more frustration than satisfaction when the end results were so poor. Their magic was designed to heal the soul, the magical essence of a monster, not a physical body. Your HP was at max and your soul was healthy, but your flesh was still torn and your eye was still gone. Their magic numbed you and accelerate your body’s natural healing, but compared to how fast monsters healed, you knew you had rattled a few of them with the lingering effects of your injury.

They were too polite about it, but you were sure you had grossed at least one of them out.

You hummed and reached up to stroke the back of Stretch’s skull. Your touch was soft and slow, like with petting a sleeping cat. “Nah. I’ve always been like this. I don’t know any other way to be. Why? Does it scare you?”

“It terrifies me.”

Sans stood up from the bed and you heard his feet on the floor. He shuffled over in his slippers and just stood within arm’s reach, hands stuffed into his pockets. He didn’t try to hide his presence or announce it, but you could tell he was hyper aware of everything that was said and went on in the room that you shared with him and Papyrus.

You pat Stretch’s skull once more and then pushed away, pulling yourself up into a sitting position. This time he let you go but followed you up.

“Will, you be ready for dinner?” Sans asked. “We’re having it on the roof.”

“Always ready,” you answered easily.

Unlike the last hotel you had all stayed at, this hotel did not have a cafe or lounge area on its roof. But plenty of the members of your party had shortcuts so it was a simple thing to blink in and out of rooms before meeting up on the roof in time to catch the last half hour of sunlight and see the sun sink into a blazing glow of red, orange and gold. Then the stars came out and it was no less delightful.

Blue and Red had ordered a ton of food and brought it up together, but Stretch still went back to order more and carry it up on his own once he saw how quickly you devoured the garlic bread. Sans disappeared and then later reappeared with four different full bottles of wine before going back for the glasses.

It was fun to hear the boys enjoy themselves for a brief moment in time before the food was nearly all gone. Everyone was too full for dessert, but Red still ordered a whole cake and came back with new plates. Everyone refused, saying they were too full, but somehow the cake still ended up half gone.
“It’s the last day with the bottomless credit card, use it up,” you cheer when Papyrus starts to chastise Sans for even offering to make a late night bakery run. “Anything you want, get it now. I’m sure that guy is going to cut the strings soon.”

“You know, my brother and I are already, financially endowed,” Papyrus huffs. “There’s no need to be excessive.”

“It’s less about buying things for yourself and more about draining his resources out of spite. I spent far too many years living paycheck to paycheck, sacrificing and penny pinching to not wanna indulge,” you say while reaching for your wine glass. Feeling it empty you set it back down but Blue hastens to fill it up for you and you thank him.

“Don’t worry about that, sweetheart.” Red interjected. “We had fun on the town. I’m surprised we didn’t hit a limit. Some of those places were pricey.”

“But even without the card, the gold we had on us was worth so much,” Blue added. “I’m not sure if it would be enough for a house though.”

“Oh, that what you want now, bro?” Stretch asks with a teasing tone.

Blue sputtered and you couldn’t see his blush even though you suspected there was one. You knew him well enough for that.

“What did you buy?” you ask.

Red laughed and Blue sputtered some more before squeaking out, ’stuff-lots of stuff’ that made Sans and Stretch laugh along with Red.

You couldn’t hear Edge but you knew where he was. He sat nearly across from you but he was the quietest by far out of all the boys. Since your accident you had been aware of him hovering at the edges of your senses, sitting just outside a room or around a corner, watching out for you, but still keeping his distance. When you talked to him he spoke to you like normal, but there was something new between you, something less sturdy than a wall but solid enough to keep you out. You were content to let him keep his boundaries, but you were eager to see them come down. Hopefully, in time, they would.

“Speaking of which,” you say, drawing the group’s attention away from another conversation about ‘revealing Blue’s secret porn stash’ or something equally embarrassing that the others were coming up with in an effort to get him to talk about what he had bought with Red.

You felt the group shift towards you and the side chatter died off when you move your hands to your face and undid the clasp that held your bandages together. The first loop fell away but then you had to purposely unwind it the rest of the way until there was only the last layer. You hesitated and braced yourself but slowly dropped the last of the bandages and opened your good eye.

Your brain panicked for a hot second but then it went back to focusing and you could feel the difference. You were looking at a world without filters or enhancements. Your natural vision wasn’t terrible but compared to what you were used to it would be a step down. Yet, thanks to the bandages and the temporary blindness now you could see…

“You’re all really beautiful,” you admit with a smile. “Glad to see you all so well.”

“That is my favorite pun ever!” Papyrus exclaimed, reaching over his brother to fall on top of you in a hug that rattled with his excited laughter.
Sans ended up squished against your side but then Blue was jumping in as well, along with Stretch and Red and yeah, even Edge. You ended up toppling backwards and complained loudly of needing space.

All the cellphones had been left down in their rooms but Papyrus had brought a small compact for you to look into. You studied the absence in your empty socket, able to tell there was an eye missing underneath the lid, but only because you were looking for it. You combed your hair down with your fingers so that it fell over that half of your face and that was good enough. You weren’t going to be winning any beauty contests on your own, but you felt like that didn’t matter when Blue hugged you again from behind.

“That’s step one down,” you exhale in relief. You shut the compact and return it to Papyrus before facing the others. “Now step two. Thank you all again for being willing, for doing this for me. It’s a huge inconvenience but-”

“It’s the right thing to do,” Edge interjected. With your sight back you could see him watching you and know that the curtain between you was quickly crumbling. It made you feel light.

“And it’s, frankly, a dream come true,” Sans interjected in a tone that was nearly giddy-something you had thought impossible for the guy. Looking him over, the same excitement in his voice was in his eyes.

“You’ve dreamed about going AWOL and hunting renegades off the grid with your own agenda?” you scoffed playfully in disbelief.

“To be fair, I’m sure that was a MTT spy drama, and Sans was always fond of those,” Papyrus said.

“Well, you won’t have the bus tomorrow. Blue and I will be on his bike but the rest of you will need to follow up on your own. Oh, the new cell phones, Red, did you get those?”

“Yup,” he answered with a thumbs up. “Boss got his blinged out and everything too.”

“I wasn’t one of the ones who needed a replacement, you fool,” Edge grumbled.

“Yeah, well it’s important when we make contact with this other Sans or Papyrus iteration that we not do anything to broadcast it, even accidentally, to social media, otherwise the Embassy will know where to look for us,” you say.

“And our plan for first contact?” Stretch asks.

You swallow and think it over before answering. “Well, it depends on a few factors but I’ll run down the basics of it real quick.”

And for the rest of the night you and the other boys conversed with one another about the plan you and Sans had come up with for making contact with the new skeletons.

You needed to make sure they were okay and safe enough that Raven and his weird gang of renegades couldn’t make trouble with them, even though you doubted that was really your brother’s soul intention at this point. There was more going on between your brother and the others, including that freaky Winn guy, that you just didn’t understand.

You retired to your rooms later in the night and ended up snuggled alongside Papyrus in his bed, seeing him for the first time since he had offered to sleep next to you following your accident. It was a bit more intimate but not so much so that it made you uncomfortable. You had been cuddling
into his warmth for days now, and you weren’t about to stop until someone told you otherwise.

Your nightmares hadn’t stopped.

Another function your false eye served was in blocking or inhibiting such dreams while you slept. You’d rest and achieve REM states of sleeping, but your implant filtered out your dreams and didn’t let you experience them. Dealing with that old trouble was a challenge. There were only so many nights you could stay awake and then drown yourself in cheap booze to stave off the dam dreams.

But in Papyrus’ arms.

Safe

And like all the times before, you woke up rested and in one piece. When you looked up Papyrus was already awake, watching you with a soft smile on his face as one hand lazily dragged through the ends of your hair from the back of your skull. It had grown longer and this hadn’t been the first time you caught him with his fingers tangled in your hair.

‘There’s more of it!’

‘Yeah that’s how human hair works. It just keeps growing on its own, like it or not.’

‘You don’t have to do anything for it?’ Papyrus asked in hushed delight.

‘No, but I’ll cut it again when it gets too long,’ you say. Papyrus doesn’t respond but you notice how his shoulders droop and his demeanor dims. It’s not hard to guess why. ‘But I might grow it out again, so that won’t be for a long while.’

‘Can I touch it?’ he asked. The brightness was back in his smile and you couldn’t find it in you to deny him anything.

‘Sure. Anytime.’

“Morning,” he greeted simply when he saw he had your attention.

“You know you can get up and go jogging if you want to. You don’t have to stay with me until I wake up,” you sigh, turning just enough to bury your face in the mattress out of sight.

“This is better than a workout. I wouldn’t want to miss this.”

He flushed only a little bit and you wondered if that was because of how often you had done this or because he wasn’t embarrassed by his own words.

You felt your own face head up and buried it deeper into the mattress so he wouldn’t be able to see the color. You almost missed the bandages for no other reason than the protection they provided.

“I need to get up.”

With your weak excuse Papyrus lets you go but you can feel him watch you all the way into the bathroom. When you’re done he is sitting on San’s bed talking to his brother’s back. Sans groaned when he heard the door shut but didn’t get up.

“I’m going to head out now. Blue should be set up by now,” you called out.

“I’ve already texted him and he is in position. We’ll take your things with us and meet up with you
later,” Papyrus answered. He stood and reached for you, pulling you into a goodbye hug that was both familiar and warm. When he let you go he turned to his brother and reached for the nearest pillow to toss at Sans. “Say a paper goodbye, Sans.”

“Not’a goodbye,” Sans slurred.

“Inexcusable,” Papyrus snapped.

Sans rolled over on the bed and raised one of his hands up. “See ya later.” And then he made one of his eye lights wink out.

Papyrus gasped but you just laughed. It was an awful pun but they didn’t annoy you as much anymore. They reminded you too much of Raven as a kid, before he got too cool for them.

“Not goodbye then, just, until later.”

Behind you there is a knock on the door and when you check you see Blue and Stretch. When you open the door, he's happy to bounce in and check the room before turning to you and asking if you’re ready to leave.

Sans gives you another little wave and you nod back before taking Blue’s hand who’s holding Stretch’s hand. The next minute you’re a shortcut away, feeling dizzy and seeing stars as you pitch sideways. Blue catches you and Stretch groans, hands on his knees.

“Stretch?” Blue calls out, sounding worried.

“Fine,” Stretch coughed. “Just surprised how heavy of a ride that was.” Then Stretch calls your name.

“Fine too,” you cough and hold up a thumbs up and shut your eye. You’ve taken shortcuts before, but after losing your eye it was harder for you to come out of it still feeling balanced.

But in another minute you’re telling the truth and the wave of dizziness is gone and you can follow the boys into the trees where they hid the bike last night. Blue is as eager as a beaver to don his helmet and leather riding jacket with the safety padding. You chuckle when he pulls out a jacket just for you that also matches your helmet. There are kitty patches on the shoulders and elbows while the helmet has air draft vents on the top that looked like cat ears.

“Didn’t you say you had a bike of your own before? You can ride and borrow mine from now on. You just need the right equipment.” He dissolves into chuckles when you accept the jacket and slip it effortlessly over your turtleneck.

“Fits like a glove,” you say, turning around to strike a pose for Blue and Stretch. Blue’s eyes spin into stars and he nearly vibrates with excitement. Its enough to make Stretch laugh and push his brother towards you.

“Enough fooling around you goofs. Saddle up already,” Stretch chastises. He watches as Blue hops on first and you slide on after him. With a smirk he leaned forward to add, “Both of you look bone to be wild. Be good.”

“No promises,” you called over Blue’s shoulder. “You know I have a tendon-cy to not do what I’m told.”

Blue revs the engine loud enough to drown out anything Stretch might say in response but his smug smirk never left as he watched the pair of you tear out together, taking a backroad north with no
hesitation.

You held on tight to Blue’s back as he navigated a path for both of you up the road. Before long when you looked backwards you couldn’t see anything of the hotel or the bus parked outside. You weren’t sure why your heart hurt or your chest felt tight because you were all going to meet up later.

As if he could sense your unease Blue reached down to pat at one of your arms around his waist. It was enough to comfort you and you turned your head around and leaned with him into the ride.

Five ...ten...twenty…thirty five miles north and then forty five miles later and the landscape changed. Your were higher up, but so far from the city and all the suburbs the lands stretched out longer and longer without interruption. You could see a couple of farms set far back away from the roads, and even further back were the scattered woods interrupted by the occasional pond or stream.

You could smell it in the air, how the larkspur and golden rods were blooming in shades of vibrant gold and deeper purple. There were lazy trees looking as ancient as trees are allowed to look when they stand in a field all on their own.

You travel for another half hour before Blue is forced to decelerate and tackle the windy roads at safer speeds. The dots on your map don’t move much and haven’t traveled out since you first noticed them. You’re close and you tap Blue to let him know.

He stops on the side of the road at an old pull out where the gravel kicks up dust from the slightest disturbance.

“How close?” Blue asks, flipping his visor.

“Close enough. One is the woodlands over there and the other is further up the road. You pulled out the paper map from the saddlebag and unfold it enough for Blue to see. It’s not perfect, but you use it to mark where the stationary ‘Papyrus’ is while the one marked ‘Sans’ wanders the woodlands.

“I’m not biased, but this Sans is closer. Let’s start there,” Blueberry says.

The two of you lead the bike off the road into the woods and hide it behind a tree before turning around and heading deeper into the woods. It’s quiet between you but occasionally Blue will brush his knuckles up against yours and you’ll brush back. You don’t miss his quiet smiles even if he thinks he hides them well.

You pause and he freezes like you, waiting for a signal. You used your hands to communicate. You had the hand signs so that you wouldn’t need to whisper and be overheard. Your last hand gesture had been a four meaning ‘estimated forty meters out.’ Sans looked at your face with a question in his eyes.

After double checking you exhaled and stood back. “He blinked out. He’s not there anymore. I’m looking for where he went, hold on. Can you just…watch me?”

Blue holds onto you hand and turns, scanning your surroundings while you get lost looking through the map. You spot him and then he’s gone, somewhere else, and then he pops up somewhere new, far away before blip-and he’s gone again.

“He’s bouncing, I can’t pin him down.” You pull out of the map and squeeze Blue’s hand to get his attention. “I don’t know when that’ll stop. You think we should go after the stationary one?”
“If he's anything like us, then only one of them can use shortcuts. We won’t have that problem with the Papyrus,” Blue admits. He shakes your hand and you look down to see he’s still holding it. “But we’re in no rush, right?”

You wanted to get to them before Raven, but you didn’t have a reason to suspect your brother was actively targeting the brothers or even interested in them anymore, if he was ever aware of them at all. You weren’t in a rush but…

“What did you have in mind?”

Blue shrugged but then he swung your hand back and forth idly. “We could just take our time getting there. We don’t have to hurry off.” His phalanges brushed over your fingers absently. “It’s been a long time since we were just off on our own. You’re always surrounded by others.”

It was true and the way he looked up at you made your heart beat a little louder in your chest. You brushed one of your thumbs back over his and he jerked a bit at the touch.

“Sure,” you agree, feeling too good to deny him something simple. “We can…take our time this way.” You turn towards the Papyrus dot and tugged him along. Blue is only too happy to comply, walking hand in hand with him.

“How are you feeling?” he asked after a while of blissful silence, scented with goldenrod and filled with warm sunlight through the treetops. “With your eye,” he clarified.

“Not perfect, but better than before. Leaving the bandages was the right call. My brain is still sort of a mess but there’s no fixing that. You guys really took care of me, and I appreciate it. Without you I wouldn’t have done so well.”

“We didn’t do a lot. We couldn’t even fix your body. Our magic was pretty useless.”

“That’s not the most important thing. My body will heal itself in time. It was more like the bandaid over a real old wound was ripped off and I had to deal with something all over again. What’s the worst part about recovery is how long it is and what it does to your psyche.”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Whenever I heal long term I feel terrible and it’s not a physical pain. I’m just so scared and miserable and on edge, waiting for something to take advantage of me. You took that away from me. You took care of me. I felt safe and knew you were going to be there for me when I woke up in the morning.”

“Of course,” Blue gasped, tugging you hard enough to pull you back. “I’ll always be there for you, and I trust you too. It goes both ways. I-”

Blue trips on his words as his soul thumps loudly and yours is nearly tugged out. Blue gasps and tries to pull away from you, in order to save you from an accidental encounter but you don’t let his hand go. His eyes are wide but yours aren’t. He realizes what this means a moment later and lets his soul go, setting it free to seek out yours.

You go first and use your magic to rush over him, feeling the sensation of being in a meadow all over again. Blue is soft and kind and gentle, his soul is pure and rich rolling green feeling. Kind.

And then it’s his turn and you feel your soul exposed to his. For a moment you think you can almost see it too, a heart set on fire and burning with red determination that wants to keep everyone warm and safe. The way his magic is there, washing over it, makes you believe in it a little more.
Blue makes a sound and you’re almost too dizzy to hear it, but it’s one of wonder and breathless surprise as he sees you without any of your defenses. You’re as exposed to him as you can be and so is he but you’ve never felt more safe.

“It’s beautiful,” he whispered as the world fades back in.

Then he staggers into you and holds you tight, hitching his breath with the emotion he can’t put into words. A single trail of tears runs down your cheek and you turn towards him, comforted by his touch too much for words. You’re a bit breathless yourself.

But a new voice behind you cuts the moment short. You turn together and see something small in between the trees, crouched behind a bush that’s too see through to provide the cover she sought. It was…a child.

When she saw that she had been discovered she bolted up and screamed. Before you could stop her or explain she was running through the woods and you weren’t sure why. You saw the dirt on her elbows and a pair of braids barely in their knots, coming undone more on one side than the other and polka dots on a shift dress.

“What?” Blue choked, still a bit dazed. “Who was that?”

“Just a kid,” you answer, taking a few steps in that direction. “No one I’d met before.”

Your mouth fills up with the taste of sour.

Before Blue can say anything more you both go taunt at the thrum of new magic before bones are flying towards both of you, nearly too much to dodge. The attack is ruthless, giving you no chance to catch your breath before run out of room to maneuver.

You’re pushed back too far and step onto something that clicks. Something drags at your ankle and you’re stuck in a net with Blue calling your name, distracted enough to end up pinned to a tree. You don’t tell him not to worry-you can burn through a net- you’re too distracted by the new figure striding forward with cold fury in his eyes.

“TRESPASSES ON MY PROPERTY! YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER THAN TO TANGLE WITH THE MALEVOLENT SANS, CAPTAIN OF THE ROYAL GUARD, AND ALL HIS GREAT AND HORRIBLE DEFENSES! MWAHAHAHAHAHAHA!”

Chapter End Notes

We meet a new boi, a new addition to the family and I couldn't be any more excited for what comes next. (How many of you saw the SF brothers coming?)

It's a new year and that means a new arc in the story, so farewell Stay Frosty Royal Milk Tea and hello~ whatever comes next.

Also, Blue's moment at the end was way too much fun to get to. If you're wondering something along the lines of 'is that a metaphor for...' the answer is yes. Encounters are always a metaphor. Monsters can't get more vulnerable.
Chapter Summary

You meet the new Sans and Papyrus... and their extended family.

Chapter Notes

I got a feeling inside that I can't domesticate
   It doesn't wanna live in a cage
   A feeling that I can't housebreak
   And I'm yours
'Til the earth starts to crumble and the heavens roll away
I'm struggling to exist with you and without you, yeah Bishop Knife Trick
FOB

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sans, who wasn’t your Sans, but a different Sans, stood stiffly in place, bone sword raised with his heels together in perfect form. He was half a head taller than blue, from what you could tell, with the same slender frame. He was dressed in dark black pants, red boots, and a military style jacket with brass buttons winking in the sunlight to complement the trailing crimson scarf. It was a nice look, professional and clean cut with plenty of style.

Being trapped in a rope net hadn’t stopped you from admiring the newest skeleton who knew how to dress himself. Even if he ended up attacking you and starting another fight, he still looked plenty cool.

His eye lights were narrowed and flickered with purple tinted magic that went back from pearl colored to dark purple, then scarlet red. Maybe it was the light or maybe it was his magic, but you were having trouble seeing the true color of his eye lights. All you could tell was that he seemed pissed off.

Blue struggled loudly, tugging out the bones keeping him pinned in place. Once free he summoned a wall of his own bone attacks to prevent the newest barrage headed his way. You heard the smack of shattering bone as the two forces met and canceled one another out.

“I CAN SEE YOU’VE COME LOOKING FOR A FIGHT THEN, FELLOW MONSTER? GIVE UP NOW AND YOUR DEATH WILL BE SWIFT!”

You felt some of your admiration for the sharp dressed skeleton flutter from the threat. With a huff you heated your hands, burning your fingernails black again. You started to burn away at the ropes under you, careful about which ones you burned through and which ones you left intact.

“We-WE DIDN’T COME LOOKING FOR A FIGHT!” Blue shouted back, infusing his voice with magic to help deter further fighting.
“YOU ARE LUCKY THEN TO HAVE FOUND ONE WITHOUT THE EFFORT.”

He laughed again and it sounded like the laugh of an old super villain from a childish cartoon. You couldn’t take it seriously, but then the bone attacks came out again you nearly suffered a heart attack watching Blue move to avoid the bones with all the skills of a captain of the royal guard. He was skilled but this new guy was ruthless. Suddenly, there was a garden of fear blooming in your heart as you thought about Blue getting hurt while you were still trapped in a net, unable to help.

You burned through most of the bottom strands and slipped free, landing in a crouch. Your legs still stung a bit and you knew that was a longer fall than first anticipated, but the sting wouldn’t slow you down.

You crunched enough foliage and debris under you to draw the Sans’ attention and he nearly let loose another barrage of bones in your direction but faltered at the last second, seeing your face. The bones went wide, hitting the trees behind you and biting the dirt as they skid to a stop.

“A HUMAN!”

For whatever reason he seemed hesitant to attack you so you used it to your advantage and ran to stand in front of Blue and spread your arms wide. This seemed to confuse the new Sans even more. You held your palms up in a show of surrender and stood your ground.

“We didn’t come here looking for a fight, Sans. That part wasn’t a hoax. We didn’t know you had traps in this area either,” you say in your most soothing voice, grateful for how it didn’t rattle.

“And attacking without an encounter is underhanded! There would be no point to it if you couldn’t pull out my soul,” Blue argued, stopping his foot from behind you and fisting his hands over his hips.

Military Sans sniffed at the comment and turned up his chin. “Cracking open an egg would yield more effort on my part, but it’s all the same soul no matter how you get to the yoke of it.”

“THA-THAT’S BARBARIC!” Blue gasped.

“And unnecessary,” you hastily added. “Because no one wants to fight out here in the woods on such a nice day.”

The other Sans glanced around and twirled the bone sword over his hand before grabbing at the hilt and preparing it. “Then call back your hidden friend and have him appear before me with his hands raised or I won’t hold back. I am no fool. I sensed two different magics that were not my own. Where is your third companion?”

“That other signature was me. I’m the other one with the magic,” you say.

“A human?” He asked with a sneer. “I may be new to the surface customs and social niceties but I am no fool.”

“Never said you were, but I’m sort of an oddball. You okay letting me prove it here?” you asked, keeping your hands up.

The Sans readied his sword once more and lowered his stance. His magic rolled off him in waves of warning while his eyes flashed with red and purple lights. “I will not be caught unaware. I am ready for your to expose your companion.”
You shut your eyes, ignoring the way Blue makes a sound of protest just past your shoulder. Instead you focus on your own magic and pull it up, raw and unfiltered, before setting it free to wash over the world around you, primarily the Sans in front of you.

When your magic touched him he jerked, nearly falling out of his stance but it was when your hands turned black like coal and sent up twin flames from each of your upturned palms that he stood at attention. You opened your eyes and let flames trail out of the empty socket while the simple presence of your magic rolled over Military Sans.

Unlike his clean cut appearance, there was a battered and near broken texture to his soul that echoed in his magic. His soul didn’t have a color you could see so easily, but you felt the echo of it in your own way.

You recognize the color that matched what you felt, even though it was different from when you experienced the same trait with Papyrus; Integrity. For Military Sans, his soul might have been the same color but it wasn’t the same exact feeling. He was a new person, a unique individual, and his soul echoed that.

His soul was intense, not like how Papyrus’ soul was. There was a mania almost to how protective and strong the sensation was that washed back over you. It was protective and caring, but also heavy and intimate. It made you think this person was the type to let few get close enough to ever benefit from his most honest gestures of integrity.

Your belly felt warm like after a hot meal and you were almost seduced into a new feeling of safety before the magic washed out and you remember where you were.

You pulled away and the fires went out, leaving your palms black and cracked as the charcoal like texture flaked off on its own. You sighed, hopeful for the end of your fight, but Military Sans recovered before you and didn’t go as peacefully as you would have hoped.

As soon as you were back and mentally aware he was in front of you, using his magic to pull out your soul in a forced encounter.

Blue screamed and tried to interfere but a barrage of bones kept him pinned behind you.

“What is this for?” you ask, using your turn to talk.

Power shifted back around to Military Sans and he was predictable enough to check you, the same way others had checked you before for…friendlier encounters.

Only a few minutes ago you had been in an encounter with Blue that had been built up for weeks and weeks. Within ten minutes of knowing you this guy had dragged you into something just as intimate.

He finished with his turn, finding something that must have satisfied him. You weren’t sure what that was but you were starting to feel too tired to care. The turn came back to you and you tried to flee, to pull out of the encounter and pull your soul back into your chest, but it seemed he wasn’t ready to spare you.

There wasn’t enough mercy to save you.

“You’ve had a look at me, you should have seen I’m not a threat and that I don’t mean you any harm at the very least. What are you still doing?” You snapped at him.

But the answer didn’t come from Military Sans, even though his mouth looked open and poised for
Instead it was the girl in pigtails and polka dots that came barreling back into the clearing, crying with her arms out in front of her. You watched as Military Sans’ eyes went wide and the encounter fell apart in time for him to catch her in his arms, just after she flung herself at him.

“Don’t fight with them Mr. Blackberry!” the child wailed, squeezing him around his neck and burying her face there.

All the tension seemed to drain out of the air as Blue dashed to your side and reached for you, tugging your waist against his. He didn’t take his eyes off the other Sans, but you had been his first concern.

“SS-SHH, I TOLD YOU MY NAME WAS SANS AND IF YOU WEREN’T GOING TO USE IT THEN TO STICK TO BLACK. I’M NOT A DARN FRUIT YOU PEBBLE TOED HALF PINT. NOW GET OFF ME. I CAN’T BREATH WITH YOU AROUND MY NECK.”

The girl gasped and pulled her arms away, stretching them up over her head as if burned. “S-S-Sorry Mr. Black, King, Sir. I d-didn’t want you fighting no more,” she sniffed. ”It’s bad for you.”

Like a man caught with a dirty secret Sans glanced between the girl in his arms and you, before his eye lights finally settled back on they girl he tried to disentangle from. “YES BUT WHAT IS WORSE FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME TO SUFFER THROUGH IS INSUBORDINATION. YOU HAD CLEAR ORDERS TO RUN FOR SAFETY AFTER SEEING MAGIC OR MONSTERS BUT DID YOU DO THAT?”

“Yes!”

“NO YOU DID NOT!” He hollered with almost a foot stomp.

“You’re the safest thing I could run to,” the girl admitted unabashedly.

There wasn’t a hint of a blush on her face or stutter in her voice. But the same couldn’t be said for Mr. Blackberry King. The kid was adorable and had just said the cutest thing and in response Sans’ face had colored an indigo purple hue.

You almost laughed.

Sans peeled the girl off his person and stiffly placed her down on the ground in front of him before straightening and folding his arms behind his back in military fashion.

“TH-THAT IS NOT WHAT I MEANT AND YOU KNOW BETTER. HOME! HOME, GO NOW. DO NOT MAKE ME COUNT.”

“B-but…”

“FIVE…. FOUR…. THREE…."

The girl squeaked and flailed a bit before turning on her heel and speeding off into the woods, darting between the trees so that her braids bounced against her back.

“TWO !!” The Sans called Black shouted loudly. After a longer period he finally shouted ‘ONE’ into the air but there was no one close enough to hear him so he didn’t move to make good on his threat.
“Oh my stars.”

He flinched at the sound of your voice, as if having forgotten about you. The blush was still there on his skull but his eyes were narrowed and fierce.

“You’re a ...dad?!”

“THERE IS NO SUCH THING, HUMAN! HOW DARE YOU MAKE SUCH INCENDIARY COMMENTS ABOUT SOMEONE YOU DON’T KNOW. YOUR SMEAR CAMPAIGN WILL EARN YOU NO FOOTHOLDS IN THIS SITUATION.”

“I mean, I think I know you a little bit considering we were just having a heart to heart moment there before you daughter interrupted us.”

“SHE IS NOT MY DAUGHTER YOU VILE SLANDERER!”

“Sure, she can identify as anything she wants to, but I feel confident enough to say she seems to like you enough. That must mean you’re not so terrible a guy.”

Blue squeezed at you elbow, pulling you back to whisper urgently in your ear. “His LoVe was super high though! Didn’t you see it?”

“Oh, sorry, I must have missed that. Still, that’s just what Mr. Blackberry,” Hearing his name the skeleton in question sputtered angrily, “is capable of? There are plenty of dangerous people who don’t have any inclination towards violence unless it’s absolutely necessary. Not to say I think he’s one of them, but he’s worth talking to.”

“I HAVE A GREAT CAPACITY FOR VIOLENCE AND I AM NOT SOMEONE WHO WOULD SHY AWAY FROM ADMITTING THAT LIKE SOME COWARD! NOW, ANSWER ME HONESTLY OR SUFFER MY UNFILTERED WRATH ONCE MORE, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?”

“Came to see you Mr. Blackberry!” you called out, smiling wide and waving.

The blush came back but so did the dedicated glare. Blue squeezed your elbow but you weren’t worried. You had felt his soul and he had seen yours. He could be reasoned with if you played it cool.

“YOU ARE A CHARLATAN OR AN ASSASSIN. NO ONE COMES TO SEE ME HERE. NO ONE KNOWS I AM EVEN HERE. I WILL NOT GIVE YOU ANY MORE CHANCES. THE TRUTH, VIXEN!”

Blue sputtered at the name but it just made you smile. “I knew. I also know that there is a person named Papyrus in a property half a mile that way,” you say pointing, “and that the two of you aren’t even from this world’s underground. I’m not sure how long you’ve been topside, but I know you didn’t come from the same place most of my monster neighbors came from. I also know why that is if you’re willing to listen.”

Blackberry held onto his glare but the blush was gone and some of the rigid lines of his form softened. He dismissed his bone sword and shifted stances to appear more open. “VERY WELL THEN. EXPLAIN YOURSELVES.”

“Here?” you asked, pointing to the trees around you. “You don’t want to go somewhere more comfortable and sit down and talk? Maybe over some sea tea?”
“WE WILL HAVE YOUR CONFESSIONS HERE AND NOW. DO NOT DEVIATE FROM THE TRUTH AND DO NOT DELAY. MY MALEVOLENCE WILL NOT BE MADE TO WAIT.”

“What a drama queen,” Blue sighed.

“There was a person, a human like me, who brought you and your brother here. You weren’t the only ones. This is Blue, short for Blueberry, but that’s just a nickname because his real name is Sans.”

“UNLIKELY! SANS IS NOT SO COMMON A NAME.”

“Yeah, in his world he was the only one too,” you chuckle. Beside you Blue steps out further and grabs for your hand to give you courage. “But that world isn’t this one. Here there are four different sets of brothers pulled over and they’re all either Sans or Papyrus before the nicknames. It’s been sort of my job to find you and make sure you’re not… ripping the souls out of children or making trouble.”

“WHAT GOOD WOULD THAT DO? THERE IS NO NEED FOR SUCH MEASURES WITH THE BARRIER ALREADY DESTROYED. YOUR JOB IS A POINTLESS ONE UNLESS THE OTHERS ARE IDIOTS.”

“Well there’s more to it than that. There’s a whole bunch of new laws to help monsters and humans integrate into society peacefully. We’ve been doing this for over five years now and there is still the occasional kink. One of those rules is no encounters with a human without explicit consent,” you explained.

Black’s sharp fangs shifted in what you thought was the skeleton’s equivalent of a sneer without lips. “WHAT SORT OF HOGWASH RULE WOULD THAT BE? DO YOU ASK A CHARGING BULL TO RESPECT THE CONSENT OF A PINECONE? ENCOUNTERS ARE HOW MONSTERS DEFEND THEIR OWN.”

“You can do that just fine without the encounter, trust me, I’ve seen it firsthand. But I’m just saying, most humans find it incredibly unsettling, especially the older ones, so there is a law there to protect the peace.”

“YOUR PEACE PERHAPS.”

“I don’t wanna do this whole posturing peacock dance with you, but I’ll just say it’s vital to all monster kind and the peace that exists between them and humans.” You tried to find a balance between placating and stern in your tone. “I don’t like fighting but that is sometimes unavoidable. Don’t force my hand.”

Black huffed loudly and tilted up his chin as if the thought of you putting up a fight was enough to turn his nose up at. “I AM NOT THE AGGRESSOR IN THIS SITUATION. YOU WERE THE ONES TRESPASSING. I WAS DEFENDING MY HOME.”

“YOU DON’T THINK THAT WAS A LITTLE EXCESSIVE FOR TRESPASSING?” Blue called out, using magic in his voice to make a point. He wouldn’t be seen as lesser to this alternative version of himself. “YOU COULD HAVE REALLY HURT SOMEONE LIKE THAT.”

“OF COURSE, YOU UTTER CHILD. HOW ELSE SHOULD ONE DETER CRIMINALS?”

“What if they weren’t criminals like us, just some lost people? You stop to think about that, huh?”
“I TOOK NO SUCH ACTION BLINDLY. I KNEW YOU WERE A THREAT AND A WORTHY ONE TOO. YOUR MAGICAL SIGNATURES WERE NOT CLEVERLY DISGUISED ENOUGH TO PASS AS SIMPLE ‘LOST PEOPLE’ TO SOMEONE AS CLEVER AS I.”

“Yeah and plus we scared his daughter, so of course he’d react,” you add in a calm monotone.

It’s enough to get Blue to snicker and Black to sputter in a new bout of rage as the blush returned to his face. He looked ready to verbally rip you a new one when the shuffling of bushes just past his shoulder made him freeze. He half turns so that you’re still in his line of sight, but it was enough to address the new pair picking their way over to you guys.

The skeleton is without a doubt, Black’s Papyrus. He is tall and thin enough, but he walks with a sleepy hunch that doesn’t subtract from his impressive height. His clothing is just as baggy and lazy as him, aside from the long fur collar duster with the hood pulled up over his skull. You noticed the gleam of color and see a gold tooth replacing one of his canines.

Then your eye is pulled down to the monkey looking boy with dark skin and darker curls that clung to Papyrus’ front chest with all the dexterity of a baby sloth. When he looked back over his shoulder his smile remained you of a cat’s.

Black holds back his sputtering rage well enough, but no one is convinced he’s not upset by the sight of his brother and another human turning up.

“here you were, it wasn’t too hard to find you,” the new Papyrus absently commented with an easy smile. His arms hung down at his sides, limp and unused while the boy continued to cling to his front.

“YOU INSUFFERABLE MUTT! WHAT IN STARS’ SAKE ARE YOU DOING OUT HERE WHEN YOU KNOW I AM DEALING WITH SOMETHING?”

“eh, phil here said it would be a good idea to get you for lunch, but that was before wendy came back crying.”

Papyrus pat the back of the boy clinging to his front the same way someone would pet a dog, seeming to indicate that the ‘Phil’ from his statement was the one clinging to him. You assumed Wendy was the girl with braids.

What were these two brothers doing with human children? Were they staying with another family the way Red and Edge had been? Were the kids neighbors or just locals that liked hanging out with the only two monsters in town?

This far north in such a rural county the monster population was a far cry from what it was in the more metropolitan areas. You wouldn’t be surprised if you found the town completely devoid of monsters apart from these two. Maybe that was one of the reasons they had decided to settle in this location. No wonder the Embassy didn’t notice them.

“I AM BUSY WITH URGENT MATTERS. RETURN TO THE HOUSE AT ONCE AND PREPARE MEALS IN MY ABSENCE.”

“awww, don’t you wanna invite your guests over? i made sandwiches and lemonade.”

“NO, I DO NOT WANT TO INVITE TWO STRANGERS OVER TO MY HOUSE FOR LUNCH, MUTT!”

The Papyrus called Mutt turned towards you both and waved. “hey there, i’m papyrus, the kids call
Blue jumped first, raising a hand and striking a pose. “I am The Magnificent Blue, and this is my human,” he said before sharing your name.

Russ nodded along with the same easy smile on his face. “cool, cool, cool, nice we aren’t strangers no more. now you can come and join us for lunch, right m’lord.”

It wasn’t really a question since he turned around and started heading back towards the house without waiting for a response. Black sputtered and looked near ready to pitch a hissy fit when Russ called back over his shoulder.

“wendy is still in her room so you’ll have to call her down and explain to her why you’re really not angry with her.”

Something in Black’s demeanor went slack and the anger leaked out of him. He recovered a second later and turned back to face the both of you, hands folded behind his back and heels together.

“YOU WILL BE JOINING MY BROTHER AND I FOR LUNCH IT APPEARS. UNDER MY ROOF I WILL REFRAIN FROM ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE SAVE FOR RETALIATIONARY VIOLENCE SHOULD IT BECOME NECESSARY. WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED YOU CAN LEAVE.”

“Never wanted to fight in the first place so that sounds good to me.” You looked back over at Blue and he nodded back. “Lead the way, King Blackberry.”

“THAT! IS NOT MY NAME!!”

You followed behind Black as he forged his way through a familiar stretch of the woods until you were out and under the sun again, standing at the edge of the treelike staring out at a healthy roll of green pasture next to Blueberry.

There’s a small water hole not too far off, where a handful of absent cows graze and drink their full, having wandered over a break in the fence that divided one property from the next. A handful of apple trees dot the field on the far side of the watering hole, low and wide enough to shade some other animals.

Your eye catches a scattering of gold and purple colors peppered through the grass and weeds. The golden rod is wild along with the sprawling larkspur flowers.

Set way back from the road there was a winding gravel driveway, and a partially dilapidated farmhouse with sagging sides, exposed framework, and a brand new cherry red door. It looked like something lost to the ages that someone had attempted to renovate or was in the process of renovating currently. Somewhere further back there was a barn that used to be red but was stuck peeling with a caved in silo and sliding doors that had slid all the way off their tracks.

It wasn’t a perfect picture, but you have to stop for a moment and just take it all in. The world is open and wide. The sky looks so close you could reach out and touch it if only your fingers could just trench a little further. The clouds were fuller and thicker with white over the grass fields.

“This place reminds me of you,” you blurt out to Blue before you can stop yourself.

“E-eh, me? How so?” He stops alongside you while Black stomps off, ignoring your presence or lack there of behind him as he makes a beeline for the house.
“It’s so ...peaceful here. I could fall asleep in the grass or sit under those trees eating wild fruit or make a daisy crown and not care one iota for how time passes. It’s...when my magic comes into contact with you, this is what I feel.”

You don’t know how weird it sounds, but it was the truth and you don’t regret admitting it.

You feel him take your hand again but don’t acknowledge it as you study the landscape a little longer. You hear the buzz of a bumble bees’ wings as they flit past to get to the nectar of the wild flowers, and see the flash of color as light bounces off a dragonfly’s body.

It was dreamlike and you couldn’t be sure you weren’t asleep. This was the sort of thing you found on oil paintings and novelty puzzles from the craft store. An idyllic little farm where one could just hide away?

“DON’T JUST STAND THERE LOOKING LIKE A PAIR OF PLASTIC LAWN ORNAMENTS. WE WILL NOT BE DELAYING AN ALREADY LATE LUNCH ANY LATER FOR YOUR SAKE!” Black bellowed from further down the field, nearly at the house.

Blue hummed beside you but he doesn’t face you so you can’t see what sort of odd shape his eyes have made this time. “Come on. Let’s not keep his majesty waiting.”

“Yeah,” you numbly nod.

CENTER

Chapter End Notes

Guys, I seriously enjoyed writing the SF bois from this point on. It’s so hard to have so many favorites. I only have two hands!

Just like Red and Edge, the SF bois clicked with some humans along the way and thus-we get nicknames out of it. These brothers were super intimidating to start writing though but I really enjoyed them the more I wrote.

Children names are: Wendy (the girl who adores Black) and Phil (taken from The Promised Neverland because I'm so unoriginal when it comes to names).
Black’s Papyrus stood in the doorway with the same loopy smile, holding it open with the back of his foot. Black’s outburst didn’t seem to rattle him any and you suspected he was used to this sort of behavior from his brother.

“Watch your step around here and don’t step in any gopher holes,” Blue suggested, tugging at your hand again. You almost stumble but trailed behind him, careful of your footing in the tall grasses.

Shadows from the clouds dotted the field of space that separated you and Blue from the house, but they passed lazily with the gentle wind, making the grasses rustle and hiss.

You skip down the path and arrive at the door in time to see Black disappear inside, sparring you both one last glare in warning until he turned out of sight.

‘Rus’ waited at the door for both of you with Phil still stuck to his front.

“Welcome to our castle,” he chuckled with a voice that echoed his good nature. “It may be crumbling but it’s home. wipe your feet please and come on in, we probably have a lot to talk about.”

You wiped your boots off on the watermelon shaped welcome mat and followed Blue inside. There was a small entryway where shoes were scattered in a corner and a short flight of stairs that led up to the right. You followed them up to the main hallway that fed into the kitchen.

There were signs of distress all throughout the house you could see, but there was also a lot of evidence of restoration. The appliances were all sparkly and new stainless steel with a regular fridge and a monster issued hot fridge. The table in the middle of the room was big with a mismatch of different placemats, but in the center of the table was a platter of finger sandwiches and a tray with cups stacked next to a pitcher of lemonade.

Rus sighed loudly and then tickled Phil under his arms until the boy let go on a laugh, hanging only by his legs. Rus plucked Phil off the rest of the way and set him into a seat with arms that trapped him at the table. Phil, who looked no older than four, if that, smiled mischievously over the edge of his plate and his expression reminded you once more of a cat.

“Lunch, this time for real!” Rus called out before pulling out a chair for himself at the head of the table. There was a bench seat he gestured to you and Blue to help yourselves to.

Before you were seated the rest of the way a pair of children, older than Phil and Wendy, tumbled into the room. One was a boy and the other, you thought was probably a boy too but you weren’t sure. The pair of them stopped dead at the sight of you but didn’t seem too phased by Blue, another skeleton monster, sitting at their table.

The older one had dark straight hair cut unevenly and darker eyes. The one next to him was shorter and had dirty red hair that stuck out at odd angles and a smear of dirt across one side of their nose.

Rus pointed to the older one and then the younger one. “We got Tron and next to ‘em Peter and then on the other side of the table is blueberry or blue, whatever he wants, and Y/N. Now sit down before the lunch goes bad.”
“Family?” Tron asks, pointing to Blue and then Rus.

“sure, let’s go with that,” Rus answers with a shrug.

You notice the younger one is wearing an old and faded, likely secondhand, Thundercats shirt and as they climb up into their seat you comment on it. “I like your shirt. You ever see the cartoons?”

The child hesitated before grinning wide and nodding before spilling into a flurry of commentary about the original cartoon leading up to the reboot from over a dozen years ago that still aired on some of the old kid channels.

It was…familiar, and you realized after another moment of rushed explanations why. Not just Raven, but all the kids that came after you, sounded like this at one point. It was something you had been pretty explicit about seeking out while you still were growing up. If the kids didn’t have something they loved and could gush about it was harder to deal with other things.

That passion had been something an older girl taught you to look for and something you passed on to those after you, looking out for those who followed in your broken footsteps.

Your eyes snuck a look at the elder boy, Tron, who was watching you and Blue enough, but focused the bulk of his attention on Rus, mimicking the taller skeleton in little ways. That was a good clue.

“Alright, enough chatter from you,” Rus interrupted. “now you eat or else no friendship burritos from the lord tonight with dinner.”

You shared a small smile with Blue and mouthed ‘friendship tacos?’

Peter, the redhead, pouted but grabbed for his sandwich and shoved all of it into his mouth, filling up his cheeks like a squirrel. Blue almost sputtered out in laughter alongside you at the sight while Rus just raised his brow bones. Beside him, Tron rolled his eyes and poured another glass of lemonade.

“You have a nice house here. It’s got so much character,” you say, direction your attention to Rus at the head of the table. “Are you and your brother fixing it up?”

“something like that, it was easier to get something broken and fix it ourselves. our gold isn’t going to last forever.”

From their seats the two kids smirked or snickered and Rus chuckled too, like it was some inside joke they were all in on. If this set of brothers was anything like Blue and Stretch they were more than just loaded.

Apparently the captain of the guards position paid real well.

With their sandwiches finished, Rus told the kids they could leave their dishes behind and go play as long as they took Phil with them. Tron and Peter shared a look between them and hurried off, carrying Phil in spite of his wiggling to get back to ‘puppy.’

You feel Rus shift in his seat and the aura in the whole room shifts with him. Blue noticed it too.

“i think this is the first time we’ve had unanticipated guests over and something tells me you anticipated us plenty.”

“Yeah,” Blue answered. “That’s the whole reason we were out here, looking for the two of you.
How much did you overhear from when we talked to your brother?"

At Rus’ blank look you and Blue recounted the same simple story. Rus took it a whole lot better, nodding along and then seemingly accepting everything at face value. When you and Blue were done his only response was a absent sounding ‘huh’ and nothing more.

“Is…don’t you have any other questions?” Blue asked. “When me and Pappy came over we-ah, no that was just me, I had so many questions and it took days to answer everything.”

Rus scratched at the back of his skull. “yeah, well, we’ve been here for two months, maybe more and we’ve been reading and listening ta’ enough media to get a good idea of how things go. plus, the kids keep us informed.”

“Then if you know so much, did your brother attack us because he wanted to break the rules or was he careless in remembering them? Going after me is one thing but he attacked Y/N too,” Blue asked, not exactly sounding hostile, but still coming off as miffed.

Rus didn’t appear to take offense or be bothered by Blue’s new tone. He was still the same chill guy from minutes earlier. “sans is…acclimating to this world at his own pace. some things are a little harder for him to let go of, like much of his military training. sorry for that, he probably just sensed your encounter and went with his gut.”

Blue flushed darkly at the mention of his earlier encounter and you leaned across the table, hoping to ease some of his misplaced embarrassment by saying something. “It sounds like your world was a pretty cutthroat sort of place. Two of the others, we call them Red and Edge, came from a place like that too. Funny enough, they also found some humans to stay with who helped them adapt.”

Rus laughed at your comment but it was two parts nervous energy and one part honest humor. “ooh-yeah, uh, um this place is a cakewalk in comparison,” he swallowed and glanced away for a minute before returning his gaze back to you. “i won’t deny it, but that just makes it all the harder to believe in. it doesn’t feel like anything bad could happen here, but we know that’s impossible.”

You think back to first seeing the meadow once you and Blue stepped out from the woods. You understood what Rus was saying too well. It was like they were living in a protected little paradise set aside from the rest of the world.

“Yeah, I was thinking I could help answer some of those questions,” you said. “I can promise you that neither the kids nor any news station broadcast would be able to get you my information.”

His eye lights blinked on and off and then dilated. You suspected that meant he was taking another good look at you, based on what you had picked up from the body language of your other skeleton friends.

“hnnn, y-y eah, i was thinking there had to be some humans with magic around here somewhere, even if the kids said there was no such thing. i mean, someone had to set up that barrier in the first place, right?” his eye lights wavered a bit in their sockets as he seemed to burrow further into his hood. You noticed him playing with the edges of his duster under the table. “ts my first time seeing a mage in person though, thought you were all like, old and wrinkly.”

“Ha, maybe one day, but fingers crossed, that’s a long way off,” you laughed playfully. “But I guess the title of mage is sort of outdated. We’re just a bunch of brat kids with magic who aren’t kids anymore. There’s not a lot of demand for our skills though in peacetimes, just a few peacekeeping missions.”
“…even if, uh, even if you’re not attached to any higher power?” There was a weight to Rus’ stare this time around, and you could tell that he was still nervous around you both, but that didn’t keep him from his due vigilance. He wasn’t his brother, but he also wasn’t one to trust blindly.

Good.

If they were taking care of kids he would need that.

“The only higher power I need to answer to is my own convictions. I’d say you’re better for the long run keeping off the radar. Not that I think you’re in any immediate danger, but it doesn’t hurt to be safe.”

“Speaking of keeping safe,” Blue interjected, sliding closer to you on the bench to cut into Rus’ line of sight. “You’re housing small children but is that safe? What about their parents and families?”

Rus dropped his hands and his nervous twiddling. “eh, none of those around for any of them. they were here squatting on the property when we purchased it and refused to leave. it wasn’t that much more trouble to keep them.”

“There should be some sort of service in place for humans without families. Didn’t you say you there were orphanages like the one you came from, that could help out?” Blue asked, turning to face you.

You wrinkled your nose at the thought and leaned back enough to cross your arms over your chest in an effort to sort through your feelings. With your experiences being in the system and landing at an orphanage (once you were no longer infant sized and cute enough for potential parents), it would be the last place you’d wish on another kid older than four.

Of the kids you had seen so far, Phil, Tron, Peter, and Wendy, they all seemed well adjusted and close with their skeletal caretakers. If they had been squatting on their own before being discovered it was likely they were runaways and prone to running away again if the environment wasn’t right for them. Yeah, the responsible thing to do would be to contact the authorities but… that move didn’t feel good to you at all.

“There are child protective services that you can always get in contact with, but… I really wouldn’t recommend the place I came from considering where I finally ended up,” you said. "Plus, they seem safe here. But I’ll admit I’m the wrong person to ask for advice on this sort of thing seeing as how I’m biased against the whole system itself.”

“They’re very safe here,” Rus interjected, eye sockets wide with the first real fear since meeting you both. “an-nd even if it wasn’t something we cared about too much a-at first, now we couldn’t imagine this place without them here. They-uh, oh um-we, we make sure they have all three meals a day of human food and gave them each a bed with blankets and books and movies they didn’t have before.”

You spotted a bead of colored sweat collecting at the base of his skull and knew what it was there for.

“I’m not gonna do anything to risk their well being and I believe they’re best off with people who care about them, not just people who can buy them stuff.” Rus started to fidget more openly as his nerves mounted and you raised your palms to soothe some of his fears. “But I see that they’re getting that here. The boys seem to really adore you and if a little girl is willing to throw herself in the middle of an encounter to save her ‘Mr. Blackberry King,’ I think your brother checks out too.”
“you-yu-your not gonna call someone?”

You shook your head. “No, I’m not going to do that. You should feel flattered though. Runaways don’t trust lightly or easily.”

Rus deflated in relief, hanging his head low enough that it hit the edge of the table with a dull ‘thunk’ sound.

Unconsciously your magic leaked out like some agitated animal that had finally caught sight of something it wanted to play with and you only barely managed to trap it back before it could come into contact with Rus. Blue reached for you, grabbing the edge of your long sleeve and giving it a small tug to let you know he was there.

“Rus,” you call his name and he picks his head up only enough to see you with one eye light. “You don’t have to worry about me or your kids. Do you believe me?”

“i... guess so?” But there was still something nervous in the way he watched you.

You were distracted from saying more when you heard the heavy stomping of someone new entering the kitchen. Military Sans, or as you were calling him in your head, Black, swept into the room and ignored everyone at the table in favor of pulling human ingredients out of the fridge and assembling them on the counter to prepare.

“wendy still mad at her king, m’lord?” Rus chuckled with a fond look in his eye lights.

“SILENCE, MUTT. I DON’T REQUIRE YOU NEEDLESS COMMENTARY TO MATTERS THAT DON’T CONCERN YOU. CANOODLE WITH THE TRESPASSERS AND LEAVE MY AFFAIRS TO ME.”

“sure thing your majesty.”

For a while the three of you watched in silence as Black diced vegetables and cooked a small section of ground meat in a pan on the stove. You recognized the ingredients once you saw the soft tortilla shell. He finished with the meat and fed it into the fold of the soft shell, adding his vegetables and a dollop of sour cream to make it picture perfect before wrapping it up.

Black huffed in satisfactory seeing his creation on a plate decorated along the edges with cute cartoonish bears and rabbits. He took the plate, paused to spare you and Blue a withering glare in spite of the colorful blush high on his cheeks.

You smiled back and spared him a playful wink, suspecting it would only annoy him further. As expected he blustered and hurried out of the room with his peace offering.

“She’s got him wrapped around her finger,” you laughed. Blue and Rus added their chuckles to yours and the three of you shared your 'beef' moment of enjoyment together.

You offered to help Rus clean up, even though he flustered bright lilac at the thought of letting you help, but you ignored his pleas to ‘please sit’ while he washed the used plates off in the sink and passed them over to Blue to dry.

Eventually Rus gave up on dissuading you and packed up the rest of the unused sandwiches before saving them in the fridge. When you were done he had an apple pie out, and though you both insisted you couldn’t stomach another bite, Rus fussled with plating you each a slice you couldn’t refuse.
“i- in exchange you could, um, talk a bit more about yourself? we don’t get many guests and fewer who can make conversation so openly,” Rus explained.

Blue and you fielded a few of his questions together, though most of them were about you and the Embassy you left behind as well as work you occupy yourself with. In turn you heard about Rus’ interest in computer programing and his efforts to set up some sort of home office where he could write programs and sell them to potential buyers instead of the simple website designing he had started out with.

He invited you out to the garden on the side of the house and brought more of the lemonade with him for you both to drink and enjoy while the conversation flowed.

When Black showed up outside with a scowl cut deep into his expression you realized how late it had grown.

“I’VE ALREADY SET THE TABLE FOR EXTRAS SEEING AS HOW YOU WERE OTHERWISE TOO OCCUPIED TO COOK OR SET THE TABLE. IF YOU ARE DONE CANOODLING WITH THE HUMAN AND HER LOVER WOULD YOU KINDLY CALL THE OTHERS DOWN TO DINNER BEFORE WE ALL DUST FROM AGE?”

You felt your eyebrows raise while Blue behind you sputtered and choked on nothing but air while his face flared with a dangerous blush. You recovered first and laughed at Black’s scowl and Rus’ look of concern.

“You’re a little too presumptuous, your grace. Blue and I are just friends,” you answer while reaching back to rub a circle into his back and help calm him down.

Your words made the shorter skeleton flush a dark shade of purple high on his cheek bones as he pulled on the bottom part of his uniform and stood up straighter. “HUMPH, PROMISCUOUS MINX. YOU LEAD OTHERS TO MAKE SUCH ASSUMPTIONS ALL ON YOUR OWN. WHAT ELSE IS ONE TO THINK AFTER YOU SO BLATANTLY SHOWED OFF YOUR SOULS TO ONE ANOTHER LIKE A COUPLE OF CANOODLING TEENAGERS?”

“Canoodling what?”

“You Heard Me Sufficiently, Human.”

“Sure, but, I mean, maybe you’re not the best person to make that sorta call considering you pulled me into an encounter right after that and got a good eyeful of my soul too. At least Blue asked for permission first.” At your words Black went stiff and flushed an even darker purple while Rus stared up at his brother in surprise. “Plus, how could you tell we had shared an encounter? You didn’t show up until after.”

“sans?” Rus called, his voice soft as he watched his brother.

“I HAVE MY SOURCES! DINNER! IS IN FIVE MINUTES!” And then, not bothering with walking, Black took a shortcut out.

In his absence Rus turned away from where Black once stood and eyed you and Blue anew. Your almost blushed when you realized that Rus had made the same assumption about the two of you. Blue and you were super close, and a lot of the things you did could easily be misinterpreted by outsiders who didn’t know you better.

Rus smiled over at you and Blue, his eye lights brighter. “…so …dinner?”
Lunch with the kids prepared you for dinner with them and Sans. The only other addition to the group was their lone female, Wendy, who hadn’t looked away from you once since seeing you at her table. Immediately to her right Black sat, cutting up the chicken for her and then chastising her for not using her napkin to wipe her face with. You thought it was adorable how Black blustered over her more so than the others.

Once dinner had wrapped up you and Blue moved to wash and dry the dishes just like at dinner, something the boys cheered for since it was their chore you had ‘saved’ them from.

“You’re gonna stay the night, right?” Peter asked, hanging off of Blue’s arm while the skeleton wiped down each fork and knife with the dish cloth.

“We were actually going to-”

“NONSENSE,” Black interrupted, causing you to turn. He and his brother stood side by side, a united front. “ALLIES OR ENEMIES, I’D RATHER HAVE YOU UNDER MY ROOF WHERE I CAN KEEP MY EYE ON YOU INSTEAD OF LOOSE IN THE WORLD AND VULNERABLE TO ITS DANGERS.”

“Umm, that’s not…” Blue hesitated, glancing nervously over at you and then back at the brothers. “We shouldn’t impose upon you.”

“I INSIST!” And then Black blinked away with another shortcut making Peter and Wendy gasp and giggle while Phil just clapped his hands.

It seemed like there would be no arguing with Black, and your original plan to stay at the bed and breakfast a few miles south was shot. Good thing you never made those reservations.

Outside the night began to roll in and Rus set up a spare room for each of you in the renovated wing of the house. Blue mumbled something about being able to share a room and you rubbed his hand with your thumb, holding it.

“I’ll be fine for one night, and besides, my eye doesn’t even hurt anymore,” you say.

“You were still in a fight today,” Blue worried before adding in a mumble, “I shouldn’t be away from you.”

“I’m one door away and I know to knock if I need you.”

“Yo—you don’t even have to knock,” Blue muttered, flushing with color and looking down at his hands as he mumbled out his words to you.

“I appreciate the gesture, but I think I’ll be fine,” you say, turning your voice soft just for him. His kindness for you was something that humbled you, and still took you by surprise every so often. He never seemed to run out of compassion. “But I promise I’ll come to you if I get lonely.”

“…Okay then.”

With great reluctance Blue let you go and shuffled over to his room, making a face that begged for pity all the way. He hesitated on the threshold, watching you for a moment longer before heading inside.

With your saddlebags from the motorcycle still somewhere out in the woods, you made do with a
spare toothbrush and the innermost layer of your clothes for Pjs. Eventually the house, filled with
the noise of scurrying feet and whines for one more bedtime story settled and the stars came out,
winking into their glory.

The bed was nice and the room was neat, but you opened your window and sat on the edge of it,
dangling one bare leg over the side and letting the cold air chill your warm skin. The hours rolled
by and you stayed awake, knowing too well how bad it would be if you had another night terror
and woke a house full of children.

That was the last thing you wanted.

It was after midnight when you heard the door to your room creak open on well oiled hinges. You
startled, suspecting Blue, but surprised to see the only other girl crouched on the threshold. When
she saw your eyes in the dark she squeaked and froze where she was.

“Wendy?” you softly called. You stretched out your hand and curled your fingers. “What are you
doing up so late?”

She didn’t answer, but she took a couple of steps towards you, leaving the door open ajar. Each
step was slow and measured, but eventually she made it to your windowsill and reached for you.
You recognized the gesture too well and fondly picked her up, turning her around to cradle in your
arms atop you lap.

“Were you having trouble sleeping?” you ask.

“…Were you?” she answered. Wendy leaned back and looked up at your face as she sat sideways
on your lap, cradled against your one arm.

“Something like that. I was just watching the stars and getting a cool breath of air. It’s so nice out
here in the country,” you explained honestly. “I sometimes have bad dreams, the stars help.”

“What are your bad dreams about?” Wendy asked, fidgeting in your lap.

“That’s a big question,” you say, but you don’t leave her unanswered. “I dream about things that
I’m scared of and there are plenty of things that make me afraid.”

“Like what?” Wendy pressed.

Of course she would want to ask the hard questions. “Do you mind if I tell you some other time,
maybe when I’m not trying to forget about them?” you chuckle weakly.

“Oh,” Wendy said before glancing down at your chest before poking at it. You didn’t flinch when
she got close to your scars. “What about your heart? Where did it go?”

“My…heart?”

“It was soooo pretty,” Wendy breathed while staring up at you with big brown eyes. “It was red
like a lollipop and it was on fire. I saw it when you were with the other skeleton. He was looking at
it too. I… I thought he might have taken it from you.”

“Oh, you mean my soul. I forgot you kids can see those things. No, he didn’t take it, I still have it
inside of me. I can’t pull it out on my own to show you without help, otherwise I would.”

“Why was it on fire?”
You held up your free hand and concentrated on the palm, turning it black as charcoal before it cracked open with a small flickering flame. Wendy gasped as you made the fire dance into shapes she might recognize, a ballerina, a swan, a girl dressed as pretty as a princess…And then you let the fire go out.

“I can do things like that. Maybe that’s why my heart looked like it was on fire to you.” When Wendy reaches for your hand you let her take it. You don’t miss the way she breathes out in awe when she feels how smooth your palm had turned.

“Any other burning questions?” you joked, getting her to chuckle.

It felt familiar to have a child in your arms again. You had always been one of the mentor figures to the newest recruits while at the Embassy. So many of them sought you out in the middle of the night and talked to you until they fell asleep or just sought out a story or song to slip off to. And even thought they had come to you for help, when you comforted them, it was always easier to find your sanity the next morning.

“You ready to head back to bed now?” you asked after a while. It was late and you could stay up, but you didn’t doubt she needed her sleep far more than you.

“…Don’t wanna sleep yet.”

She cuddled closer and you pulled her in to keep her from falling out of your arms. “What if I told you a story…or sang you a song?”

“…You sing?”

It was a song she wanted? You could work with that. “Let me think of something,” you say while staring out at the night sky lit up with a mess of twinkling stars.

You brushed back a loose string of her hair and started to rock back and forth, humming a melody she could feel through the vibrations of your body.

“And the planets of the universe… go their way. Not astounded by the sun or the moon, or by the day,” you sang, pitching your voice low and soft. “You and I will simply disappear out of sight…. But I'm afraid ... soon there'll be… no light.”

When you sang you remembered a different history. You didn’t have the best vocals and no one would be tripping over themselves to get you on a record label, but it was a voice suited to soothing and lullabies, a voice that weighed something.

Raven had complained about your singing, but he asked for your songs more than anyone else. That memory felt like a lifetime ago, like it belonged to someone else more than it did you.

“Now…. I know, oooooh, I was wrong to live for a dream. If I’d had…. my life to live over, I would never dream, no ohhh, I will never dream, no….”

Wendy felt slack in your arms so you stood with her, still rocking and humming as you made your way out into the hallway and spotting the only room with the door left open. Inside was a room fit for a princess, painted pink with a canopy bed and plenty of stuffed animals and toys. Some still had their tags left on them.

You hummed as you lowered her into bed, pulling the comforter back.
With your back to the door you felt eyes on you, but when you turned around there was no one there. You hummed one last note that lasted and lasted before getting up and closing the door behind you. The hallway was empty as you made your way back to your room, only to pause outside of Blue’s door.

You thought about it, knowing you shouldn’t be a bother, but ultimately turned towards it and eased it open enough to sneak in. Blue was asleep in his bed, lightly snoring through his nasal ridge as he had turned onto his back.

You pulled back the covers and slid in beside him. As soon as the bed dipped with your weight he moved in his sleep towards you, rolling onto his side and reaching for you. Like all the other nights you slept in his arms. He buried his face in your hair and held you close, entwining one leg with yours.

Safe in his arms, you let yourself fall asleep, knowing you would be safe from dreams one night more.

Chapter End Notes

Guys! I got fanart for this fic, something I'm over the moon for! And it's Blue and reader cuddling. I'm so freaking ecstatic for it and ya'll should check it out: Blue & Reader
I promise there will be way more skeleton bed sharing and cuddles in the future. They're my favorite thing to write and of course this chapter ended with Blue getting some sleep cuddles-more of that next chapter!

Kids ordered via age:
Tron
Peter
Wendy
Phil

Song Used at the end: Planets of the Universe
Sans had opinions.

Without you and Blue, the group dynamic was less than stellar. Stretch was noticeably more agitated without his brother by his side, and no amount of confirmation texts could put the doubt out of his skull.

Edge and Red, monsters who had been more than civil the entire time on the road, started to fray a bit emotionally. It looked like, to Sans, their true personalities were coming up to the surface in the absence of some civilizing element; namely you. Without their humans around to reinforce their learned behaviors, some of their bad habits started to reappear.

Papyrus… he was doing okay. He had been sad to see you go and that sadness still weighed on him, but anyone who didn’t know him as well as Sans did wouldn’t be able to tell. At least he was still talking with his brother. Sans would have been far more forlorn if things had been the way they were before this trip started. Drifting apart from his brother because he felt ‘replaced’ by all of Papyrus’ adoring fans had been a stupid decision.

“last call for ai express,” Stretch called out, breaking Sans free from his thoughts.

Papyrus and Stretch watched from the window as the massive tour sized bus turned on, empty of inhabitants, and began to pull out. Knowing it had been bugged and tapped to high heaven, Sans wasn’t sad to see it go, but he was surprised when the tail lights blinked out behind a far off building, now gone from view, and his soul throbbed. Maybe he did feel a bit attached to the stupid bus, considering it had been a space he shared with you and the others. He hadn’t hated his time on the road with you…all…

“ONE MORE NIGHT HERE AND THEN WE CAN RETURN TO BUSINESS,” Papyrus sighed, sounding relieved. “WE CAN DO THAT.”

“…the sooner the better,” Stretch added. His phone was out and the message app was lit up as he scrolled through his communications with ‘Sans’ Blue.

That had been the plan. They would spend one more night and then wake in the morning. They’d go separate ways at first, before meeting at a pre-identified checkpoint and restarting their journey up to the town of Blackberry where you were hiding out with Blue and two other iterations of the brothers.

Sans took one more look around and sighed when he saw that neither Edge nor Red was present. He knew it would be the responsible thing to do, and he was trying to be better, but he still didn’t feel like pulling himself up to track down the pair.

He took a shortcut into their room and scowled when he found it empty. The gym was empty too but the bar wasn’t. Red sat at a table by himself, a small blacknotebook open by his drink. A couple other empty bottles collected on the table from past mixes and straight up shots.

It wasn’t even five yet.

Sans cursed at himself for being stupid, but ambled over, sitting down directly across from his
counterpart.

“hey.”

Red looked up and shrugged. “Hey yourself.”

Unlike the others, Red and Edge seemed to keep their magic out of their voices even when there were no humans around. It had been like that when he and Edge last spoke in the hallway of the last hotel they stayed at.

Between the two brothers, Sans found Red a lot more approachable, even if he looked like he got dressed in a garbage dump blindfolded.

“I take it, the reason you’re here now is because the AI took our bus away?” Red guessed.

“smart guy. whacha writing about?” Sans asked, making his own guesses based on what he knew of himself. He had a brain for science and jokes, but one of those things benefited from getting written down and studied while the other just needed to be voiced.

“Journaling. Helps me so I don’t end up venting to bro all the time.” Red answered without looking up. He reached for his drink to finish it off. “He’s got enough on his mind right now. He don’t need me messing it up any more.”

don’t you call back home for stuff like that?” Sans asked.

Red smirked a little at the thought of Ma and Mini’s place being home. “Yeah, sometimes we do, but the ladies have their own life to live and we’re supposed to be more independent than that. We don’t call home every time something comes up, otherwise we’d never get off the phone.”

“...so,” Sans began after a beat of silence, “what are you writing about this time?”

The pen went still and Red let it drop into his journal. “Nothing so important. We’ve already talked about this, but I’m getting the feeling that there is more to this mission than what we briefed.”

“yeah, there is, that’s why we’re splitting from the embassy.” San frowned. “what do you think it is?”

Red tapped his phalanges to the clip of his pen and then reached for his empty glass, cradling it absently. “I don’t think you would have been able to tell, but have you ever noticed anything... weird about the shortcuts you use here?”

That was not what Sans thought Red would say. “nah, same as always, why?”

Red twitched. “I don’t like it. I know danger when I feel it and I feel it every time I use one. It’s the same void, but it feels different here and it shouldn’t. The void is the void. It shouldn’t be different from one corner of reality to the next.”

different how?” Sans asked.

Red shrugged. “Can’t say for sure yet, I just feel it for now. I’ve tried to stretch out my shortcuts and stay in the void longer to try and notice it, but nothing has turned up so far. I’m not sure if it’s just me being paranoid or if there really is something to get worried about. Alternatively, if all us iterations are here in one place maybe that’s done something.”

Sans nodded, thinking along and listening. He had been expecting Red to be moping about you
leaving or sappy about how Edge was going off on his own more and more, but in actuality he was using his mind to be productive...or paranoid.

Sans wasn’t the best judge of what was healthy skepticism and what was paranoia.

“And here I thought you were down here journaling about your feelings, drinking by yourself cause you missed her,” Sans chuckled.

“Oh, no, I did that first. Once I got through a few pages I started on this theory,” Red answered honestly, face completely blank. Then it shifted and he was glaring down at his book. “I know he’s more Papyrus than Sans, but Blue has grabby fingers and is old enough to know how to use ‘em.”

Sans didn’t like that thought but tried his best to keep his tone civil when speaking about someone in their absence. “Blue is harmless, you know he’d respect boundaries.”

“If he can recognize those boundaries. I like the kid plenty, don’t get me wrong, but he’s not just a kid. He’s a Sans. He ain’t stupid. None of them are. He’s just the best at fooling you,” Red sighed, sagging in his seat and kicking at the table. “And now I’m depressed again. Fuck. How long we gotta wait before we can go after them?”

“We’ll leave tomorrow after checkout.”

Red groaned and flipped his notebook shut, snapping the elastic cord that kept it all together. “That’s great. I guess I’ll dick around in the void for a bit and hopefully get my brain back.”

And then Red was gone.

A moment later Sans realized that he had been left with the tab.

His hands were still around you, tangled in your hair and wrapped around your waist when he roused at first light. Always an early riser, Blue wasn’t surprised to find himself awake before you considering how late you stayed up.

He had been asleep for most of the night but remembered rousing just enough to hear your voice from outside his window, lulling the night itself into a softer darkness. It had been the first time he heard it but he knew the singer had been you right away, no matter how different or deeper it slipped.

The mornings were for running and training and the day was for working, but as he had all the other times you slept next to him, Blue found an excuse to stay in with you. He didn’t want you to have to wake up alone and be worried.

Plenty of people misunderstood him at first glance and wrote him off as childish, but Blue wasn’t dense. He understood enough to realize there was a pattern to your sleeping habits.

If you snuggled with one of them it was all good. If you slept on your own, you’d get out of bed eventually to sit up the rest of the night, sipping energy drinks or listening to audiobooks on your phone to stay awake. Once he had woken and notice you absent from the bus completely, leaving the roof hatch open behind you. If you didn’t seclude yourself or stay up you drank when you thought no one else would notice and slept yourself straight into a hangover.

It didn’t take Blue long to put the pieces together after that.
After the accident you were afraid to sleep, or more specifically, you were afraid to dream. Had the encounter reignited some old trauma that haunted you into your sleep? It appeared so, but you had never mentioned anything about it and Blue hadn’t felt confident enough in his assumptions to confront you about it. Maybe he should have.

In your sleep you let out a thin breath, shuffling slightly. Blue waited a moment more to see if you would wake up, but when you didn’t he tugged himself back, closer to your side. You moved so rarely in your sleep it had unsettled him more than once when he roused in the middle of the night. He’d wake and see you still in his arms and wait until he heard your breathing before relaxing again.

The hand he cradled your head with reached up to tangle with your hair and brush it back. Papyrus had commented on it the other day, excited by its new length and anticipating how long it would grow in the future. Blue hadn’t thought he had a preference, but with his hands tangled in your silky strands, he thought it might not be too bad if you really did decide to grow it out. Maybe you would be willing to let him try braiding it back for morning training? He was sure with enough research and practice he would be able to make something you would like.

Outside the sun was still low on the horizon, new and bleeding red and gold against the clouds, but there was enough sunlight to filter into their room and fall across the pillows. You looked beautiful under the sunlight. He could watch you for ages and still never get over the awe his soul throbbed with.

The house seemed to sleep on with the occasional creak or groan of the old frame settling. One of the kids was awake somewhere, scrambling around on the ground and making soft thuds with his or her feet against the bare wood. There weren’t any whispers or words and after another minute the footsteps ceased.

It was a good day to stay in bed and rest.

And think.

Thinking about yesterday, or more specifically, your encounter with him, made Blue almost melt into the bedsheets. He had been plenty confident before that, but then after seeing, feeling, and hearing your soul in their shared space, he had all the assurance he needed.

He knew what he felt.

The fact that he had almost tripped into an accidental encounter with you because his soul longed for yours had been strong evidence all on its own. Someone with his level of control still managed to slip up, and there was a reason for it.

Blue remembered the soft touch of your magic and then your soul, so warm and bright. The memory forced Blue to bury his face in the mattress. It was nearly enough to make him dizzy.

How’d he get so lucky? Your soul was…you were …your soul…He couldn’t make the words work even in his thoughts.

If Soul Mates were ever a thing he would have thought that’s what it felt like to just…click onto the same wavelength as another person. In all the gushiest most romantic monster stories, there was usually a bit about the hero and his or her lady connecting in a way that was so extraordinary people had to call it something different. Humans didn’t have an equivalent for it in their cultures or customs, but someone had said it sounded like ‘love at first sight.’ That didn’t feel right to Blue and he didn’t want to cheapen what he felt with half truths.
He wished there could be a mark or a sign he could point to. It would make showing others what he felt a bit easier. Alas, magic didn’t work like that and all he had were his feelings. But maybe it was better without a mark. He wasn’t sure how he’d feel if he had to see your mark on someone else. He didn’t dream very much, but he daydreamed often and his worst sort of dream was one where he lost you, either to a fight he couldn’t win, or when you ran off into the sunset with someone else.

He pulled you closer in his arms and lifted his face from the mattress to nestle against your forehead. His teeth brushed just above your eye and he tried to kiss you, but he couldn’t be like the humans in the movies, so without lips he touched his teeth to your skin as softly as he could.

You shifted slightly, likely in response to his own movements, but you settled right back down and returned to your easy, even breathing. Safe, you were safe in his arms. The fact that you hadn’t thrashed from a nightmare or woken up crying was proof enough that you believed it too.

You were plenty strong all on your own, and Blue knew that you could handle yourself. He did! You had done fantastically yesterday, talking down that ego inflated knock off version of himself that thought he was just so malevolent. And apart from your diplomatic angles, you had a mean set of fire hands and enough know-how to use them dangerously.

Still…

It was probably horrible of him to worry about you as much as he did. He knew you were strong! It was just… it mattered what happened to you. It mattered more than it should. It mattered more than anyone else’s safety, and that scared him. Hearing about your fight with Sans, about the bruises he had given you that went ignored and brushed aside, churned something angry up inside his gut. To you it wasn’t a big deal but any wound or injury to your person was just something that disgusted him.

What a mess he was.

Blue held onto you as long as he could, but eventually the house began to wake, first the footsteps, and then the whispers, and then came the doors. A few came close and then rushed by, leaving the hallway quiet once more.

You stirred more in response to the sounds, extra sensitive to them.

Knowing you were close to waking Blue started to unwind his fingers from your hair, his hand from your waist, and his legs from out between yours. He slipped out of the bed and peeked out to check the coast before dipping back into your room to collect your clothes from yesterday, the ones you left discarded on the floor. Until they had access to their saddlebags you would have to make do in your old things.

He made it back to the room unnoticed and eased the door shut behind his back, watching you roll over in bed and flail around, searching for something on the nearby pillows. You covered one half of your head with your hand and then sat up, hiding the scarred side of your face behind your fingers. Your good eye landed on Blue and the things he carried in his hands.

“Shoot, Blue, I’m sorry,” you yawned. You stretched out your arms, reaching for the edge of the bed and imitating a cat that just came up out of its nap. “I forgot to grab those.”

He wanted to say something along the lines of ‘I noticed’ because he had. Your legs, from mid thigh to ankle were bare and smooth. There was no way he wouldn’t have noticed that after cuddling through the night.
“It’s no trouble. Don’t apologize to me for something so simple.” He playfully chastised, playing off his bashful embarrassment. “You say that too much. Don’t you know I like doing things for you?”

He sat down on the edge of the bed and handed over the black leggings and extra layers you had shed for sleep.

“You’re too sweet to me.”

“Not nearly sweet enough!” he chirped back.

“At least let me thank you for letting me crash next to you last night. I know I said I wouldn’t, that I didn’t need to, but I guess I changed my mind in the middle of the night.”

“What made you change your mind?” And what could he say or do to convince you to fall asleep in his arms all the other nights?

You had pulled the comforter over your head and by the way it moved, Blue suspected you were wriggling into your leggings and adding the other layers under it. Stars, even the way the comforter wriggled was cute.

When you finally emerge your hair is a far worse mess but, even that!, makes Blue think of you as all the more adorable. He wanted to hold you again and just keep holding you, never letting go. He had found his happiness and he wanted to take as much of it into his arms as he could each day.

“I don’t know. I guess I was just feeling a little lonely. The girl from yesterday, Wendy, she snuck into my bedroom last night. Turns out she was the one that ratted on us to Black. She saw my soul at least.”

“Oh!”

He wasn’t sure what he was supposed to say to that. He wanted to jump on the topic and talk all about the bond you had forged? Formed? Awakened? during your encounter, but he also wanted to hear the rest of you recollection.

You nod along, crawling over to the edge of the bed and sitting with your legs crossed. “Yeah, she was a real chatterbox. I remember back when I was a teenager, there were always kids younger than me and I stayed up with so many of them, reading to them or singing until they fell asleep. I didn’t mind it. I was… nice. Familiar even.”

“Was that you singing last night?” Blue asked, not caring if his smile was teasing. When he got you to flush it was all worth it. “I thought I might have imagined it when I woke up a little, but I heard someone outside singing.”

“Shoot, Blue, I’m sorry. I hadn’t meant to wake you.”

“I’m glad you did! It was like listening to a… a, an angel!”

Your blush spread and you made a sound in your throat that almost set him off. It was an embarrassed little moan. It took all of Blue’s legendary self control to keep from pouncing on you and snuggling into your side once more.

“Don’t! Pretend you didn’t hear it. I haven’t done that since forever ago.”

“I’m sure Wendy appreciated it. She’s so lucky, getting to stay up talking with you, even getting a
song? I’m jealous!” Blue laughed.

There was still color on the tips of your ears but Blue didn’t push it anymore, content to only fluster you a little bit. He wasn’t his brother. If Stretch had been given the opportunity he would have teased and teased until the other person ( you ) was begging for mercy.

“We should probably get up and see if they need any help. I feel bad that we just crashed in on them without warning like this. We ate their food and took up their beds.”

“Yeah, but the Blackberry attacked both of us so it’s an even trade,” Blue pouted.

“Still, I feel bad,” you say, already up and standing next to the door with your hand on the handle. “Maybe we offer to help with food?”

You were…so SWEET and so GOOD! Blue’s soul throbbed a little bit in want.

You must have seen something in his face because you paused, hand hovering, jaw hanging in an expression of surprise. “Blue, your eye lights!”

He blinked and shook his head, likely dismissing the stars his eye lights were prone to make. When he looked up again you were smiling and the surprise was gone.

“Is something wrong with my eye lights?” Blue asked, hands hovering over the sockets in mild concern.

“Nah…just, shapes is all. Come on, let’s not have them think we’re lazy bones.”

CUTE!

He followed you out and down the stairs, smelling breakfast before they were even in the kitchen. Only one of the kids, the smallest boy named Phil, was sitting at the table, and at the opposite end with a newspaper and coffee mug at hand, The Blackberry king himself sat.

Rus turned around, revealing an electric skillet with several pancakes flipped onto their golden brown sides. Another glass dish sat half filled with already made pancakes.

“morning,” Rus greeted.

“Good morning,” you said first. “Sorry we weren’t up earlier. I hope there’s something we can do to help.”

“you can sit at the table and get comfortable. these will be done in just a minute.” Rus turned the spatula over in his hand and then turned back to the pancakes.

Blue narrowed his eye lights at the scene, paying extra close attention to the differences. Blackberry had a coffee and a paper but wasn’t interacting with either of them, instead he watched his brother with a narrowed look of disbelief that pinched his face, as if the sight he disbelieved in was equally distasteful.

The other difference was Rus himself. Yesterday he had been dressed in baggy clothes, stained sneakers, and a dirty duster. This time around Rus was wearing…nice shoes? Fitted slacks? A light blue long sleeve button down with the sleeves rolled up?

Black watched his brother mutely, ignoring the both of you as well as Phil in his seat.

“oh, y/n, are you allergic to anything? we have a lot of fruit we use and some of the pancakes have
blueberries already in them,” Rus called back, glancing back over his shoulder at you.

“I can eat anything. Thank you so much for the rooms last night and all this food. It’s so generous,” you gush, earnestly.

Rus chuckled and it sounded a bit too much like Stretch’s chuckle that for a moment, Blue was almost stunned. Stretch wasn’t anything like Edge or Papyrus aside from the physical aspects, but Rus seemed like he had more in common with Stretch than he did with the other Papyrus versions. And… somehow…that made it a little easier to accept his kindness and not feel so on-guard against it. Still….

“WE HAVE AN ABUNDANCE OF BOTH. YOUR GRATITUDE IS ACKNOWLEDGED THOUGH ULTIMATELY UNNECESSARY,” Black answered, still watching his brother oddly.

“and its nice to have guests for a change.”

“WE ENTERTAIN A NUMBER OF DIVERSE AND DISTINGUISHED GUESTS ON OCCASION,” Black quipped back, directing his comment at his brother and ignoring the pair of you seemingly altogether.

Rus sighed over his pancakes. “mrs. tatcher and the pallacos are our neighbors and they’ve only visited once each.” Rus then muttered under his breath, “and i doubt they’ll be returning anytime soon.”

“VETTING PROCESSES ARE TYPICALLY THIS THOROUGH. ONE MUST NOT SKIMP ON THE DETAILS LEAST THEY INVITE A FOX INTO THEIR HENHOUSE. AS CAPTAIN OF THE ROYAL GUARD WE HAD UNCOVERED SEVERAL NEFARIOUS VILLAINS OF SUCH A NATURE DURING THE LAST LEG OF THEIR INVESTIGATION.” Black then whirled his attention from his brother to you and Blue. “THAT IS NOT TO SAY EITHER OF YOU HAVE BEEN CLEARED OR MET THE STANDARDS OF ACCEPTANCE FOR MY HOME.”

You don’t flinch from his words or seem to take any offense at them, but you do lean a little further across the table and put your face directly in his line of sight. That makes him stiffen and wrinkle the edges of where his phalanges gripped the newspaper. Blue can hear the crinkle it makes.

You don’t say anything, but the color across Black’s face continues to darken.

“That’s,” you say after a heartbeat more of silence, “too bad, but I don’t blame you for being wary. When the stakes are as high as they are it’s better to be safe than sorry.”

“AND WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?”

Overhead something went thud and then there was very vocal laughter followed by a cry of complaint, and then the sound of rushed footsteps as a couple of tiny bodies chased one another upstairs.

“You’re pretty strong all on your own and you have enough LoVe to prove that you’re not above doing what needs to be done to keep you and your own in one piece. I don’t know anything about where you came from, or what you experienced but I doubt it was a walk in the park.”

As if to illustrate your point you tap at your eyebrow and make a gesture with those fingers to indicate getting sliced there. It mirrored the scar that cut through the bone of Black’s one eye socket.
“You both strike me as the types that know how to survive, but survival is easy when all you have to worry about is yourself. It’s so much harder when you have things to lose and things to protect, or at least it feels that way.”

Black doesn’t reply and Rus doesn’t turn around. And for a minute there is quiet in the kitchen, unbroken even by Phil who was busy coloring on his placemat. Before words can interrupt the silence Wendy ran into the kitchen giggling fiercely while Peter ran after her, waving a long sock over his head like it was some sort of whip. Wendy darted towards the table and jumped up into Black’s lap, turning around with her arms on his shoulders to stick her tongue out at Peter who had to skid to a halt.

“Not fair!” Peter complained, stomping his foot in frustration. “You didn’t call base.”

“You woke me up with your stupid smelly socks again so you don’t get to use the rules,” Wendy sassed back.

Carefully Black set aside the half finished mug of coffee he had skillfully managed to keep from spilling in light of the jostling. He didn’t snap at Wendy to get down or chastise Peter for running in the house, but watched the pair carefully. Apparently that was all it took to break Peter off from his teasings and send him to his seat at the table.

Phil looked up from his coloring and snickered at Peter.

“You want a sniff?” Peter asked, holding up his single, soiled sock.

Blue watched on in mild mortification as Phil cheered and reached for the sock, only to have Peter lob it at his face. Phil didn’t seem to care as he collected the sock and wore it around his shoulders like a scarf, much to Wendy’s horror and Peter’s delight.

Hadin’t the human ambassador Frisk been a child when they freed the monsters from the underground? Blue was having a hard time picturing it while he watched the children play with the smelly sock.

Blue poked you in the side and leaned in to ask, “Is this…normal? I thought kids were all like that Frisk we saw videos about.”

You didn’t seem anything but amused at the sight. “Frisk was a small twelve year old who was very determined and a bit exceptional. Hey, Peter, how old did you say you were?”

Peter perked up at being called on. “Imma be eight soon! I’m seven and three quarters.”

“Wow, you’re really tall for your age. I bet you’re gonna be bigger than me one day,” you say, smiling brightly at the boy who inflates with the praise and sits up straighter.

“pancakes are up, peter, you wanna call tron down or let him sleep in?” Rus asked, coming over with the glass dish stacked high with pancakes.

Peter’s smile turned mischievous and he was gone in a flash. Before Rus could start serving you grabbed for Wendy’s plate and took over, plating pancakes for everyone else at the table and even those absent.

For eating Black had picked up Wendy and tried depositing her in the same seat as last night but instead she wriggled free and snuck under the table to pop back up on the bench between you and Black. He seemed exasperated with her but moved her plate over to the opposite side without comment.
“Hey,” Wendy chirped up at you, playing with the end of her dress.

“Hey,” you chirped back, imitating her playful tone.

Peter came back into the room with a very tired and ruffled looking Tron who ate his pancakes mechanically, still only half away in a way that reminded Blue of Stretch when he had been a baby bones.

You complimented Rus on his pancakes and he flushed, laughed like Stretch would, and deflected until the attention was off of him.

You were all almost through breakfast before Wendy spoke up again, loud enough for the whole table to hear her words to you.

“Can you show me your heart today?”

Rus choked on his food and Black went almost as still as Blue.

“You mean my soul?” you clarify without missing a beat. You spear another piece of pancake with your fork and run it through the blueberry syrup before tasting it.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. You said you couldn’t show it on your own but Mr. Blackberry can do it again, can’t he?” Wendy asked, turning around enough to glance back and forth between you and Black.

“That’s…” Blue can’t finish his sentence out loud as his skull heats up.

“Yeah, but it might make someone else uncomfortable so I wouldn’t want to do that if it’s considered rude,” you answer easily. “It might not seem like much to us but we’re a little different than our monster friends, and to them is a little scarier.”

“Mr. Blackberry doesn’t get scared,” Wendy answers honestly.

“w-wendy, honey, its still c-considered ah, um, it’s still not a thing adults do in front of others,” Rus tried to explain.

“But you did it yesterday, and there were people there.” She looked back up at Blackberry and pouted cutely in a way that likely got her whatever she wanted any other time. That’s how it looked to Blue at least.

You looked at Black who wore a mask of expression that hid the panic Blue could smell rolling off him in waves. You threw up your hands and shrugged. “I mean, honestly, I don’t mind, but I hear it’s a sensitive topic for monsters. I know everyone’s different about it.”

“I wanna see it too!” Peter exclaimed standing up in his chair. “Is it magic?”

In his chair Phil bobbed along too.

Tron didn’t say anything but he looked more awake than before.

Seeing the faces of each of the kids must have made something in your head shift. You reached for Blue and tugged on his gloved hand. “Hey, you could do it, couldn’t you? Not a whole encounter but just pulling it out, right?”

Rus watched with wide eyes and a mute expression.

“THAT-” Black looked to his brother and then down at Wendy and the kids before looking back at
you. “THAT IS NOT NECESSARY. TO INDULGE THE YOUTH WOULD ONLY SPOIL THEM FURTHER.”

“But I don’t mind and you said you still didn’t trust me. I don’t expect you to, but I’d be willing to do this if it helped my case. Just, only if you’re not too uncomfortable with it.” You glanced to Rus and then to Black. “Because that’s my only reservation.”

“YOU-”

The kids started to cheer and Rus stayed silent while Black physically deflated, sinking into his seat and covering one half of his face with his hand.

“DO AS YOU WISH!”

The kids all cheered and you checked with Rus one more time to get his head nod of approval, even though his eye lights were pointedly elsewhere. Then you turned to Blue and smiled.

“Ready?”

You trusted him to pull your soul out and hold it. Yesterday had been the first time he ever saw it and now he was able to hold it for you. He might have blustered a bit more if there weren’t so many eyes on him.

“Yeah,” he whispered, glancing down to where your hand touched his.

It was an easy enough task to complete. He found your soul, held it with his magic, and pulled it forward. It seeped through your physical body, warm and flickering with crimson gold light, but couldn’t be tugged much further. Your magic prevented it from fully detaching the way it would with other humans. It was heavier than he thought a soul should be, but maybe that’s because you were a human? Or maybe it was because it was you? Or maybe it was the magic.

You couldn’t see it but everyone else in the room could. It turned the walls a warm shade of red and made shadows behind everyone. He heard a fireplace crackle and everywhere else felt too cold and too wrong. You were so warm.

Like before, your soul was a beautiful flickering flame of red, spilling off the edges and burning like a candle that distorted the traditional heart shape. Blue shivered at the touch, feeling like he was handling something too precious to ever play with.

“So pretty,” Wendy breathed, climbing up to stand on the bench and see better. No one else seemed able to speak out loud.

She reached for it before anyone could stop her and you jerked at the feel, making Blue panic. He almost moved to stop Wendy, but your hand squeezed his before he could move. That was enough for him to know you were okay. He calmed down and held himself back.

Wendy removed her hand, unburned, and stared down at it before her eyes went back to your soul. No one else said anything and Blue felt that was as good a sign as ever to push your soul back into your chest. You couldn’t see it, but you felt when it clicked back into place and you breathed a little deeper.

You looked fine. But he didn’t miss the extra beads of sweat on the back of your neck.

“Well,” you breathed, voice light and thin. “That was fun.” You reached over and bopped Wendy on her nose. “Now you have to help clean up.”
Wendy giggled and followed after you like a baby duckling while you collected the empty dishes. Blue moved to help and without asking Peter and Tron also pitched in a little.

Rus had excused himself for a minute and Black sat at the table, unmoving, staring into the dark black of his coffee, glaring at it like it was responsible for something unforgivable.

Chapter End Notes

I got a freaking piece of fanart that everyone should check out because I'm freaking excited about it: [Blue & Reader](#)

Isn't it interest how Red had concerns about Blue's grabby fingers, concerns Sans shrugged off, only for the next scene to be all about Blue's cuddle session? Hmmm? Red isn't dumb here-not in my house.
Chapter Summary

Getting closer with the new brothers, an unexpected offer, and a twist in your plans!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

After breakfast Wendy was stuck to your side.

You went with Blue to retrieve the motorcycle and walked her back while Blue split to drive the bike back all on his own. By the time the two of you made it back to the house Blue had insisted on making friendship tacos for all the kids and Russ, but begrudgingly offered to make one for Black as well.

“NOT NECESSARY!” Black snapped before excusing himself to go to work on one unfinished end of the house.

Blue just needed to call his brother first and talk to the rest of the boys about the progress that had been made with Sans’ plan. Last night the bus should have left on its own and in the morning their plan was to either buy, rent, or ‘shortcut’ their owned vehicles to the hotel and drive those up. Both Black and Rus insisted on meeting the 'OTHER COPIES’ but you had a feeling Rus was the only one actually looking forward to hosting.

Later on in the day you tracked Rus down with Wendy still stuck to your hip and asked him what you could do to help out. When he tried to excuse you again you told him you’d just start doing the kid’s chores with them if he didn’t say anything.

“then you can help me with some of the picking and gathering,” he finally sighed.

The kids ran out ahead of you, all except Phil who stayed behind, each one outfitted with a basket to carry their goods back in. They led you out across the grassy fields, through a patch of woods, and up to a stream that trickled thin in places and thicker in others. There were bushes heavy with blackberries lining the stream, and Rus pointed out several other bushes blooming with fruit, but there were more blackberries than all the others combined.

“It’s why they named the town that,” Peter explained.

You paused in your picking and caught Rus’ eye lights. “Wait, is that why…Black’s nickname is…?”

“Yeah,” Wendy piped up. “Cause he’s the king of all the town so he’s the Blackberry King.”

That made a lot more sense and you couldn’t help but laugh out loud with the revelation. “Really? That’s good to know. Should I also call him m’lord or his majesty ?”

Rus snickered and then it turned into the familiar Nyeh heh heh that made your heart warm.

“nahh, I don’t think he minds too much either way, but the kids can get carried away with the act.
just black or sans is fine, but that must get confusing with your sans in the house too.”

“I guess so, but Blue has gone by ‘Blue’ since I met him, so it’s fine. The original or Sans from this universe keeps his name and he has enough media presence and clout in the political spheres here that it made sense for him to not adopt a new nickname? If we had all felt differently I think we would have forced him and his brother to take on nicknames, but it all worked out so we can avoid confusion and hurt feelings.”

“none of the other iterations were attached to their names?” Rus asked, stopping next to you, his basket was half filled while yours was still on the sparse side.

“The other two came after Blue and those brothers already had nicknames when we ran into them. They had been given new names by a couple that found them soon after their topside arrival. Funny, huh?”

“funny,” he agreed, moving down to the next bush and then waiting for you to join him. “do you think you could tell me about the other brothers, the ones you and blue were traveling with?”

You spend a good twenty to twenty five minutes giving a crash course summery on each of the other five skeletons. Rus patiently listened, nodding along and watching you with his dim eye lights as you moved further up the stream to where the bushes weren’t so picked over. He didn’t interrupt you or ask questions until you were finished even though the kids interrupted plenty.

“you seem close.”

“Oh yeah, for sure. We’ve been living together in close quarters for so long, almost two months now. I know that doesn’t seem like a lot, but it feels like it’s been forever on some days.”

“forever in a good way, or forever in a bad way?”

“A good way, like I’ve known them so much longer than sixty something days. Is that something that’s common to monsters you think?”

Rus shook his head, picking blackberries that he dropped into your basket instead of his. He had filled up a while back and was hardly picking at all anymore while mostly listening.

“nah, that’s not a monster thing, it’s just you. but it might be something easier for monsters if you’ve shown off your soul to them like you did at-uh, um the-that what you did at the table,” Russ flustered. His eyes flickered with colored light and then his cheeks were dusted a soft lilac color like his magic.

Something in your gut twisted. You recognized that look but wished you hadn’t. Rus looked guilty even though he hadn’t done anything.

You stopped on the bank while he moved on, causing him to pause and glance back. The blush was still there on his face making you feel worse.

“Shoot, did I-were you uncomfortable with that, Rus?” you asked, mild panic making your voice thin. “I’m so sorry. I-sh-shoot. I shouldn’t have said that. I-I put you on the spot. I’m so sorry.”

In the shade from the foliage you saw the purple lights in his sockets flicker bright and then he turned around to face you more fully, blush darker than before. His sockets were wide with expression.

“no, that’s not it at all-d-don’t apologize i’m not-ugh-um,uh!?” he looked even more panicked than
before. His words were a mess just like your insides. “you have the wrong idea, it’s not about what you did, don’t think that!”

“Papyrus,” you say his true name hoping that might help but he only flushed darker. “I’m really sorry if I said or did something you weren’t comfortable with.”

“you didn’t, it was go-ah, it was fine, really fine, it was just a little bit of a lot of-oh i’m not making sense here.” He took a deep breath that seemed to help him calm down if the blush lessening was anything to go by. “i was really honored by your trust and what you did, even if, um i don’t feel like I earned it or deserved it. to you it was something easy, but for us it was a lot. thank you.”

“You’re not mad?”

He looked at you like you had grown a second head. “mad? why would i be mad?”

You shuffled awkwardly. “I-I feel like even if it wasn’t a bad thing I stepped over a line, but if you’re really okay with it, then I guess it’s fine.”

Rus rubbed at the back of his skull, glancing down. “you can trust me, it’s really not a bad thing. it was… nice.”

The quiet of his voice made you grin. “If you say so, I’m gonna have to take your word for it. After I hit a certain age I lost my ability to see souls so I have no idea what mine looks like anymore. I was actually the only one in that room who couldn’t see.”

“did ‘ja feel left out?” he asked, tone a bit more playful.

“A bit!” you admitted with a laugh.

Rus approached you and poured out some of his blackberries into your bucket, leveling it off so it was even with his. “if no one’s ever told you this, then you should know it’s probably tha’ prettiest soul i’ve ever seen, just don’t tell any of the kids, they get jealous even when they shouldn’t.” He started to laugh again, that familiar Nyeh heh heh cheering you up even more. “At least they have souls with traits that are colorful.”

“You don’t think you do?”

He shook his head. “nah, monsters don’t have any variety to them, all our souls look the same, boring and colorless.”

This hadn’t been the first time you heard about monsters souls being uniform and colorless. All this came out after you lost your ability to see, though, so you could only take the words of the young. However, if your two weeks of blindness had taught you anything, it was that there was more to the world than what you saw of it.

“I’ve heard that before but I have a hard time believing it. I think you’re just unable to see your own colors or traits from your souls or whatever. Like, the same way I’m unable to see my own soul you can’t see yours.”

“I’ve seen mine before,” Rus laughed, “and it’s just like my brother’s, basic and boring like every other monster’s ever before.”

You wrinkled your nose and thought back to all the different encounters you’ve had before and how each one felt different. You might not be able to see a monster’s soul and prove it had a color, but you could feel it. Each trait felt different to you and no two monsters felt the same, even if their
souls were the same color. Papyrus was different from Black, after all, but they both had the same ‘integrity’ soul trait.

You wondered if it would be helpful to tell Rus.

The kids were a little further up the stream, staining their fingers and their faces with freshly washed blackberry samples. They seemed to be enjoying their time outside all on their own.

“Hey Rus,” you called. He looked up at the sound of his name. “You remember what I told you yesterday about how I have magic and where it was I got it from?”

“ kinda hard to forget hearing about an organization that trained monster hunters out of children, but yeah,” he answered with an easy grin.

“I remember being able to see souls when I was younger but then I partially lost that ability. Instead of being able to see souls I can use my magic like an extra sense and…feel, or read souls for the prominent trait like how you monsters CHECK a soul. It’s not a super skill but I’ve used it enough times on enough monsters to know none of you have boring copy souls. Every single soul is unique, colorful, and different, you just can’t see it.”

“…thats…um, oh, okay,” Rus said.

You weren’t sure if he believed you and was trying to be polite or if he truly didn’t understand how what you were telling him could be true.

“Yeah, your brother has a dark blue, almost purple soul of integrity. It’s unique and really strong or hard. It felt heavy and I got this feeling that your brother is the sort of person who lives by his word and abides by his own code, even if it’s not what the law of the land might be. He’s not a bad guy, even if he’s a little scary.”

“you could tell that because of your encounter?”

“Not... exactly. Like you know how I can’t pull my own soul out, I also can’t start an encounter or check another monster. It’s just something I don’t know how to do while having magic. I can’t check anyone but I can use my magic outside of an encounter to get a feel for them as a person.”

You swallowed and shuffled from one foot to the next, nervous for what you were about to say next. “If you wanted to know what color your soul is ...I could... it wouldn’t hurt, and it’d be a quick little painless thing.” Your breath cracked and you tried to laugh off your nervousness. “Ah, shoot, is that weird to ask?”

“...to...ask...” he repeated, words slow and measured, like he was unsure of what you were asking. He didn’t look offended or embarrassed at least.

“Can I use my magic to...h, no, never mind. I’m soso sorryIshouldn’t have even asked,” you sputtered, flushing from embarrassment.

You had just got done telling Wendy that sharing souls was something important to monsters and here you were asking to feel Rus’ soul like some pervert?

You were the worst. It would be better if a hole in the earth appeared and swallowed you up to save you for having to look up at your host who had been nothing but unfailingly generous and kind.

You turned back to the blackberry bushes and thrust your hand in carelessly, scratching the skin as you ripped a couple berries free to drop into your bucket. You reached again but Rus’ hand stopped
yours before you could plunge it back into the thorns.

“...you’ll hurt yourself that way, careful.”

“Sorry.”

He didn’t let go of your hand. You waited for him, noticing the conflicted expression as his eyes
lights, dim in his sockets, flickered with indecision before he finally looked up and faced you
fully.

“...i’m probably not the most decent guy to get to know. back underground sans was the one who
did all the hard work and kept us safe while i helped as much as i could, it wasn’t much at all, most
of the time i was just a mess he had to pick up after.”

Rus let go of your hand and reached up to the collar of his shirt, undoing the first button and
tugging something out. It looked like a worn, old dog collar. You didn’t ask your question with
words, but your eyes must have.

“you remember when I introduced myself as mutt when we first met? i was the runt of the canine
unit and their biggest disappointment because i couldn’t do half of what my brother could. as part
of the uniform we all had to wear these but sans gave me his personal tag, see the gold bit here, so
all the others who saw it would know who i belonged to and leave me alone, even if i was easy
pickings. bro had to make a few examples before it clicked with the others.”

He tucked the collar back into his shirt and buttoned up to hide it away.

“That sounds terrible. Is there a reason you’re still wearing it?”

He shrugged and it was an easy roll of his boney shoulders. “habit? i kinda grew fond of it over
time and didn’t want to let it go when we came topside, but maybe that’s not true since i did hide
it.”

“You didn’t have to tell me all that, but thank you. I’m glad you did, even if it was hard for you.”

He chuckled lightly. “nah, that’s not the worst of it, but this still doesn’t come close to what you
shared with us. if you used your magic to read my soul i don’t think you’d see anything too
flattering. bro is a different story, since he’s pretty much the best, but me...”

You felt a little bit crushed to hear how little of an opinion Rus had for himself. He was such a kind
guy and the kids all loved him, mimicking him in little ways at the dinner table and following him
around as they did. It was so terrible he couldn’t see that.

“You’re a pretty cool guy too, Papyrus.”

“...just ‘rus is okay, ya’know.” He avoided your eyes.

You grabbed his hand this time and spoke even when he wouldn’t look at you. “Please, I don’t
want to overstep or make you uncomfortable, but please let me have a chance to prove you wrong.
You’re not something second-class or a mutt.”

“...you’re awfully nice for someone who’s known me for two whole days,” he chuckled weakly.

You nodded to Wendy and Peter who were a little ways up. “They know you though, and they trust
you. Let me say something as a former orphan myself, you’re probably their whole world, you and
your brother. Taking them in, caring for them, showing them a bit of love every day? Not anyone
can do that. They’re lucky they have you and they know it, that’s why they stayed.”

He looked up and you pressed on.

“Please let me have a chance to prove you wrong.”

He smiled but it was weak. “Knock yourself out, but don’t be too disappointed when you don’t see anything good.”

“Not possible,” you say even as you let your magic free to wash over him. You know you probably pressured him into it and felt a little bad about that, but you wanted him to have something good, something you could give him.

You magic mingled with his and you felt the texture of his soul like the first ray of sunlight won after a long hike up to the summit of some great peek. You were there, in the morning seeing something beautiful because you had persevered to the end. His soul felt like watching something rare and beautiful with a warm dog at your side; a great big shaggy Irish wolfhound. That dog… huh, it was a touch of patience to echo his perseverance.

“Purple,” you breath. “Your soul, I can feel it. Here,” and before he could protest you dropped the memory into his mind.

“Oh” he breathed, grabbing for your shoulder and leaning into you as the memory washed over him. He saw the sunrise, felt the satisfaction, knew the dog was there to share in the picture perfect scene. It was such a lovely picture and now he would be able to see it.

He stood stunned for a moment more and then you felt the first lilac colored tear on your shoulder.

“Papyrus?”

“…just…rus is fine,” he breathed, sounding thin and far off. He reached up and rubbed at his face, smearing the tears. “Sorry, I’m sorry ya had-oh, wow… that was it, huh?” He finally looked up and you could see the bright color of his eye lights shining strong in his sockets as he looked at you. His smile grew, wider and wider and more tears spilled. “Wow.”

“I told you, you were wrong.”

He rubbed at his face again and then cursed softly under his breath. “…you don’t know what you just did for me. I’ve been chasing a sense of that for years into different beds and bad habits and it was all for nothing. You and these kids…oh...”

You hesitated, but reached up and pat his shoulder. “I think you’re pretty cool. You have a big, beautiful soul. Thank you for letting me see it.”

Rus laughed and more tears came, but you gave him a few minutes to collect himself before calling for the kids and heading back.

Along the way his hand would brush up against yours and when you looked his way the same soft face would still be looking your way.

Blue had ‘friendship tacos’ for all the kids and you to eat and you were delighted to see Rus and Blue click. The two of them seemed like a good pair for each other, almost like Blue and his brother Stretch.

Black didn’t eat with you, but busied himself with renovations all through the morning and up until
lunch time when he excused himself to run a couple light errands. He didn’t come back until after you had all finished eating and were done cleaning up. You noticed him first standing awkwardly in the doorway but didn’t say anything about it as Rus was already up, greeting his brother and taking the bags of groceries to put away.

You spent a couple of hours with Wendy and other other kids, but it was clear that Wendy was more attached to you than Blue and you had a suspicion why. Wendy wanted to play dress up, where she put on different princess gowns and costumes and got complemented by you, followed by a very elaborate tea party where half of the guests were plotting passionate murder because of jilted feelings, cheating, and a cult that didn’t believe in flossing.

Little girls were weird and you loved it.

The two of you looked up when someone knocked on her door. You saw Black standing awkwardly with his arms folded behind his back.

“The king, the king,” Wendy cheered, making one of her dolls wave. “Did you come to play tea party with us?”

“N-NOT TODAY, UNFORTUNATELY AS RULING MONARCHS OFTEN ARE, I AM QUITE BUSY AND NEED TO SPEAK WITH Y/N FOR A FEW MINUTES BEFORE RETURNING HER TO YOU.”

You tugged the play tiara off and returned it to Wendy, promising to be back soon. You stood and followed Black out into the hallway, noticing how his eye lights stayed fixed on Wendy playing even after you were beside him.

“You had something to talk about?” you asked in a whisper.

He startled and then, realizing it was you who had said something, nodded. He waved you down the hall into a study that was richly furnished. He gestured to a chesterfield couch and some chairs set up across from it. You took the couch, crossing one leg over the other and stretching one arm back.

“THANK YOU FOR SEEING ME.”

“Of course. I haven’t forgotten this is still your home and you’ve been more than gracious in inviting us to stay as long as you have.”

Black fidgeted with his hands still crossed behind his back before nodding stiffly. He didn’t sit but stood across from you, heels together. “THEN LET ME PROCEED WITH MY APOLOGY.” He cleared his throat purposefully. “I ACTED IN WHAT I BELIEVED TO BE THE BEST INTERESTS OF THIS HOUSE AND MY…FAMILY. THAT RESULTED IN THE VIOLATION OF YOUR AGENCY AND PRIVACY. I WILL BEG YOUR PARDON FOR THESE GRIEVANCES.”

“Oh, it’s…wow, thank you. I don’t hold any ill feelings towards you for that, you know. I was a bit annoyed with you in the moment but I understand where you were coming from. I said as much at breakfast, but I know why you were so cautious. The kids are treasures and you were looking out for them.”

“I WAS!”

You nodded along. “Honestly, I wished I had someone care about me when I was that age. I don’t blame you so you can consider your apology accepted.”
“VERY GOOD, NOW I MAY PROCEED TO MAKE RECOMPENSE. PLEASE ACCEPT THIS AS A TOKEN OF MY GOOD WILL GOING FORWARD AS I SEEK TO MAKE AMENDS WITH YOU.”

He produced from the breast pocket of his uniform a small red box and offered it to you. You turned it over and froze at the large hunk of raw red stone attached to the end of a gold chain. It wasn’t polished or the refined sort of jewelry that you would see in an outlet, but it was something you would wear. You weren’t a fancy sort of person. You were too poor to have taste.

But you weren’t blind.

“Is this…for me?” you asked slowly.

“AS INDICATED, YES, THIS IS FOR YOU,” Black answered in his no nonsense tone of voice that only made you feel more out of place. It didn’t look like a fake stone but if it wasn’t that meant…

“Black, what am I looking at?” you asked in a voice that was two steps short of scared.

“A 16” ROPE CHAIN IN 14K GOLD ADORNED WITH AN ENCRUSTED RAW RUBY FROM MY PERSONAL COLLECTION,” he answered professionally.

“Why…though?”

“I CAN SEE YOU ARE ASKING YOUR QUESTION FROM THE STANDPOINT OF ONE OVERWHELMED WITH THE NATURE OF THE GIFT AND NOT OF IGNORANCE. NEVERTHELESS, LET ME CLARIFY ONCE MORE FOR YOUR SAKE THAT THIS IS MY TOKEN OF APOLOGY AND GOOD WILL. I SELECTED THIS STONE AS IT CAME THE CLOSEST TO COMPLEMENTING THE HUE OF YOUR SOUL COLOR, THOUGH I WILL ADMIT IT DOES NOT DO JUSTICE TO THE ORIGINAL. I AM CONFIDENT IN MY SELECTION. DOES IT NOT MEET YOUR STANDARDS FOR ACCEPTANCE?”

“Black, it’s—oh wow, it’s kinda too nice for someone like me. We, er, I told you about what I do right and all of that stuff about me? I can’t.”

“I FAIL TO SEE THE LOGIC IN YOUR REASONINGS. YOU ARE A HUMAN WHO LIVES AND FEELS AND THAT IN YOUR HAND IS A COLD HUNK OF ROCK THAT DOESN’T HELP ANYONE ON ITS OWN. YOU ARE NOT TOO NICE FOR SOMETHING THAT CAN FIT IN THE PALM OF MY HAND.”

“It—it just looks really expensive, even if you said you took it from your personal collection.”

Black scoffed. “MY BROTHER AND I ARE QUITE WELL OFF. IN ADDITIONS TO RARE GEMS AND THE GOLD WE BROUGHT WITH US OUT OF THE UNDERGROUND, WE ARE BOTH SKILLED TRADESMEN WHO COULD MAKE OUR FORTUNES SEVERAL TIMES OVER SHOULD IT EVER COME TO THAT. MONEY IS NOT A CONCERN YOU SHOULD HAVE WHEN ACCEPTING GIFTS FROM ME. UNDERSTAND I AM APOLOGIZING WITH THIS. PLEASE DO ME THE HONOR OF ACCEPTING IT.”

You didn’t want to. You really didn’t want to, but you also really, really wanted to. It was pretty and so well suited to your dark style. It was something you would never be able to afford on your own, and Black had put so much thought into it. Beyond just the price tag, he had picked the color for you because of what he saw of your soul and that…made you feel strangely attached to the item. You didn’t understand it, but it already felt like yours.
You thought back to the first days free, sitting on the bare floor of your studio apartment, with only a mattress in the middle of the floor, eating ramen out of the cup again while watching ‘TV’ news on your phone. You remembered thinking, ‘how long can I go without eating this time?’

Even before the days of freedom, you had lived humbly but that wasn’t so much of a choice as it was the decision of the Embassy. Comfort in excess made you weak so of course you had never been the sort of person to have nice things.

You…didn’t suit something so nice but you wished you did.

The silence must have stretched on for too long for Black. He stepped closer to you and at his proximity you looked up to see him staring down at you with an expression of conflict. He reached for your hand around the stone and covered your fingers with his.

“PLEASE, ACCEPT THIS. THINK OF IT AS A KINDNESS TO ME. I AM TRYING TO DO BETTER AND I KNOW YOUR FORGIVENESS IS NOT SOMETHING THAT ONE CAN PURCHASE.”

“I don’t, I’ve never had anything as nice as this,” you admit after a moment more. His hands stayed on yours.

“I SURMISED AS MUCH. I WOULD VENTURE TO GUESS YOU DID NOT HAVE ANYONE TO PROVIDE FOR YOUR WANTS OR INDULGE YOU GROWING UP IF YOU ARE HAVING THIS MUCH TROUBLE ACCEPTING SUCH A PITIFUL TRINKET.”

“It’s not a trinket,” you laughed. “This could pay my rent for a good ten months if not more.”

“WOULD YOU PREFER THAT?”

Your eye almost boggled out of its socket. “No! No, no, no, no I’m not a sugar baby no thank you,” you nervously laughed. You had a feeling things could get dangerous if you didn’t accept his gift, and it was a thoughtful gift too, so with a frustrated groan you tugged you hand closer to your chest. “But thank you for this. I’ll accept this, but this isn’t the reason I’m forgiving you.”

“I UNDERSTAND!”

He folded his arms behind his back and grinned, showing off the sharp ends of his teeth. You got the sense that he seemed far too pleased when he gave out gifts, which was probably the reason Wendy’s room was choked with new toys.

Sugar daddy type.

You could feel bad about accepting his gift in the morning, and what a blow it was to your integrity. You weren’t a bought girl, but hell if you didn’t like getting treated well for once in your damn life.

“AHEM, THEN IF THAT IS SORTED APPROPRIATELY, PLEASE INDULGE ME WITH A BIT MORE OF YOUR TIME. THERE IS A SITUATION I AM ILL EQUIPPED TO HANDLE THAT I SEEK YOUR ASSISTANCE WITH, CONDITIONALLY OF COURSE. I WOULD NOT WANT TO ADD ANY MORE STRESS TO YOUR LIFE THAN I ALREADY HAVE.”

“It sounds like you’re asking for a favor, Black.” You eyed him wearily and suddenly had a new wave of suspicion regarding the gift in your hands.

“IT IS! BUT IT IS NOT A FAVOR FOR MYSELF, THOUGH I AM THE ONE ASKING IT.”
YOU ARE…VERY GOOD WITH CHILDREN.” You relaxed a little, feeling more comfortable with the direction of this conversation. “AND I AM DOING MY PART TO LEARN, BUT I MUST ACKNOWLEDGE MY INADEQUACIES WHERE THEY EXIST. I HAVE DONE WHAT I CAN TO PROVIDE BUT STILL FIND MYSELF LACKING WHAT MONEY CAN NOT BUY.”

“Okay, and what is that?” you asked. He seemed more nervous, but it was hard to tell.

“MY CHARGE, WENDY, AS YOU HAVE NOTICED IS A VERY VIBRANT CHILD WITH TASTES. SHE HAS LATCHED ONTO YOU AND IT HAS NOT ESCAPED ME THAT SHE LACKS A FEMININE INFLUENCE WHILE HERE WITH MY BROTHER AND I. WE DO WHAT WE CAN BUT I CAN NOT IGNORE THE BENEFIT WE WOULD BE FORGOING IF WE DIDN’T …INVITE YOU TO STAY WITH US MORE LONG TERM.”

You blinked and felt how wide your eyes went. “You mean live with you?!”

“For the children, YES!”

“For the kids?”

“YES, FOR THE KIDS. THEY WOULD BENEFIT MORE FROM HAVING YOU HERE, BUT THEY WOULD NOT BE THE ONLY ONES. MAYBE THEN PAPYRUS WOULD BE SATISFIED BY HAVING SOMEONE HE COULD SOCIALIZE WITH.”

Did he miss the part where you had told him about being raised to kill monsters? Or the part where you had confessed to being little better than ‘on the run’ from a nebulous shadow organization operating under the umbrella of a large scale facility? He wanted you to nanny knowing you could make fire with your hands?

Yeah, you thought you were pretty decent with kids thanks to experience, but there was a lot more to being a nanny figure than just…being liked by the kids. What about the risks and dangers you brought into their home? You didn’t want to stay long term with them in case Hightower and the Embassy found out where you were, or Raven and that Winn guy.

“You’re flattering me here, Black, but I don’t think I would be the best person for the job. There are plenty of others more suited to that line of work and I know Pa-er, Rus knows how to use the internet to put in an add for exactly what you want.”

“What I want is exactly you. I don’t trust anyone else.”

“I mean, okay, I see your point there Mr. Paranoia, but I’m more risk than worth it. I still have a fugitive to track down and get answers out of, and… other things.”

“And how long will that take you?”

“No way of knowing that. Weeks, months, years? I’ve been on the road with the others nearly two months already and only had one…sorta disastrous encounter.” You want to rub at where your eye used to be, but the lid is always heavy and hard to lift without a concentrated effort. You know rubbing wouldn’t help it any. You stop your hand before it can get more than halfway to your face and make it a fist instead.

“And what would it take for you to be finished and free?” he asked, looking like he was ready to take anything but ‘no’ for an answer. You got the sense he wasn’t used to being denied.
Still, it was a good question. You lived too much of your life day by day. What would it look like to finally be done with this chapter?

First, you would have to find Raven again and squeeze out of him the truth. You didn’t believe Hightower’s story anymore, and you felt terrible about what that meant. You had no idea what your brother was doing by bringing boss monsters over from their own dimensions. Whatever his answer was, it would change your plans for what to do next.

Would it be something you could walk away from so easily?

You doubted it.

“I don’t know,” you answered honestly. “It’s the nature of the job. I don’t know enough right now to give you an answer. I’m sorry I can’t be more clear with you, but this is all I can say.”

“I WILL RESPECT THE HONESTY OF THAT ANSWER. LIFE IS TERRIBLY UNPREDICTABLE AND WE DO WHAT WE CAN DAY BY DAY TO GET AHEAD WHILE WE CAN. FOR MYSELF, I WILL LEAVE MY OFFER ON THE TABLE FOR AS LONG AS IT NEED BE THERE FOR. SHOULD YOU FIND YOURSELF FREE AND IN NEED OF STABLE EMPLOYMENT WITH GENEROUS BENEFITS,-” He stopped suddenly and you watched as his eye sockets widened before he reached into his uniform to retrieve a sleek smartphone. “YOU MAY CONTACT ME. OR NOT! I AM ALSO AVAILABLE FOR COUNSEL ON A VARIETY OF TOPICS.”

“Or you know, just to talk,” you joked, taking his phone and adding your new number before handing the phone back over to him. “If you text that number I’ll save it in my phone and know it’s you.”

“THAT! IS VERY GOOD.”

He turned the phone around and you were amazed by how fast he was at typing out a reply. A moment later he sent off the message and it buzzed in your pocket. You laughed when you saw how long it was. Black had added all his titles and then a greeting that was just as long.

“That’s perfect, I’ll know it’s you now.”

You shot back a quick reply before adding his contact info into your phone. You watched as the message sent and resulted in a heartbeat sounding vibration. Black stiffly glanced down at his phone but read the emoji heavy message before sighing and pocketing the device.

“THAT WILL SUFFICE, HUMAN. OUR BUSINESS IS CONCLUDED.”

“Cool, and hey, if you have any questions about kid stuff or just want someone to vent to, cause I know it can get to be a bit much at times, feel free to drop me a line.” You stood with a shrug and saw yourself out, leaving before Black could form a reply.

Wendy was having her tea party still and you found yourself entertained until the evening when Blue called for you. There was a car on the road and he recognized the person driving it. You ran down to make it outside in time to see Papyrus pull his cherry red convertible into the car lot and jump out, posing for the flare of it. Sans and Stretch ambled out next, looking like the ride had been cramped.

You didn’t wait for words but launched yourself at Papyrus first, laughing as he spun you until Stretch reached for you, pulling you free from one hug and into another. Then you stumbled free to see Sans watching you, a small sort of privet smile on his face. He didn’t expect the hug, if his
shock was any indicator, but you didn’t care. He still got one.

All the boys did.

“Hey, where are Red and Edge?” you asked.

Sans rubbed at the back of his skull, trying to fight the blush of color high on his cheeks. “They said something about a short detour and we figured with Papyrus driving we’d beat them here by a lot. They should be right behind us.”

That was good enough for you. You turned around to introduce the boys to Black and Russ before the rest of the kids introduced themselves and were off running to the convertible. Papyrus was more than happy to show it off and let the kids play in it while he held the keys behind his back.

Rus seemed nervous but excited to see so many new faces and you were proud of him. Black was prickly but Stretch navigated the smaller skeleton supremely well, somehow able to read Black’s intentions better than Black himself.

The meet melted into dinner and before you could worry about it, an hour had passed. It grew darker out and Papyrus assured you that Edge and Red would be along in no time, but when another two hours came and went you slipped away to have a moment to yourself.

In the dark of the closet you closed your eyes and pulled up your map in your mind, using magic. It was small and zoomed in to show where all the Sans and Papyrus inside the house were.

You didn’t need that.

You zoomed out and saw more and more of the world. Papyrus Edge and Sans Red didn’t show up anywhere close to the farmhouse. You almost panicked but kept your cool with a stick of rock candy that grounded you even if there wasn’t any magic to make your mouth taste sour.

“Come on boys,” you said to yourself like it was a prayer.

You kept zooming out and out and then you stopped. The two of them showed up, right on top of themselves. They were together and somewhere, maybe an hour away, maybe less. If your memory was good enough it looked like they were stopped at a gas station outlet. Maybe for gas, maybe for food?

If they were in trouble they would have called, right?

You were almost ready to dismiss the map and rejoin the others when a third dot blinked into existence, lasting only a second before it blinked out. It wasn’t a dot with a name you could read. The symbols vibrated wildly and seemed to scream at you. The same symbols that came before Winn’s arrival….

You gut was a pit of fear as your ruined eye socket throbbed.

There was a reason neither Edge nor Red had made it up to the farmhouse.

You risked it, dialing Edge’s phone only for it to go straight to voicemail with a message he had recorded recently. You tried Red next and the ring tones echoed, seeming to last forever. You thought you were going to get a voicemail message too, but then the phone picked up.
It wasn’t Red who answered it.

Chapter End Notes

There were a lot of really fun moments that I enjoyed writing. I can't write a slow burn to save my life and we're already over 120K into it so might as well make these new additions quick burns. :)

I'm really tired and really late. It's only 1:30PM here but I need to sleep since I've been up since 3AM for an event and I'm finally finished. Enjoy while I nap!
The call hadn’t lasted longer than two minutes, the screen said as much, but it took you twice as long to find your legs again and force yourself out of the closet. Like an old routine you started to move, heading towards the door to do what it was you knew you needed to do, but then you heard the voices.

In the kitchen someone had told a terrible joke and half the room laughed for it while the other half screamed in frustration from it. The sound was like a splash of water and suddenly you remember that you’re not alone. You could hear them and see them from where you stood, your friends. The last thing you wanted to do was lean on someone else, it felt too much like cheating, but you knew better. You weren’t alone.

You force your feet to move and re-enter the room. Sans hangs back, happy to be a lazy wallflower while his brother and some of the others took center stage. He looked your way before you were even at his side but it was only when you reached for his arm that he startled.

“Hey, can I talk to you?” you whisper, nodding to the hallway.

San’s eye lights wavered in their socks as he stared back at you, looking baffled. But he didn’t refuse you. Instead he set aside his drink and followed you out into the dimly lit hallway where you pulled out your phone and showed off your call history.

“Ya called Red and Edge?” he guessed.

“I called but I didn’t speak with either of them. There was someone else, someone who spoke in hands,” you said, keeping your voice low.

Sans’ eye lights went out but you grabbed for his arm to help ground him. He didn’t flinch at the contact but slowly reached up to grab your arm back. “how’d ya know it was in hands?” he asked, forgetting to subtract his magic from his voice.

“It’s what the guy was speaking before he ripped out my damn eye. I wouldn’t make that mistake.”

“-no, how did ya know what the language was called?”

“That…isn’t that what you call it?”

Sans’s eye lights were pinpricks and you knew he was waiting for your answer. Another question wouldn’t get him to let it go.

“Hightower taught us to recognize it. The other kids called it Black Speech because of how wrong the magic made all the words sound, like the evil language from Lord of the Rings. It just always creped us out when we heard it. It’s-”

“Where did you hear it?”

You didn’t like the way his question brought back the bad memories but you didn’t let that show on your face. If you never had to suffer Hightower’s trainings, even in memory, it would be too
soon.

“I can give you short and sweet answers now or I can talk to you at length about this in all the detail you want, but right now there are more important things to bring up.” You shake your phone again. “Red and Edge. Someone else answered their phone and when I checked for them on the map—”

“was it that winn guy?”

“I can’t be sure. It’s hard for me to read the language when the symbols won’t stay still. But the voice on the other end of the line sounded different. I don’t think it’s the same guy, but he still gave me the creeps.”

“what did they say?”

“Just to come and hurry because my friends weren’t going anywhere. I asked if they were hurt and the voice said they were fine, just a little stuck. When I asked to speak to them to confirm the guy’s story he just laughed at me, shook up my head, and said I already knew. Then the bastard hung up on me.”

“Sounds like a bastard. Shit, none of that sounds good,” Sans said, finally remembering to remove the magic from his words while around you.

“No duh.”

Sans glanced back into the kitchen and then up at you. “Why do I have the feeling this bastard doesn’t want you bringing the calvary?”

“The voice said come alone or bring a friend, but too many more would ruin the party.”

“And you’re taking who?” Sans asked, still watching the others in the kitchen through the hallway.

“You.”

He startled and turned back to face you, eyes wide for not the first time since your conversation started. This time there was a blush to go along with them. “what? wh-what did you say?”

“It’s why I tugged you out here and explained it all to you. I mean, yeah we should let the others know where we’re going and what happened, but you would be the most obvious choice, right?” you say.

“But, why me?”

“You and Stretch are the only two that can shortcut right now, with Red MIA. And between the two of you I know your abilities.”

“you know they’re shit compared to yours and Hand-Job made a mess of you on the floor last time so, ergo, you’re better off with Stretch or Paps or even Blue.”

“If you wanna be self-deprecating that’s cool, but cut it out for right now because that doesn’t help. You know, objectively, you have more magic than Stretch.”

“He has more hp.”

“That doesn’t matter if he never gets hit. I tired you out last time, but I also was pretty lame at landing anything on your bony coccyx. You’ll be perfect for this and I want you. Do you think I
would make a mistake about something so important?"

“-uh, if you’re picking me then maybe.”

“Sans,” you say, grabbing both of his elbows. “Shut up and listen to me. You’re not perfect and yeah, you’ve made some mistakes in the past, but you don’t get to let that keep you from doing what you need to do next. I need you for this. I can’t do this alone. I want you to help me and I need you at your best. Don’t try to support me while shooting yourself in the foot, ‘cause I’ll fall apart with you.”

Sans was stiff in your arms, rendered petrified by your touch. But then he nodded and the pin pricks of his eyes came back and the blush on his face spread free across his skull. He swallowed and nodded again, like the first head shake hadn’t been enough to free him from his stunned state.

“…okay,” he finally said, voice little better than a whisper as the words came out soft and thin.

“You’re a tough bastard and I know I’m a badass all on my own, but you’re nothing to sniff at. Our chances are best this way,” you say again, letting him go and standing back.

You mean every word.

Sans was stronger than his brother and the under swap brothers. Maybe Stretch could give him a run for his money, but Sans was war weary from more than one lifetime of being the underground’s Judge, Jury, and Executioner in the shadows. And for all the magic and strength you’ve seen from him so far, you know that’s not the whole of it. There was something in Sans that held him back, something you took advantage of during your fight and spar, but it was something he would need to shed for the sake of your mission.

“We should tell the others,” you say.

Sans agrees with you but neither of you move from your spot before Stretch eventually appears in the doorway, arms crossed expression carefully neutral.

“Something to share with the class?” Stretch asks.

“Sans and I are going to pick up Red and Edge,” you say first. “We should probably tell Blue and Papyrus about it too, can you call them out?”

But like the sound of their names was a magic all on its own, Blue and Papyrus appear in the doorway right behind Stretch. Further back in the room your hear Black and Russ corralling the kids and leading them off to bed.

“Something to say?” Papyrus echos.

“Something held Red and Edge so we’re going to go and pick them up real quick. We’ll be back in a couple hours, maybe a bit longer,” Sans explains nonchalantly. His blank face is equally deceiving.

“It…might take longer than that. They’re forty five minutes out but when I called Red someone else answered his phone and told me to come pick them up with one other person. I don’t know who they are, but we’re going to be careful.”

“One other person?” Blue echoed, eyes wide with hurt. “O-oh, I guess it-it would make sense…”

“I could go,” Stretch interjected. “I have the same abilities as Sans. ‘I can cut us out of there if
things get too dicey.”

“You could…” Sans let his words trail off before his eye lights went purposefully to your frame, meaning crystal clear enough to make Stretch bristle.

“Stay here with Blue, you’ve been apart for a while. Sans has some experience in these sorts of things so we’ll try to be as fast as possible,” you say, going to spare some of Stretch’s feelings.

“You should be as safe as possible,” Papyrus gently corrects you. He steps out, past Stretch and Blue until he is in front of you and leans down to brush a skeleton kiss, all teeth and no lips, to your hairline. “And come back soon. You’ve been gone too long.”

Blue swallowed but nodded and flashed a thumbs up. “I’ll watch things on this end. With me on the job, this house couldn’t be safer!”

“I know you’ll do excellent,” you chuckle with fondness at Blue’s cool guy pose. Your eyes turn to Stretch who looked pointedly away. “Stretch?”

“…Text us your location on the map apps so we know where you are. I can probably shortcut close enough if it’s by the road we came up if you need me.”

He still looks turned off by the plan but you’ll take what you can get. You pull all three of them into a hug and nuzzle the sides of their skulls before leaving with Sans.

You don your riding gear and pass off the extra to Sans who sits behind you, touching your sides gingerly as you rev the engine.

“Hold on a bit tighter than that, OG, I’m gonna try and save us some time.”

“O-OG?” he choked.

“Careful, it’s dark out!” Papyrus called from the porch.

You laugh and your one good eye flashes with red white light as magic illuminates the halo of color surrounding your pupil. The dark won’t be a problem for you.

Sans found out pretty quickly that his tentative clutches at your sides weren’t going to cut it for him if he wanted to stay on, so with a quick apology he wrapped both arms around your waist and leaned into your back, turning when you turned down the winding roads.

You pulled up the map in your mind intermittently to check and see if Red and Edge were still where they had been, and sometimes the monster with a name written with hands was there and sometimes they weren’t. You could only check a handful of times when the road went straight and empty because you didn’t want to risk splitting your focus so much from what you saw in your head and what you saw with your eyes.

You were almost halfway there when Sans spoke up.

“You think you can help me fill-in the blanks now?”

“Now?” you called back, knowing you had to shout to be heard. The wind tore at your frame and with your helmet in place you could scarcely hear Sans who was right next to you. It wasn’t the best time to have a heart to heart.

Sans grumbled but seemed to consider this and nodded. You could feel the action as his head
brushed against your back.

“First chance I get, I promise,” you shout back. “I won’t run away from a talk.”

“Didn’t think you the type,” he chuckled.

You weren’t sure if that was supposed to be a joke, but you were satisfied with the amicable atmosphere between the two of you so you let it go.

You leaned more into the bike and dared to accelerate even more. In the dark it was like you were eating up the road, consuming one yellow stripe after stripe all the way down until the bends came again, forcing you to slow enough to take them without tilting. You passed a farm where the cows and pigs had been put into their outdoor pens to sleep, visible from the road.

“Hey,” Sans called into your back.

“Yeah?”

“What do you call a pig that does karate?”

You snickered at the familiar pun but asked anyway. “What?”

“Pork Chop.”

The road was empty the closer you got and you wondered if that was because of the late hour or because of how backwards the road was in the first place. Closer to the town of blackberry there were plenty of houses left alone and empty. You saw buildings boarded up and left abandoned to crawling weeds and decay. The only things that seemed to survive were the farms and food distributors.

Eventually the road split off and you had to slow to follow it to where Red and Edge were. Like so many of the buildings you had passed, it looked empty and derelict. It might have been a gas station from the looks of it, but the pumps had been pulled out long ago and only the shack of a convenience store remained.

“Don’t look like they went out of their way to end up here,” you said, parking the bike and cutting the engine. On second thought you left the keys in the ignition, one turn away from reviving the bike in a hasty getaway should it come to that.

“Yeah, the poor place is just a skeleton of its former self,” Sans joked.

You rolled your eyes at his joke and pulled free your helmet, leaving it behind.

The door had been left open, but you still kicked it in to make sure there wasn’t anything connected to it or triggered by the space around it. You stepped in tentatively and glanced around.

“Red! Edge!” you called.

There were several different black metal aisles turned over and several more pushed back to block one’s view of the back of the store. You felt the hair on the back of your neck stand up at the obvious set up. You would either have to approach the back from one of two sides and you weren’t sure which one would prove advantageous. What if one side was trapped? What if both sides were trapped?

“Here,” Sans said, stepping forward.
The aisles lit up with blue magic and were dragged apart and moved to the walls, clearing out the space in front of you.

At the back of the store where the freezer section used to be, a figure in a gray hoodie and matching sweats sat, head bent, arms resting on his knees. On either side of him Red and Edge stood frozen with magic coloring their figures. Their faces were caught mid expression, arms extended enough to make you guess they had been in the middle of fighting back.

“Good of you to join us, it was getting too quiet.”

You almost stagger but catch yourself. You’re not going to be unsettled by another monster’s voice a second time.

“What did you do to them?” you hissed, summoning enough magic to burn your nails black and let the light of a flame flicker from underneath the lashes of your empty socket.

“I hit pause. They didn’t look like they wanted to talk.”

The figure lifted his head and you saw the details of his skull. He was another skeleton but he was far more human looking than any of the Sans or Papyrus iterations.

He... wasn’t the same guy as last time.

“You’re not Winn,” you say, keeping your magic ready. “What would you want to talk about?”

“I’m not going to fight you, and when I’m done these two won’t even know what they missed. No harm done.” He answered breezily.

“So talk, bogeyman.”

“You can call me Dee. I wouldn’t expect you to know my name now,” he said, waving his skeletal hand in front of his face as if waving away the slight.

Winn and Dee, why does this sound like something you should know?

“Start with explaining what you want, Dee.”

“Well, I don’t want to hurt you. Let’s start there. I hadn’t actually been planning on talking with you so soon but your friend here was sticking his metaphorical nose into our business,” Dee said, nodding to Red.

“Business? What’s that?” you snapped.

“Red was trying to figure out why the void felt different here as opposed to in his world,” Sans explained. “I don’t know what he was doing about that though.”

“Not what he should have been doing,” Dee laughed.

“That doesn’t sound anything like why your friend had to pull my eye out so roughly a few weeks back,” you groused. “Or what you really wanted.”

“The eye thing wasn’t my call but it only benefited you to have the tracker removed. You’re welcome.”

You let the flames from your empty socket push the lid open and flare out, angry and hot off your
“You were expecting a thank you for that? I was blind for a week after that trauma.”

“Yes, he was quite indelicate about that. Believe me, he got an earful for his actions.”

Sans snickered behind you but you didn’t feel like laughing for such a pathetic joke.

“Alright, so far you have said a grand total of zero things that matter enough to keep me from going ape ship on your boney ass this time around. You’re going to let my friends go now and you’re going to tell me what you, your buddies, and my brother are all working to pull off.”

Dee looked surprised but sat up and leaned back, letting his arms drag back over his legs, like they were too heavy to pick up. “I’m not your enemy, Y/N.”

“But I can make you mine.” You snapped your fingers and a flicker of flame danced into life just above your fingertips. Behind you San’s bones materialized in a hypnotic pattern that was just as threatening.

Dee looked from you to Sans who stood at your side and then back over at the Underfell brothers before sighing. Like it was some great chore he nodded. “Fine, if you are so inclined to set me up as your enemy I won’t doubt you. I’m sure those people fed you a story about Raven’s ambitions, wanting to find monsters he can make an enemy out of and make those years of training worth it? Not true.”

“So what is it?” Sans asked, stepping forward.

“Have you noticed any resets lately?” Dee asked, looking pointedly to Sans before cutting his eye lights your way.

“Not since we was topside,” Sans admitted.

“You ever wonder why that is? Or maybe wonder what caused the resets in the first place? I know you have your theories and your machines. None of them have worked out for you so far.”

Sans was quiet. You weren’t sure what Dee meant about the machines or what he wanted Sans to say. Information about resets was supposed to be top secret stuff. Only a handful of the kids had figured out how to pull one off in theory and even then…

“You can’t!”

Sans and Dee both turned to look at you after your exclamation. You almost flushed when you realized how loud you had accidentally shouted.

“No, the resets. They can’t happen anymore. This reality is too heavy to flip.”

Sans stared up at you with wide eye sockets and tiny pin pricks for eye lights. It made you want to fidget until his attention was off of you. “Whatcha mean by that?”

“A reset is when a period of time is reversed, and it’s like when you’re baking and you roll out the dough far enough, and then you take the end and fold it back until it becomes one piece you have to roll out again.”

“That’s a terrible analogy,” Dee laughed, sounding condescending. “Time is a bit of dough that never runs out?”
“Not, literally of course,” you sighed.

“I know what a reset is, kid,” Sans chuckled, looking down and rubbing at the back of his skull. “I remember all of them.”

“You… remember?” You glanced back at a smirking Dee and then back at your bashful friend. “You remember the resets? Wait, which ones? How could that be? That doesn’t make sense.”

“**The actual science of it is surprisingly straightforward and not at all like baking a cake. Time resets itself, but so does the rest of the world apart from an anchor that always has to remember in order for that reset to be true.**” Dee smiled pointedly at Sans. “But, what were to happen if a world had more than one anchor in it? Would a reset be twice as easy or twice as difficult? Turns out, the more anchors you have the more impossible a reset becomes.”

“That’s why it’s just us and the Grillbys that are getting nabbed,” Sans said, voice low enough that you almost didn’t catch it.

In addition to the brothers you had already met, there were reports of two other Grillby characters getting registered and setting up shop in the modern world. Someone online had claimed the two newest locations were the start of a chain. At some point you would have to touch base with your Grillby and then visit the other two, just to make sure they were settling in okay and not too messed up with the Embassy.

“That’s why you’ve been pulling boss monsters over to this world?” you scoffed. “What the hell is that all for?”

“**What? You miss your resets?**”

“No, I—it’s not like that was something I could even do.”

But Raven could.

“Then what is the problem? We’re all against the resets, so shouldn’t we be friends?” Dee asked.

“Why’d ya have to be so cryptic about it, buddy?” Sans asked. “You didn’t want Hightower knowing that was what you were after? What’s that mean for him?”

“He benefits from resets.”

You feel your gut bottom out and it was almost like a memory was triggered, but it was only the sensation of that place, the deep pit in the basement of the Embassy that all the kids got dropped into… you felt cold and panicked even though the harness wasn’t on you and the air was clean and clear enough to mean you weren’t under hundreds of feet of rock.

“How does a guy like that benefit?” Sans all but growled. His voice worked to bring you back, grounding you in the present.

“Us.”

Sans turned at the sound of your voice and saw the way you face, like your voice, had drained to something paler. “Kid?”

“**Us**, that’s how they make us, kids like me and Raven and all the others from the Embassy. I-it’s
what I said I would tell you about later. It’s void magic and then it’s a reset and then it’s…us.”

You explained as best as you could even though it makes your chest hurt and your heart race. You’re dancing on the edge of a knife and one wrong slip will send you panicking back into old nightmares. But you’re determined not to fall this time around.

“When we come back from the reset we can use magic, but I’ve only ever known one person who was able to use that sort of magic outside of the void or the underground and it nearly kills him each time he tries it. I’m positive right now he can’t even reset the world if he tried,” you say.

Dee huffed. “Raven hasn’t been able to reset anything in years, and he’s tried. It’s nearly the reason he took off running in the first place.”

“Hightower wants the kid to reset things?” Sans guessed, sounding panicked.

Dee smiled like the cat that got the cream and you guessed this was because he was about to tell you something new or shocking. He was so smug about it too. “That guy is the other human anchor. If this world reset he’d be able to manipulate things to his favor.”

“If he went back to the beginning there would be a lot there to manipulate,” Sans said.

Your brain goes dizzy with the implications and you’re out of sour candies to help you stay in the moment. Before you realize you’re doing it you reach out for Sans’ hand and he doesn’t shake you off when you grab it. Instead you feel his fingers tighten their hold around yours.

“He’d be able to have the war he wanted,” you breathed out loud.

You remembered every word of twisted rhetoric, and every instance of indoctrination that took years of therapy to get through. Hightower had been thirsting for blood for literal years and the peace that came out of the underground took that from him. For as calm and collaborative as he looked on the outside, you knew that man a little better.

“Maybe. Think about this theory for a spell; He’d be able to send his own kid in through the crack in the mountain he missed and manipulate the whole story all over again. Instead of Frisk it’d be FourD or ThreeM or one of the others. And as much as Raven seemed to like the idea of that, he couldn’t go along with it in the end. He couldn’t be the villain.”

Really? Was that true? Could you believe what this person was telling you? It almost sounded too good to be true. It felt right and it seemed to make sense, but the ideas all made you dizzy and the mention of resents just threw you off.

“So what’s that leave the bastard with now? You know what his new plan is?” Sans asked, referring to Hightower as the bastard.

Dee shrugged, arms still mostly limp. “He wants Raven, we’ll keep Raven out of his hands. That’s it for now. Now that you’re not bugged maybe we’ll touch base with you for when things change.”

“When things change?” you echo.

Dee smiled and it was so human looking for a moment you forgot he was a monster. He was far more human looking and feeling than the other skeletons, and that wasn’t a negative or positive issue, it was just weird.

“For now, have yourself a break. You’ve earned it,” Dee said.
Comically he lifted both of his heels up off the floor and in reaction, both Red and Edge fell forward, the magic holding them in place gone. Dee tipped back into the cooler but when he slipped down it was into one of his portals and not the bottom of the broken cooling unit.

“Shit!” Red cursed, stumbling as he turned on his heel, searching the room for where his opponent had gone. He stopped when he saw you and Sans.

Edge exclaimed from behind you, calling your name, then he was rushing up and grabbing you by your shoulders. You’re pulled off your feet and reach out to wrap your arms around his shoulders to keep from falling. His whole frame is shaking and it’s bad enough to make you worry.

“Hey, Edge, hey, you okay there?” you call to him, finding the back of his skull and stroking it fondly. “It’s all good here, you’re safe, you’re okay. We’re all okay here.”

“You-whatcha doing here sweetheart?” Red sighed, deflating with relief as he approached you and his brother. He spared a single nod Sans’ way in greeting, which Sans returned.

“We came for you guys. You got stuck.”

Edge calmed enough to let you down but he kept his arms around you, taking his time to examine you with eye lights bright with worry. “We were stopped by someone who looked like the one who attacked you. He was after Red.”

“You?” Sans echoed, sounding surprised. “What did ya do this time?”

Red growled in irritation. “Don’t make it sound like that. I didn’t do nothing. Freak said I was messing around with void magic is all.”

“You were,” Sans laughed.

Red rolled his eye lights. “I was using it.”

“Maybe we can all talk about this a little later, like when we’re not all dead on our feet in the middle of the night,” you interrupt, already sensing the verbal spar that’s brewing between the two Sans.

Edge moved one of his hands to your face and you let him fret. You didn’t miss the way his hands went awkwardly still when they got close to the scars over your empty socket. The flames were gone and the lid was closed behind a heavy curl of hair, but that accident was one he wouldn’t forget so easily.

“I’m fine,” you whisper into the space between you two, touching his hand.

He was staring at your ruined eye and it took another shake to make him look away.

“Hey bro, you okay there?” Red called out.

Edge just glared.

“It looks like we’re all a little tired. You guys too,” Sans said, rubbing with the base of his palm under his eye socket. When he looked up he caught your eye and deflated even more. “I…guess we can talk about all this in the morning.”

“It’d be better to have the others present too,” you agreed, trying to hide how relieved you were to put off that conversation Sans had been so adamant about having. Explaining how you knew how
to read Hands, the pit at the base of the Embassy, and all the resets…you were going to get a headache just trying to sort it all out.

“You look tired,” Edge agreed.

“Then that’s that,” Red cheered, clapping his hands to draw attention his way as he turned and headed towards the exit.

It was a bit of a mess since only Sans could shortcut back to the house. He went back first with Red and then popped back a handful of minutes later to take Edge. When he came back the third time you stopped him from making one more jump.

“You’re tired and I have a bike. I’ll make it the old fashioned way,” you said.

Sans looked you over, seeing the helmet tucked under your arm and the jacket zipped all the way up. “I ain’t gonna just leave you,” he panted.

You shrugged and mounted the bike. “Then hop on. I didn’t mind the extra body.”

And that’s how the two of you made it back to the farm house, nearly an hour later and well after everyone else had gone to bed. Along the way you weaved your way up the winding roads, under a sparkling sky with a barely there moon. At one point he nudged you and gestured upwards, towards the stars.

“Hey, you see those there?”

“Yeah,” you answered.

“That there…it’s the biggest waist of space in the sky, Orion’s Belt.”

You snorted and ducked your face, keeping your eyes on the road. “That’s a terrible joke, Sans, only three stars.”

You raced up the road as Sans laughs behind you so hard you can feel it through your jacket.

Chapter End Notes

I was told that after this there is a need for some plot-mandated fluff for the next few chapters at least even though there was no throw down. Reader was reading to go, at least.

A new skeleton appears—or is he really a skeleton? We've got Winn and now this guy calling himself Dee. Who/what could they possibly be, take your best guess. :)

Also, what ya'll in the mood for, skeleton-wise? Who needs more attention? Who you wanna see? Who is your favorite?
In the morning you woke and almost panicked, not realizing where you were until the tiny body curled up to your stomach stirred. You glanced down, saw Wendy, and remembered how last night ended.

When you had stumbled back in with Sans you realized too late that all the spare bedrooms were taken up and shared by the new guests. Your old room was where Red and Edge were staying. You thought about sneaking into Blue’s room again, sure that Stretch wouldn’t have minded sharing their already shared bed with you. At least you had your clothes with you this time, so you could dress for sleeping.

Your plans fell apart the moment you heard the stairs creak and saw the tiny human girl at the top of them. She grabbed for you, refusing to be separated, and you hummed her to sleep with another song and fell asleep in her bed. You hadn’t remembered kicking your shoes off or pulling the covers up over both of you, but you found yourself comfortably tucked into the oversized bed with too many blankets and pillows for a girl as tiny as Wendy.

“Morning?” her voice startled you.

You glanced down and saw her awake and staring up at you with bright, clear eyes that matched her mischievous grin.

“Do you have problems falling asleep or am I just special?” you joked booping her on the nose.

“Special!” Wendy laughed. “But sometimes I sneak into Blackberry’s room and he puts me to sleep cause he’s nice and he always wakes up for me.”

“That sounds like him,” you laugh before turning over and stretching out. It’s not an early morning anymore, but it’s early enough considering how the house isn’t as loud as you know it can be with children wild and awake for the mornings.

Wendy follows you as much as she can, even insisting on picking out your clothes for you so that you can pick out something for her to wear. You don’t have any trouble finding something. The only issue you ran into was in picking something out of the many items stuffed into her closet.

‘Did Black buy the whole store to put in here?’

“Is this all you have?” Wendy cried.

“It is now,” you admitted, suddenly bashful.

Wendy had pulled all your things out and scattered them across the floor. Everything was almost the same dark color and was long enough to cover you from wrist and ankle to neck. Maybe there was a thrift store you could restock at nearby, seeing as how it was unlikely you were ever going to get back to your apartment for the rest of your things.

“Well, it’s more than what I used to have…” Wendy sighed. “But there isn’t anything pretty here. What colors do you like? What about your dresses?”
“I…don’t have any of those. I was working a lot and dresses would be too hard to work in.”

“You should just be a princess like me and let Mr. Blackberry take care of you. Then he’ll buy you all the dresses you want even if you tell him you have enough and that you really don’t want anymore because then he thinks you’re just being modesto.”

“Modesto?”

“Yeah, like you are nice about it and aren’t asking for everything in the store.”

“Oh, you mean modest. Wow, where did you hear that word? Your vocabulary is pretty impressive for such a young princess.”

“Yeah, I’m pretty smart for a princess,” she replied absently, like it was no big deal. She went back to your duffle and attacked the side pockets, looking for anything else.

“What are you looking for this time?” you laughed.

“What about your make up? What about your earrings? Wh-what about the girly things! Ugh, even when I was a runaway I still knew how to accessorize.”

“A lot of my stuff got left behind when I left home for work,” you admit with a note of regret, even if you thought her priorities were hilarious.

You didn’t have a lot to your name, but it was a little sad to think of it all as being lost now that going home wasn’t in the cards for you. You weren’t stupid. You knew you needed to stay low. Hightower probably had someone on your house or at least cameras trained to watch for your return. Going back for your books and movies and favorite pillows wouldn’t be…feasible.

You startle when you feel Wendy’s hand on your arm. She was starting up at you with a worried look. “Did you leave something important behind? One time I left my lucky charm bracelet, the one with all the blue whales on it, and I cried to Peter about it so much but Tron went back and found it for me ‘cause he said important things are important and, and, and when you don’t have a lot you need to protect what you do have.”

You chuckle at her logic. “That sounds like some pretty good advice. Tron is a smart kid, isn’t he?”

Wendy beamed and nodded along, agreeing with you.

You don’t take much longer to dress in dark colors that cover you from ankle to wrist. Among your things the necklace Black gave you sat nestled in its red box. You hesitate over it, knowing it’s too nice and too fine a thing for someone as shabby as you, but when Wendy sees it in the box she loudly insists that you have to wear it. You compromise by stuffing it into your shirt so that it rests right above your heart, tucked between your breasts.

You amble into the kitchen with Wendy and hear the chaos before you see it. Sans, Red, and Edge are all still asleep and you don’t doubt they’ll be out cold for a bit longer, all things considered. Blue and Papyrus sat next to each other, excited to talk with Rus who nervously navigated the super charged conversation while Stretch mutely drank his coffee next to Black. Phil ate from Rus’ lap while Peter bounced in his seat, listening to Papyrus and Blue with rapt attention. At the counter, Tron was manning the iron waffle maker, looking as tired as you felt.

You and Wendy both offered your good mornings while the others in the room responded with
similar greetings. Stretch perked up a bit at the sight of you while Black didn’t move other than to cast his eye light your way and pin them on you like magnets on metal.

“Hey, sweetie,” you whispered from behind Tron, offering to take over. “Did you get your waffles yet?”

When he shakes his head through another yawn you nudge him aside without issue. He moves in time for the iron to beep, letting you know the waffle is ready. You flip it free and plate it for the oldest boy to take to the table. He ends up sitting next to Black across from Stretch and when you glance back you almost laugh at how Stretch and Tron look so much alike with their slouched posture and sleepy stare.

You make waffles for you and Wendy, chatting amicably with the rest of the room until you take your seat and are able to eat.

“I TRUST YOUR EVENING EXTRACTIONS WERE FRUITFUL,” Black said, folding back his newspaper and pretending not to notice you.

“yes, you said we have two new guests?” Rus echoed.

“Red and Edge,” Blue explained pointing at you. “They were so late last night they had to find them and bring them here.”

“Yup, they’ll be out for a while longer,” you add. “They’re all magically exhausted.”

“But you’re not?” Papyrus asks, watching you worriedly.

You cracked a small smile, suspecting it to be crooked by the way it stretches on your face. “Nah, I’m good to go, plenty of stamina so long as I’m fed.”

Wordlessly Wendy moves one of her waffle halves off her plate to yours, only to have it caught and redirected at the last minute by your fork. When she pouts Black moves a small dish of blueberries closer to her and, taking the hint, Wendy tips the dish so that the fruit spills onto your plate. Her smile almost matches Black’s, or it would if Black didn’t hide behind the rim of his coffee mug.

“But you have magic, don’t you?” Tron asked, speaking up. “Doesn’t that mean you can get magically exhausted too.”

“Of yeah, totally, but I try to counter that with a high calorie diet if I know I’ll be using my magic. The other thing that helps is sleep, but the food is still the best.” You take another bite of waffle and swallow before adding. “And to be fair, I didn’t use much of my own magic last night compared to Sans who had to shortcut the other two back here.”

You leave out the part concerning both Edge and Red being trapped magically in a sub pocket of time that rendered them immobile. You don’t doubt they’ll be out for a while after enduring all that.

You notice Black scooting a small dish of strawberries towards Wendy but pretend to look away as she takes the dish to dump over your waffles with private glee. When you look back at your plate you pretend at being surprised but scarf down the fruit all the same.

“Well, in the absence of my brother and the others, I should formally extend my thanks to both of you,” Papyrus starts to say, addressing both Black and Rus, “for the generosity you’ve shown me and my own in housing and feeding us. We are not freeloaders and would like to contribute to your
kindness in some way.”

“HA, THAT WON’T BE NECESSARY, MY MALEVOLENCE DOES NOT REQUIRE COMPENSATION LIKE SOME CHEAP PENNY PINCHER. DO YOUR WORST, YOU WON’T FIND THE END OF MY HOSPITALITY SO EASILY,” Black replied, sounding almost like he was issuing a challenge to an enemy.

“that is to say, we appreciate the company and its really no bother to have you all here so long as you get along with the kids,” Rus added a bit more gently.

“As that may be, I’m sure that after enough time you’d want your own peace a quiet so we won’t intrude upon your kindness too much longer. We still have our own business to see to, after all,” you say.

You looked up when you felt Blue’s eyes on you. He almost looked worried. Was it because of where you had gone last night? You hadn’t told any of them what exactly went down or who you met. That was a conversation you needed to have with the rest of the group, once the others woke up.

“you’re really welcome to stay as long as you need,” Rus said, looking from Blue to you and then back to Black with something close to panic in his eye lights, making their lilac color spark.

You figured he was worried about having to explain your absence to the kids or maybe of going back to not having anyone else to talk to. He mentioned not having neighbors coming over to visit so pitifully the last time. You pegged him as the attention starved type. Phil wiggled in Rus’ lap, and in response Rus nuzzled the top of the boy’s head in fondness.

Attention and touch starved, you mentally corrected yourself.

“If you’re fine with it we can stay a little longer. What we do next is still a little unclear,” you explain.

Without looking, you bat Wend’s fork away with your own to stop her from depositing waffles onto your plate again. You eye her critically and she just giggles. “Eat the rest of your food, missy.”

Black hides his chuckle from behind the rim of his coffee mug.

“a few days is no problem for us,” Rus says without looking to Black to check. “Feel free to stay as long as you like.”

“It would be nice to have a break,” Papyrus said, looking to you. “We’ve been pretty busy and I feel like it’s been so long since we were able to just…relax?”

“Yeah, no more contracts, no more work, no more missions,” you sighed, staring down at the emptiness of your plate.

A few fruit juice stains color the edges but it was blank and empty enough to warrant cleaning. You stood and took Tron’s plate with you, since he was done. Wendy started to follow but you turned her around and told her to finish all her food first.

One of the things you wanted to do was wash up and after that you figured the others would be awake and ready to talk about recent developments. If not, maybe you could do some laundry.

Getting clean would be nice. Stars, you probably smelled considering all the stress you’ve been under.
When you finished showering you stepped out and toweled dry before dressing. The bathroom that belonged to Wendy was the nicest one on the second floor, as neither Black or Rus really had much use for a toilet. Black at least insisted on having his own private shower, and the rest of the kids had access to enough bathrooms, but Wendy’s bathroom had been designed in elaborate detail to accommodate her feminine preferences.

Black was such a lightweight when it came to his ‘daughter’.

You laughed to yourself and then wiped at the mirror, finding your reflection between the steamed parts. Your hair was longer, the longest parts touching your shoulders if you didn’t pin it up or braid it back. The undercut was nearly grown out and you remembered how your hair was prone to growing faster the more you used your magic, your nails too.

You toweled your hair dry but paused to look at the rest of your body as the steam lessened in the room, revealing more of your reflection in the mirror. You forced yourself to watch, even as your gut churned.

When you eventually turn back around to dress. You’re dry and only a little shaken. Better.

When you step out with your old clothes folded over your arm you don’t expect to see Black standing there, expression just as surprised as yours.

“O-oh!” you exclaimed. “I didn’t expect to see anyone. Uh, i-is Wendy here?”

“She mentioned that you did not have replacement clothing, but I can see now that she must have misunderstood.”

You snickered, picturing Wendy complaining to Black in her princess voice. “No, I had stuff, she just didn’t like any of it.” You gestured to the black pants, and black long sleeve shirt covering you from ankle to wrist. “She has way more style than me.”

Black chuckled shifting the weight of his body from one foot to the next. “That she does.”

That’s when you noticed the bag in his hands. “Did you…?”

He brightens as if just remembering what he was holding. He pushed it towards you and looked away, the dullest of blushes blooming across his skull. “Here, I have no use for these and it would be crass to return them so suddenly.”

You accepted the bag and turned it over, recognizing the logo before peering inside. There was a dark maroon shirt with cute, scalloped sleeves and a peter pan collar. Beneath it was the same shirt in goldenrod yellow. At the bottom of the bag was a long black and white polkadot skirt.

“It’s cute!” you say before you can help yourself. You weren’t sure if they would even fit you, Black must have had to guess at your sizes, but they were the sort of things you were used to admiring on other people. “Ar-did you pick these out for me?”

The blush grew darker across his skull. “It was a spur of the moment retrieval. I
APOLOGIZE IF THEY ARE NOT TO YOUR TASTE, BUT SEEING AS YOU ALREADY HAVE REPLACEMENT CLOTHING YOU NEEDN’T CONCERN YOURSELF WITH THEM. DISCARD THEM IF YOU DON’T APPROVE. IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO ME.”

“But, you ran out and picked up clothing for me because you were worried I didn’t have anything else.”

“A SUSPICION THAT IS NOT WITHOUT ITS FOUNDATIONS. YOU DID NOT BRING ANY PROPER LUGGAGE WITH YOU.”

You didn’t feel like mentioning the fact that you could live out of a duffle bag for days was something you’d done before. To the best of your knowledge, you had never traveled with proper luggage.

“It was a kind gesture,” you say, sparing him a smile. “Thank you for thinking of me. I can-maybe I can wear them tomorrow, if it’s not too cold.”

“It IS THE END OF SUMMER. I DO NOT POSSESS FLESH OR NERVES SO I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITIES OF HUMAN TEMPERATURES, BUT YOU WEAR FAR MORE THAN ANY OF THE CHILDREN OR HUMAN NEIGHBORS I SEE.”

“It’s…cause of my fire magic. I’m always a little colder when I’m not using it. It’s not too big of a deal and whenever I’m uncomfortable I can just flare up but sweaters and boots are just more… cozy.”

“I WILL KEEP THAT IN MIND. PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF THE INTERIOR TEMPERATURES NEED ATTENTION. THERE ARE THERMOSTATS ON EACH LEVEL NEAR THE STAIRS IF YOU NEED TO ADJUST THEM.”

“That's kind of you.”

“IT’S NOTHING MORE THAN BEING AN ADEQUATE HOST!” Black snapped, switching back to military standing with heels together and arms folded behind his back. He lifted his chin and narrowed his gaze, the paragon of professional. “I STILL HOPE TO WIN YOUR EMPLOYMENT IN THE FUTURE, AFTER ALL. I HAVE NOT GIVEN UP ON THAT GOAL.”

His professionalism matched with the sight he strikes makes you grin. He’s clean cut and to the point but the blush hasn’t left his skull since your first ‘thank you’ and it shows no sign of abating. He was just as soft as his nick-namesake.

“You sound like the dedicated sort of person. I had actually been thinking about that since I’m not sure I can go back home anymore and starting over again hasn’t been the most... appealing thing to consider.”

You felt another pang of regret when you thought about having to give up all the things you had once called yours. It wasn’t a lot, but it still stung. You wish you could go back for some of your books at least or the sentimental items.

“ARE THERE ITEMS MONEY CAN NOT REPLACE?” Black startles you by asking.

“Th-oh, nah it’s not important. I’ll figure it out. If I make any decision it'll be after some serious thought. Getting involved with your family, with the kids, isn’t something I’d wanna do with half hearted intentions. Whoever comes into their lives next is someone they’re gonna get attached to and if I can’t commit to being around for them as much as they need it’d be better to be upfront about that and save ‘em anymore heartache.”
“YOU SOUND FAR MORE EXPERIENCED WITH THIS SORT OF THING THAN I WAS WHEN MY BROTHER AND I FIRST DECIDED TO KEEP THEM INSTEAD OF CHASE THEM OUT.”

“What, you didn’t have years of experience with kids underground in your world?” you teased with a soft smile.

“NO.” He shifted and the blush fell away as his attention switched to the wall behind your head. “ONLY IN DELIVERING THE ONES WHO FELL DOWN TO HELP DECONSTRUCT THE BARRIER.”

You felt the apprehension in the air between you as his words registered. His world was not the same as yours, and his underground sounded a lot more harsh than Blue’s or Sans’. Still, there were some things consistent in each of the worlds and one of those was a barrier that kept the monsters underground.

You knew the stories. You knew that King Asgore killed the children who fell, pulling their souls free in an attempt to break the barrier with them. When Frisk fell Sans and Papyrus had tried to keep them from the king because they knew what would likely go down. It had all turned out alright, but even to this day the fact that their king killed children was a well kept secret.

But the universe Black came from…

He didn’t meet your stare but kept his eye lights fixed on the wall behind you. “THERE WERE ONLY FOUR, BUT THAT WAS FOUR TOO MANY. I THOUGHT THAT MAYBE IT WAS A… COINCIDENCE THAT WE FOUND THIS PLACE WITH FOUR SMALL SOULS INSIDE, BUT I WOULD LIKE TO THINK INSTEAD IT IS SOMETHING MORE PURPOSEFUL.” He forced his eye lights to fixate on you and you can see how his magic makes them turn ultra violet. “A SECOND CHANCE. I WILL NOT SQUANDER IT.”

“I believe you,” you whisper, meeting his stare without flinching so that he knows there isn’t any judgment there.

You don’t know the details and you don’t know exactly what or how much he was involved, but you knew what you saw. You knew that whatever his past was, Black cared about the kids he watched over now in the present day. You were never a person to judge someone by their past actions and you weren’t about to start becoming that sort of person now.

Black took a shuddering breath, one whole unnecessary for a skeleton and then nodded stiffly. “IF YOU ARE ADEQUATELY SITUATED AND NO LONGER IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE OR SUPPLIES, I SHALL LEAVE YOU TO IT.”

“Thank you again,” you call as he turns to leave. It’s not lost on you how he doesn’t shortcut out, but leaves through the door like anyone else would.

You put the bag away with your other things and tug out the gold chain to look down at the rough stone pendant, smiling fondly at the color before tucking it away again. You had meant to thank him again for the gift, or at least show him you were wearing it and using it. Something told you he would appreciate knowing you liked his gift even if he played at being indifferent.

You can hear voices drifting up from somewhere outside and downstairs as different skeletons and children interact. It sounded like the kids were getting a good kick out of all the new monster house guests. Peter especially sounded over the moon to be playing with both Blue and Papyrus. Between the three of them there was probably enough energy to power a small city.
You make your way out into the hallway and stop when you see Edge standing in the middle of the hall, seemingly waiting for you.

You can’t help the smile that takes over your face as you reach for him. He doesn’t say anything but opens up his arms and folds you up against him, seeming to sag with relief once he feels you. He smelled familiar before you could even put a name to what it was his scent reminds you of. It was pleasant and comforting enough to make you want to melt.

“You were already awake once I got up! I can’t believe I slept in as much as I did. How unprofessional,” Edge complained before tugging you away enough to stare at your face.

Like last night he pawed gently at your cheek, looking at your ruined eye socket. More than the others, he seemed oddly fixated on your latest injury. It must have freaked him out more than you thought, which was interesting since it was such an old, old injury and Edge looked pretty tough.

“You feeling okay? We were worried about you last night,” you say.

Edge laughed bitterly. “Ha, of course my enemies would incapacitate me for fear of any fair match or my great and terrible wrath. Next time I shall not be caught so unaware.”

“I’m just glad you’re safe and in one piece,” you say.

Edge’s expression falls. “That’s more than you can say.” He touches your face again.

“I’m okay, really. I lost this a long time ago and it’s just a little ugly to look at, but I’m not in pain and I’m not bugged anymore. I mean, yeah it hurt to get rid of, but I’m glad that there isn’t anyone spying on me now. It’s kinda gross to think about.”

“You’re not gross or ugly.” Edge huffed and then bent his head down until his teeth rested against the crown of your head. It felt like a skeleton kiss but you weren’t sure.


“Yeah,” Edge whispered. “But you don’t need to apologize for that. It’s my fault.”

You felt your body go still. “No, no it isn’t. It’s not anyone’s fault. Hey, Edge?” You pulled back again and looked up at Edge’s face to read his expression better. “Look at me, hey, it’s not your fault.”

His eye lights were oddly bright as they waver in their sockets. “You remember when Red and I both first came aboard, what we said?”

“...Honestly, there was a lot said.”

Edge chuckled at your tone, tugging you back into his arms so that your face was pressed into his shoulder and too close to see whatever expression he was making. “We wanted to protect you. It bugged me the hell out when Red told me you only had a LoVe of one in spite of everything else. What monster hunter has such a pathetic level? Obviously only one with a problem pulling the trigger.”

“That’s not true,” you grumble, knowing well and good that that has always been an issue for you. You could talk the talk and scare someone into shitting their pants but when it came to leveling up, something in you always balked.

‘You lack intent, SevenA’
There had been more than one reason Hightower and you split. Insubordination was a part of it, the other part was with what you never had.

“I can’t trust you to be okay all on your own.”

“Yeah you can.”

You wiggle but Edge pulls you closer and you can hear the way his skeleton frame rattles…almost like he’s shivering. It makes you pause. His grip on you is ironclad. He’s not letting you go anytime soon.

“Edge…?” you call his name but the shivering doesn’t abate. You try again but when he doesn’t respond you let silence rest between you, figuring he needed it.

“…I know what a human sounds like right before they die.”

You’re cold and it has nothing to do with the temperature of the room. You reach up and hug Edge as best as you can being pinned down by his own hug. Something rolls in your gut as you pick up on the vibe he gives off. It was an echo of the distance he put between you all those weeks ago, after the scream, after you lost your eye, after you had to bandage yourself up and get used to being blind.

You thought you understood him a little bit better.

“Edge?”

He didn’t respond and you worried he was non verbal or mentally absent the way you could get with some of your worst flashbacks. Another minute passed and he hadn’t moved to let you go or respond to your calls.

You are only beginning to worry when Red appears at your side, summoned by the sound of your calls.

“Hey, hey,” he panted, looking between you and his brother. “You all okay here?”

“He-he’s just not responding to me, I don’t know what set him off exactly but he was-he mentioned knowing what it sounded like when someone died.”

Red’s grin was near manic with worry as beads of magic sweat began to collect on the sides of his skull. “Hey boss, you can hear me, can’t you. We’re all good on this end. We’re all safe. she’s safe, so is me and everybody else. You can hear me, so try and remember what Mini told us. You’re safe, come on back, boss.”

“Papyrus,” you tentatively call, hoping the sound of his old name would shake him from the nightmare he seemed trapped in. You reached up to touch the side of his face and he tilted enough to push his skull closer, seeking out your touch.

“That’s…good,” Red encouraged. “Come on back, bro.”

“Is there anything else I can do?” you whispered over your shoulder.

“I-I an’t ever seen him like this around someone else. He’s-like this on his own sometimes. Now it
looks like he’s gone cold but it doesn’t last long. Just gotta keep talking to him, he’ll be good in another minute or two, promise sweetheart.”

In spite of your worry you believe Red. All you can manage is to hold onto Edge with your pinned arm and keep stroking the side of his skull with your free hand. After a few tense seconds you turn to Red with an idea.

“Can you pull out my soul or would that be too dangerous in this sort of situation?”

Red’s eye lights seem to boggle. “Doll face?! He squeaked. “Wh-why’d ya wanna do that? You can’t get more vulnerable.”

“Yeah, and I can’t get more honest. Maybe it’ll help bring Edge back.”

“The boss ain’t ever seen your soul before, though, just felt your magic,” Red offered, a look of worry matching his tone.

You had to pause to consider that. It was true. You and Edge had never shared an encounter and out of all the boys on the bus, he was the only one who hadn’t seen your soul so far—which felt wrong! Edge wasn’t any less your friend or close companion. You cherished him and if you were going to be honest, you’d admit you were a little attracted to the guy.

When you had a free afternoon you’d have to sit down and consider what that meant for you and face up to what that meant for your feelings towards the rest of your friends because they weren’t as clear cut as they once had been.

Things had changed and you needed to sort out what they were.

“It won’t be a true encounter, but please, pull my soul out so he can see it and know I’m okay. I don’t want him to worry.”

“He’ll be just fine on his own if you give him the time,” Red said, watching his brother with eye lights bright with concern. He didn’t want to sound it, but you could tell he was worried.

“I don’t want to see him like this any longer than I need to. Please, Red.”

Red looked your way and you saw the moment when his will caved to yours.

“I can’t say anything to convince you otherwise, can I?” he asked with a sad chuckle. “You don’t know what you do ta me, darlin. Fine, it what you want, don’t fight it if it feels weird.”

“I trust you,” you say with enough confidence to make your words come out clearly.

You shut your good eye and breathe deep. Like Blue had at the breakfast table, you felt the same sort of pull from another’s magic clamping down around your soul. It was almost like your heart was the prize in a claw machine and if you fought it you could shake him off, but you didn’t want to do that.

Your soul was heavy with magic and wouldn’t fully detach, but it came out enough to manifest as a source of heat you could feel even if you couldn’t see it. At the touch of warmth Edge jerked and released you, snapping to attention.

You let your soul rest atop your chest enough to still warm the skeleton brothers around you. Red was hovering over your other side while Edge moved to crouch down in front of you so that his face was near eye level with your soul.
When you heard Edge whisper your name you opened your eyes and saw him watching you. There were red colored tears beading in the corners of his eye sockets. “I’m sorry,” he breathed, sounding lost and small.

“You have nothing to apologize for.”

Edge swallowed and shook his head, reaching up to hold onto your arm for support. “It’s so small. You’re so…it’s so tiny. How can it be so warm?”

Edge called your name again and you thought he was going to ask something but he just kept repeating your name until he reached out and pushed your soul back into your chest along with Red. When he was done he let his head rest against your breast and listened to the beat of your heart. You hugged his skull to your chest and sagged a little when Red pulled the two of you into his own arms to hug.

“I’m safe, you’re safe, we’re all here together and it’s going to be okay,” you say.

“I’m never letting you get hurt again,” Edge darkly promised before sighing and relaxing once more into your embrace. “I promise.”

“We promise,” Red corrects.

“We’ll watch out for each other,” you say.

It’s a promise you know you can’t keep, but you’re determined to do all you can to try.

Chapter End Notes

Someone wanted more Edge and my hand slipped while trying to write fluff. More hurt/comfort this chapter but that’s still good, I wanna say. Black also muscled his way into this chapter with his sugar daddy tendencies and I might say that’s mostly me projecting. Pls someone pay off all my debt and buy me pretty things.
Your talk happened after lunch outside with half of the boys sitting somewhere on the porch, half off. You perched in one of the lawn chairs while the boys assembled themselves as they saw fit, some on the stairs, some in the opposite chairs, some even on the railing. Black and Russ were elsewhere, seeing to their own work throughout the house.

No one spoke up or interrupted you as you gave a quick summary of the night before. You described Dee as a new individual and then let them spitball through ideas of their own. Maybe the two weren’t versions of Sans or Papyrus from a different world, but new skeletons from a world where Sans and Papyrus didn’t exist?

“It’s not worth getting hung up on, what matters is what do we do about it,” Stretch interrupted, sounding more morose than usual. He had another honey stick out but he hadn’t opened it yet.

“I’m not working for Hightower, or doing anything that guys says to do. I don’t care even if it is a misunderstanding, I’d rather not do the asshole’s dirty work for him,” you say.

“No love lost, eh doll face?” Red teased.

“If you don’t trust him then neither should we,” Edge added with a firm tone that left no room for argument between his brother and you. Red rolled his eye lights privately but grinned and said nothing to the contrary.

“None of our contracts hold us to do anything more than what we’ve already done, so we should be free to forge our own destinies!” Blue cheered. “We can do whatever we want now.”

“Probably shouldn’t make like bananas and split so soon, buddy,” Sans joked. “We might just get creamed if we forge a future on our own too fast.”

“Well that doesn’t sound too sweet,” Stretch huffed, finally tearing into his honey stick and turning it over to suck dry.

“What did you have in mind?” you asked Sans, noticing the way he spares a look for his brother.

Picking up on his cue Papyrus coughed into his hand and stepped forward. “While our mission may have ended, it would be unwise of us to ignore the bonds that drew us close in the first place. My brother and I have been looking into local property and have found much of it highly affordable. Much of the town is too sparse to function. It is ideal for covert settlement.”

“Covert…Papyrus, what are you and Sans trying to say?” you asked, feeling the budding of a new headache coming on.

“We bought a lot of the town up,” Sans explains. “Seemed like a nice place to settle.”

“Oh?” Edge said standing up from his seat and crossing his arms. “And where does that leave the rest of us who aren’t quite so financially blessed?”
“Eh, we got gold, boss!” Red protested.

“Not enough for a house or property, I’m sure,” Edge snapped nearly flushing at the confession.

You raised a hand before speaking. “Same, I’m with Edge on this one. I’m worse than broke right now considering I’m one month shy of my lease renewal on an apartment I can’t easily get back to.”

You didn’t mention Black’s offer for a live in nanny position, as it seemed unfair to announce an offer that wasn’t good for anyone else except you. An offer that was growing more attractive with the turn of the conversation.

“You think we’re the sort to kick you out on your rears over something like money? We’re not complete assholes,” Sans snickered.

“Brother!” Papyrus cried in exasperation. “That was both crude and unnecessary.”

“Hey, don’t act so sore over me cracking a few jokes. What fart was so offensive?”

But Red and Stretch were both snickering and you had to hide your smile behind your hand while Papyrus and Blue fumed. They were stupid puns. You understood why Blue and Papyrus were so upset, but you couldn’t find it in you to join them in their frustrations this time.

“Vulgarity aside, that’s excessive. You know how much gold a single property would cost?” Blue huffed, flushing with color from embarrassment.

“Yeah, no, property near the capital is like ten times times as expensive for half as much. Out here they’re practically giving it away, even to monsters.” Sans grinned wide.

“That is to say, it wasn’t a great burden on either of our parts to purchase some land and property out here,” Papyrus said.

“Does that mean there is something Paps and I could even afford?” Blue asked, eyes wobbling with want.

Sans and Papyrus shared a nervous look between them. “You can certainly explore that option, my friend,” Papyrus answered. “Though I’m not sure what you may or may not find that’s hospitable. Many of the properties we passed over were in need of some serious repair-more than we’d be willing to invest in at this time. However…”

“We sorta bought up everything we could,” Sans finished.

“Why would you be that extra?” you ask. “You’re not even homeless or homebodies with the homes you already have.”

“Yeah, sold those already,” Sans said while Papyrus just laughed.

You knew for a fact that Sans and Papyrus both had their own apartments in the capital, separate apartments that suited their new jobs aboveground. It had been a point of unspoken contention for Sans to be separated from his brother in such a way.

On the road they had talked about it, about how Papyrus felt like he needed to grow up and not be a burden on his brother, and how Sans felt like Papyrus had never been a burden or a bother in all their years together. It had been something you knew from conversations you had with each of them privately, but once they were able to sit down with each other and have a heart to heart (or
rather a soul to soul) it had all come out. They had talked about sharing a property again, a house like in Snowdin. That was probably a good idea for their relationship.

“It seemed like a good business move,” Sans mumbled, looking away.

“To elaborate,” Papyrus interjected, “there are a number of monster folk who were interested in relocating out of the city to somewhere more accommodating of a slower paced lifestyle. As Mascot to the monsters, it’s been a concern I’ve been aware of for quite some time now.”

Edge seemed to perk up at the news and looked quickly to Red before his eye lights switched back to Papyrus. “You’re making a safe haven for monsters.”

“Indeed!” Papyrus seemed to inflate with pride. “That is our aspiration here.”

Edge nodded stiffly and then drew himself up to his full height. “I see, then I shall lend you my expert aid in accomplishing this task. No doubt you will stand to benefit from my.”


“Oh, was I doing it again?” Edge asked in a stage whisper.

“You’re too cool, boss, but we don’t wanna overwhelm ‘em,” Red chuckled.

“Very well, my great and terrible self would like to humbly request a position in assisting you on this worthwhile endeavor,” Edge amended.

“Wowie,” Papyrus cheered. “My first volunteer!”

“You should probably pay him, bro,” Sans chuckled.

“My first paid volunteer!”

“I think they’re called employees,” Red added.

“My first employee!”

You all shared a laugh at that and then let Papyrus ramble on about some of his vision for the town and its new inhabitants while Edge interjected an idea or two he had seen Ma or Mini utilize in their home town.

It sounded like a lot of fun and you were excited when Sans mentioned hoping to relocate some famous business to the local area. You had been missing your weekly Grillby burger and fries.

“Well, as nice as renting from you might seem, we already have a competing offer for our services,” Blue finally spoke up.

You, along with several others, turned sharply to look over at Blue who was grinning down at Stretch who was still trying to chew the last dregs of honey out of his honey stick.

“Another offer?” Papyrus echoed, sounding surprised. “Who could move so fast?”

“Ah, earlier this morning Black mentioned it,” Stretch explained. “Said he’d be willing to board us a little long-term if we helped out with the kids. Figured we could work a little on the side and save up for our own place this way.”

You felt a little off balance. Black had offered a job to both Blue and Stretch? It…made sense if it
was for Peter and his unending energy, and Tron who was starting to need help with school work based on his struggles with summer homework. Blue and Stretch were a pretty good fit and the pair seemed to be positive towards the question.

Did that mean…Black had wanted you to be a nanny for Wendy while Blue and Stretch helped with Peter and Tron? Or was it just his own generosity looking for an excuse to keep some company for his brother?

Thinking that Stretch and Blue might stick around made the thought of working for Black a bit more appealing. And if the rest of the boys stayed in the area working to make it a monster friendly safe haven, that would be ideal.

You weren’t ready to even think about a next week where you weren’t around the boys. That was a realization that surprised you as soon it hit. But you didn’t have the time now to unpack it all. There were other things that needed to be discussed and addressed first.

You caught Sans’ eye light and held it, watching as the easy grin went stiff and then sagged on his skull. He didn’t look away though.

“Is now a good time for that talk you wanted?” you asked in a low voice, speaking only to him.

“Not in front of Paps.”

“You don’t think that’s part of the problem?” you huffed, sagging in your seat. “What’s so bad about knowing?”

“Not everyone wants to know all the terrible things,” Sans sighed.

When he looked up he saw Red staring his way, looking between him and you. You had a gut feeling that Red was also someone who had lived through resets the same way Sans had. You wouldn’t guess the same for Blue, but maybe Stretch…

“There’s something else,” you speak up, earning the attention of the others. “It’s…something else about that Dee guy and what he said. I’d rather have it shared with everyone.”

Sans didn’t look at you but Red’s eye lights were brighter than before as they stayed glued on you. Stretch glanced at the others and read something in their expressions before sitting up to listen better.

“How many of you have heard of resets before?” you asked.

As expected both Red and Stretch were the ones who raised their hands along with Sans. You were willing to bet the way they experienced resets was the same for all three of them.

You look to Sans for support and spill out the same story of last night, this time unedited. You explained what a reset was and Sans echoed what you said with examples of his own experiences. Red and Stretch offered their own too, though Stretch seemed a tad less bothered by them.

“And your brother could do them?” Stretch asked in clarification.

“He could…but one of the reasons he brought so many boss monsters over was to make this world too ‘heavy,’ for lack of a better term, to manipulate in terms of space and time.”

“I see, but I’m still confused about something,” Papyrus interjected, striking a classic thinking pose. “What’s so bad about getting a do over? Is it so important that he not be able to skip back
“Think about having to live a hundred days all over again, and being the only person to feel and know the difference. Think about the things that went wrong and then the things that went right that you don’t get to experience again when your whole world shifts,” Red tried to explain. “Some days it drives you crazy when you lose things or remember the wrong history with someone. Resets can be as brief as a few minutes or as vast as a few years.”

“Heavy stuff,” Stretch added, gnawing on the empty plastic of his candy.

“It’s what we have to face, though. It’s the reason you’re all here now and why I’m here too. We’ve all been caught up in this because of these resets and you all should know what they are. That’s what Hightower wanted, we think, to redo the whole story and send his own child down into the underground to manipulate the story to suit his aims.”

“That’s a pretty big deal,” Red chuckled humorlessly. “That’s a lot of years too. You said with all the boss monsters here your brother couldn’t do his thing, could he?”

“No, this quantum entanglement has been pinned down and nailed in place. Space time isn’t flipping back anytime soon,” you answered. “And even before all this, when he could do it, the strain always really messed him up. It’s why his hair is white now I think. He couldn’t reset more than a few minutes but what Hightower wants is over half a decade of history undone.”

“Don’t sound possible,” Sans huffed in clear disbelief.

“If the kid couldn’t reset anything then why would Hightower want his skinny ass now?” Red huffed.

“No good reason, clearly,” Edge hissed.

“It seems as if our objectives have changed. We no longer wish to catch your brother, but rather... hope to keep him out of the clutches of those in power at the Embassy,” said Papyrus. “And the reason he didn’t tell you this sooner is because he didn’t trust you with your implant?”

Edge flinched at the mention of your fake eye and you knew what he was remembering to make a face like that. You weren’t far, so you reached out and squeezed at his gloved hand, alerting him to your proximity. He saw you and squeezed back before listening to the others.

“And that’s easy enough to do from anywhere. We can hang out here in Blackberry’s town and leave that guy to stay off grid. We can do that.”

You squeezed Edge’s hand once more and found some sort of courage for yourself in his touch. “There’s one more thing I should mention,” you say, knowing your voice is soft and lower than normal. In spite of the diminished volume everyone seems to hear and turned towards you. “About the resets...and the reason I knew about them before all this. Um...it’s...sort of a secret I was told not to mention or tell anyone else about, but, I knew about the resets before my brother could do them.”

Someone called your name and it was too quiet to tell, but everyone watched you with soft expressions.

You’re cold all over and you don’t doubt you look less yourself as the color drains from your face and leaves you winded. Your mind’s eyes trips on a memory and you see it all again.

You see the pit.
You see the harness.
You see the hatches open and waiting.
You see the darkness inside.
You see the black.
And nothing more.

It was part of the memory you used to drive the men who terrorized Ma’s place insane. That inky darkness so full of substance and nothing at the same time. The sound when atoms didn’t vibrate anymore, the emptiness you could feel but never name, all of that went into the nightmare.

“You don’t have to talk about it now if you’re not ready,” Red said, speaking up after another minute passes without you saying anything new.

But instead you look to Sans whose expression is nervous, as if he thinks he’s the reason you’re having such a hard time. You focus on his face and mentally shake yourself loose. Damn what you wouldn’t give for some sour candy right about now.

“You weren’t able to find any files or information on the conversion process, were you?”

“…N-no. Figured that you were all just born the way you were,” Sans said.

“Nah, no one is. Something has to happen. When we’re old enough that we can’t see souls anymore there’s a pit in the basement of the Embassy that’s two hundred meters deep. Children are harnessed and lowered into the pit. We were told it was a hole to the underground but I’ve visited both places, and they’re not the same, if anything, the pit in the basement is more like the Void.”

“That’s not…possible,” Stretch hesitated to say. “The void isn’t a stable place you can just…hold a door open or stay in for long periods of time.”

“You can try,” Red laughed without humor as he seemed to recall something else.

Your voice doesn’t crack, but it feels like its breaking. “The more I think of it the more it makes sense, especially now that I’ve gone with some of you on shortcuts through the void. But it’s a place they dropped us into, like bait on a hook, and left us there until we were ready.”

“Ready for what?” Papyrus asked, voice slow and measured while Edge squeezed your hand and refused to look up from the wood grains of the porch.

“Eventually our souls would just naturally detach, sometimes it would take hours, but eventually they’ll be out and then we had to…”

You dropped Edge’s hand and held up both your hands to gesture with. You pictured the red light in the ocean of black ink. You remembered holding it in your hands like an overripe fruit with a tough exterior. You mimicked with your fingers digging in your nails and peeling it open, pushing the insides out with your thumbs and then folding it back in on itself so that the meat was on the outside and the exterior was now the interior.

“We broke the shell and turned our souls inside out.”

“That’s not-” Blue interjected, rising to his feet so suddenly it almost made you drop your hands, but they stayed frozen in mid air, mimicking the ritual. “Y-you can’t just do that to your soul. It’s -
“They’re not meant to be broken like that!”

“Right,” Edge softly agreed. “Human souls fall apart when they’re broken.”

“It wasn’t broken, just turned inside out,” you say, but your voice is too weak to convince anyone.

Not even yourself.

“And this has something to do with the resets how, kiddo?” Sans asked, looking strained and nervous if his tight smile was anything to go by.

“It’s the first thing anyone ever does. The soul breaks in our hands and we’re lost somewhere even beyond the void, but we’re told to refold the world like we refolded our souls. They called it a reset. If it works we’re back in our bodies and we get tugged back out the hatch and voila, we’re mages now or whatever it is humans with magic are called.”

*They called it resurrection.*

You can hear the hum of June bugs and the heavy rustle of wild grass as other things buzz by, but no one else says anything. You look from face to face, waiting for one of them to say something, hoping that someone reaches for you, but not really expecting it. You’re holding your hands to your chest and one thumb presses down painful on the back of your hand to help ground you in the moment. You just divulged secrets you had been sworn to never share and you felt…you just wanted someone to touch you but no one was looking at you, making it worse.

“Guys?”

“What happens if it doesn’t work?” Sans asked, looking the most collected of the bunch, but just only.

You remember with painful clarity your best friend going down before you, all smiles and practiced confidence.

“Then it…doesn’t work and they bring up an empty harness.”

Red cursed behind you.

“It happens rarely. I’ve only- it’s only not worked three or four times while I was there.” You can remember three boys that just didn’t come back and then the girl who’s harness came up shredded and empty. But that was opposed to the two dozen different kids that went down and came back up the next day or even mere hours later. They had been doing it like that for years.

And it had all been for a purpose.

You were supposed to be heroes.

All heroes had their tragic backstories right?

“Apart from in the pit, none of the other kids were ever able to fold back time and space in a reset like what Raven could do. It was only in the pit where we could reset even if some of us were aware of them.”

You remembered back after you lost your eye and the attempt Raven made to capitalize on your agony. You had almost believed that reset was real, but it had only been an illusion of his making. You would never be able to flip time again but he liked to let you dream.
Blue looked sick where he stood and Stretch wouldn’t even look your way while Red cursed softly under his breath, “I thought our world was the messed up one.” It made Edge click his jaw loudly, clearly dismissive.

You forced your voice to work again.

“Even so, after monsters came topside the pit got locked up and to the best of my knowledge, it was sealed up tight. But, that might be the other reason a guy like Hightower wants to stop Raven from weighing down the world. If resets are impossible he can’t make any more mages.”

The June bugs were louder than before and you felt far too light to live inside your body in a word where the dragonflies flew by, undisturbed by your words. When the wind rustled the wild grass it hissed like whispers. You wanted someone to hold you to keep you from falling apart but that sounded just wrong, so you crossed your arms over your chest.

“But now you know,” you say on a sigh, if only to interrupt the silence with something.

“Are you okay?” Blue asked first.

It was such an honest question you couldn’t begin to answer so you just chuckled and waved a hand in the air between you before folding it back under your arm. “I’m fine. This is all old news I just wanted you guys to know since I’m sure it was never in any of the files.”

“They’re not doing it anymore, are they?” Stretch asked, looking away from you, towards the house. Upstairs you can hear Peter screaming at Tron for something Wendy did.

Your eyes go to the second story, following his. “No, and it’s not something they can pick up and start again so easily. It took them years to get us... prepped and ready. They wouldn’t be able to just pick any kid up and do that again.”

It hadn’t taken long, but it looked like Stretch had also warmed up to the kids alongside his brother. It made sense for the two of them to get an invitation from Russ and Black to stay on the farmhouse.

You couldn’t see Red or Edge who were behind and beside you on the porch, but you figured one breakdown a day was enough so you refrained from facing them or letting your shivers show. Seeing Edge disassociate had been worse than anything you could feel after a simple memory.

You were determined not to let the others know how rattled you really were.

The silence was startled by a soft vibration coming from Papyrus’ pocket. He seemed more startled to hear it, since it was on vibrate. “Oh, how embarrassing,” he flustered, pulling out his phone and blushing.

The sight made you snicker and something broke loose. Sans laughed and made a joke that only frustrated Papyrus, Edge, and Blue, but it was enough. You breathed out and dropped your arms as Stretch joined in, followed by another off-color pun by Red. The brothers easily dissolved into a familiar mess of puns and infuriated cries.

You squeezed Red’s shoulder on your way inside and he reached for your hand to squeeze back as you passed him. If you had asked for it, or had let him see, you know he would have taken you and zipped you up against his ribcage to snuggle back into a sense of calm, but you didn’t want to bother him.

You thought you heard him turn to watch you go back but you were inside before he could stop
You climbed the stairs up to Wendy’s room, knowing it would be empty as she ran off with her brothers and played throughout the house. You fell down onto the plush carpet and leaned your back up against the bed. You convinced yourself you were fine. You shut your eye and the darkness there wasn’t the darkness from the pit. You were fine. You were…

You were not alone.

You looked up and blinked at the skeleton taking up space in the doorway. “Hey, Rus, you look like you need something. Can I help?”

“…so-sorry, i hadn’t meant to but i ended up hearing it all.”

Was he going to get angry about it? You couldn’t picture Rus angry about anything, but you knew he loved the kids. Maybe that was it. Maybe he was scared of you now. Maybe he wanted you away from the kids. Maybe-

“-are you okay?”

Your manic thoughts fell apart.

“What?”

Without another word Rus padded into the room and sat down on the floor next to you, close enough that the sleeve of his jacket brushed up against your arm, and the denim of his jeans brushed up against your leg.

“Rus?”

“h-here, just…”

He reached for you and pulled you over until you were in his lap and his arms were around you. With his poor posture it was easy to forget how tall he was and how much bigger he was compared to you, but he folded you up easily on his lap and nuzzled his chin into your hair. You felt like all the falling apart you had been lying about had been caught and saved. You didn’t bother to be embarrassed. You melted into his arms with ease.

“…just stay like this a little longer till you feel better, you… looked like you could…do with a little affection… thought you were gonna fall apart there on your own looking like that.”

You can’t help but snicker into his shoulder, cuddling closer. “How’d you know?”

“…lucky guess?”

You reached up and grabbed for what you could with your fingers, and pulled yourself closer, not minding how Rus seemed to fold up around you, like if he could he’d make himself a bed you could fall into.

“Thank you. I…I needed this.”

Rus chuckled and the rumble echoed throughout his body. “‘m figured as much, that was some heavy stuff-ah, sorry about the eavesdropping though, it’s a bad habit.”

“I hadn’t meant to exclude you or Black, but I didn’t think it’d be something worth concerning you with. It’s a little too much.”
“yeah, but it’s something about you so it’s not. if it’s about you it’s not something ‘too’ much or whatever. and its still bothering you ain’t it?”

You pressed the side of your face against his chest. You can feel his bones through the fabric of his shirt but they’re not hard the way dead and exposed human bones feel. His bones are softer and almost have a flexible quality to them, like the other skeletons. You had cuddled with enough to know they weren’t just rock hard bodies of sharp bones, which was what you first suspected when you saw them.

“It’s silly, all I did was say some stuff but I feel so exhausted.”

“it’s not silly, if you’re exhausted then just take a nap, its what I do.”

His words made you snicker. “I don’t want to be silly.”

“yer not silly.”

You close your good eye and inhale, unable to distinguish all the things that go into Rus’ scent, but enjoying it nevertheless.

Behind you the door creaked as it was pushed open further and you hear enough footsteps to know they belong to more than one person who calls your name.

You open your eye to see Blue and Stretch crouching down on the carpet in front of you. Blue’s eye lights were wobbling. “Are you really okay?” he asked.

Rus looked up, sharing a look with Stretch over Blue’s head and then Rus huffed loudly. “-not my fault you were too slow,” he grumbled lowly, seemingly directing the comment at Stretch. His arms around you wrap tighter, protective in nature.

“We’re sorry we just let you go off like that!” Blue exclaimed. “We should have been more mindful but.”

“-We weren’t and we’re sorry and we’re here now.” Stretch leaned closer. “We shouldn’t have assumed you were just okay like that.”

“Red said you might need some space but-but if you-I-um, that wasn’t it, was it?” Blue blubbered.

With a heavy sigh of resignation Rus eased up and uncurled from around you, letting you turn enough to crawl out. You moved but not enough to leave Rus’ arms. “You don’t blame me for the reset?”

“What?” Rus jerked from the question and Blue just looked confused.

You force the words out. “I…one of the resets was because of me and it…it was gross, what I told you about my soul, wasn’t it.”

You felt the one arm left around you tighten as Rus tensed up during the same moment you heard Stretch, but you were too distracted by Blue throwing himself at you.

“NO!” Blue exclaimed, forgetting himself for a minute as he exclaimed without taking his magic out of his voice. “Nonononononon, no!” he gasped. “No!”

Behind him, Stretch looked miserable. “That…that didn’t, oh honey…shit we dropped the ball on that one.”
“There’s no way we’d ever think you’re gross just cause someone made you-” Blue gasped and pulled back so that he could look into your face. The rest of what he wanted to say dissolved into whimpers.

Rus bent his head into your neck from behind and breathed out. “it’s the prettiest soul I’ve ever seen, even if it hurts, that doesn’t change anything.”

“The resets…?”

“Not worth you worrying about,” Stretch answered. “I’m not sure anyone would blame you for doing what you could in that situation.” He reached over and brushed his hand across your face, pushing back a stray curl of hair that had been pulled free from Russ’ earlier nuzzling.

“What about-”

You fumbled with your words but they all fell apart in your mouth. Blue chuckled at your expression and nuzzled against the side of your face while Rus busied his jaw in the back of your neck, his arm still slung low across your waist to keep you pulled up against him. Stretch moved closer and took your hand, bending his head until his forehead touched your shoulder.

“Nothing else matters. Don’t worry about anything any more.”

You don’t.

That evening Edge and Papyrus took over the kitchen and it smelled like an authentic Italian restaurant between their lasagna and spaghetti. The kids helped with the garlic bread because of course Black had two industrial sized ovens that could accommodate enough food to feed a small army.

Everyone shared dinner with a little wine, (except the minors) and happier news. Papyrus had heard from a contact with his ‘Monster Positive’ organization that there would be a few interested parties including one very familiar name.

“You got Grillby to agree to move here!” you exclaimed. “No way.”

“Oh no, please not you too. It’s a grease trap and nothing compared to a good, home cooked meal,” Papyrus bemoaned.

“Your home cooked meals are to die for, Paps,” you say. “Both you and Edge really outdid yourself tonight. I haven’t eaten such amazing Italian food in forever.”

Papyrus blushed and looked away, hiding a smile. “Oh, yes, well if you can still tell then I guess your taste buds aren’t deficient.”

Edge blushed a little darker in his seat but didn’t say anything.

“Yeah, I got excited too, but its conditional. The hothead goes where the business is best,” Sans
chuckled. “Plus, it sounds like he’s training a new guy to take over his place in the city thanks to your brother. That has to go smoothly if he wants to move out.”

“I wanna visit before he makes the move,” you grumbled into your meatballs. You really did miss his burgers and fries. They were the best and he always made them just the way you liked them, like he knew you well enough to know such a silly detail.

“We can do that, you said you wanted to pick up your things, didn’t you?” Sans answered. He winked. “I know a shortcut.”

“More monsters are going to be our neighbors?!” Peter exclaimed, bouncing in his seat. “Alright!”

Wendy started to wiggle in excitement and even Tron looked more awake at the thought.

“APPARENTLY,” Black huffed. “NOT THAT I’M OPPOSED TO THE IDEA BUT I’LL BE QUITE PUT OUT IF THEY ARE THE NOISY TYPE OF NEIGHBORS.”

“sure,” Rus chuckled from the opposite side of the table, glancing at Papyrus and Edge who were loudly arguing about the density of the sauce and how much or little meat needed to be mixed into it. Black didn’t even blink at the bickering but reached over to push another napkin into Wendy’s hand.

“Kinda feels like this is gonna be something bigger, don’t it?” Red chuckled, digging through what was left of his lasagna. “Finally off that damn bus at least.”

“You’re telling me,” Sans chuckled.

“Then it sounds like now is a good time for a toast,” Blue interjected. He held up his glass and grinned wide at the others around the table.

“What are we toasting to, bro?” Stretch chuckled.

“Decent meat sauce with actual meat in it?” Edge quipped.

“Too much meat in the sauce distracts from its original purpose!” Papyrus exclaimed.

“You can never have too much meat.”

“We have meatballs.”

“Never enough.”

“Boss!” Red laughed, looking like he was wiping tears of mirth from his eyes. “We’re gonna toast, get your booze.”

Wendy reached for Black’s glass but he seamlessly removed it from her reach and replaced it with one filled with grape juice. Peter stuck his tongue out at Wendy but she made a good effort to ignore his mirthful teasing.

You watched as everyone else around the table put down their forks and reached for their glasses. So many of them had the same soft smile on their faces that you knew you were also wearing. Sharing food with all of your friends had been more of a blessing than you had anticipated. It was like….it felt like coming home, which was weird since you never had a home to know what it felt like.

You grabbed your own wine glass. Black offered to top it off while Blue was still watching the rest
of the table.

“A toast!” Blue exclaimed, standing next to his chair and raising up his glass. “To new neighbors and new beginnings. Thank you all for being a part of our future.”

“to new neighbors,” Rus echoed.

“And new beginnings,” you finished with a wide grin you couldn’t hold back.

“Looking forward to it, sweetheart,” Red laughed with a playful wink as you clinked the side of your wingless with his.

Around the table you each touched glasses, even with the kids who didn’t have wine but still drank their safe grape juice. At some point you had to stand and reach across to touch glasses with those across the table, but you were determined to get a blessing and share your blessing with everyone.

“Cheers!”

Chapter End Notes

Here you go, less of a cliffhanger this time around I think. There’s only two-three chapters left before a time skip which starts off the next story arc, but I almost ended it here. It was sorta heavy at first but now everyone knows how mages are made, where reader got their power, and how some of those resets happened. To clarify, every mage resets once as a part of their transformation. Raven is the only on who can do it outside of transformations, but many mages, including reader, remember resets. The ‘reset’ after losing their eye was Raven’s attempt at tempting/taunting her and less an actual attempt. If anything else is unclear let me know and I'll try to sort it out.

Also, I'm currently writing out/considering very future chapters (like you're not going to see them till 40's) but I wanna make sure I tie in some fan favorite tropes. I've got a lot of bed sharing cause that's my guilty pleasure, but are there any other domestic-y tropes you liked to see? I love hearing what others enjoy.
Black knocked softly before peeking into the room. Tron turned around in his seat and pushed back the headphones until they rested around his shoulders, looking pensive. It was late and Black had been making it a habit to check on all of them more than once ever since the new arrivals came.

Across the room Peter sprawled out haphazardly across his bed. Black chuckled fondly before slipping in to fix the younger boy under his covers once more. “YOU’RE STILL UP?” he said by way of conversation.

“Waiting for you. Don’t you always make another sweep around this time?” Tron asked. “Last night you even started talking about angel prophecies for a bedtime story.”

Black turned to regard the eldest child once more and noticed that the program running on the computer looked like the basics Papyrus once started out playing with when they were both still underground and struggling to find a foothold in the world. Tron was a good egg and latched onto whatever anyone was willing to teach him. He was smart too, of course he would have noticed.

“SUCH STORIES LOSE THEIR CHARMS WHEN THEY NO LONGER FRIGHTEN PLEEBS INTO SUBMISSION. IF PETER IS ALL SETTLED FOR THE NIGHT SHOULDN’T YOU BE IN BED TOO? IT’S LATE.”

“I’m more productive at night,” Tron mumbled, bashful all of a sudden. Black felt a swell in his soul and remembered when Papyrus was still a bitty bones that wanted to stay up with the same sort of excuse. It delighted Black more than he could ever admit to have another chance to do things the right way.

“YOU KNOW IT’LL BE BAD FOR YOU IF YOU’RE IN THE HABIT OF ALWAYS STAYING UP LATE ONCE SCHOOL STARTS UP THIS FALL. COME ON, BACK TO BED. YOU DON’T HAVE TO SLEEP BUT LAY DOWN AND LET YOUR BRAIN REST BEFORE IT OVERHEATS.”

“I’m not a computer,” Tron chuckled.

Still, he put the headphones away, hanging them on the edge of the monitor then turned that off too. Black heard the computer start its hibernation cycle and nodded in approval. While Tron pulled the covers back to climb in Black hesitated where he stood. Rus was the better brother when it came to putting the boys back to bed.

Still….

“ARE YOU SET WITH WATER?”

“I’m good. I can get up for a drink if I need it, you know.”

“YOU NEED YOUR REST.”

Tron chuckled again and snuggled further under his covers. “It’s nice to hear someone care and mean it,” he whispered before closing his eyes.
There was one wall light left on but Black turned that off and waited to hear any change in either boy. When he was satisfied with the silence he shut the door behind him and turned to the only other room on the third floor to check on Phil. Normally Phil slept in the bedroom next to Wendy and Black but had been restless there since the new house guests, so Rus and Tron suggested moving him into the guest room upstairs.

While he was restless in his bed but didn’t wake when Black entered the room. In the dark, Black waited to see if Phil would notice the extra light from the hall but he didn’t so Black eased the door shut again and reassured himself with the knowledge that Tron would wake if his sibling needed something so late at night.

Tonight wouldn’t be the night he stayed up struggling to turn a prophecy about avenging angels into a cute bedtime story for children. It was amazing the children weren’t tired of such poor folktales.

Black took a shortcut downstairs and waited with a held breath to hear anything shift or change in reaction to his presence. He held himself taunt but then relaxed when another few seconds yielded no change.

The guests were all where they needed to be. Blue and Stretch shared a room, the original and his brother shared another room across the hall, and the third room where you had stayed originally was slated to the edgy brothers who looked like they came from a world just as kind as his.

Black was wary of the ones named Red and Edge. The others at least looked soft enough to crack if bones needed to be broken, but getting the upper hand on those two would prove a challenge. For now the best defense was the diplomatic approach.

No one seemed to have any motives that would lead to his family being endangered, though the business they came from did worry Black. It was possible his new house guests might unintentionally invite complications if their enemies followed them here, but if that happened Black preferred having allies he could manipulate for the greater good.

Speaking of allies…

Black took another shortcut down to the first floor and then once more into the basement when he was satisfied on each level. The lights weren’t left on but he could see well enough in the dark so he picked his way over the mess to Rus’ computer, moving the mouse so the screen woke up and brightened the dark living space.

Black turned around and looked for his brother but couldn’t find or hear him anywhere in the basement, not even in any of the side rooms. Even his bedroom was left empty…and messy. Some things would never change, like how much a slob his brother could be!

Black closed the bedroom door behind him and glanced at the computer once more, suspecting it might have something useful to look through if Rus thought to leave it unlocked. Black took a seat and moved the mouse over to the most recently opened file and expanded it to see the list of recently downloaded content. The time stamps on when they were added were all right around the time you first came, with another batch dated as being downloaded that morning.

There was a column of information on each file that listed it’s download and last modified time as well as the number of plays if it was an audio or video. For being only a day old it was suspicious that Rus had managed to play something seventeen times.

Like most of the files, there were no names to anything. For Rus, numbers had more meaning and
each file, track, and video was identified by a series of numbers.

He clicked on the first one in the newest list, not knowing what to expect.

A younger version of you with longer hair and just as many scars entered a room and proceeded through a series of field tests.

Black clicked on the next file.

You were just as young but badly managed the elemental nature of your magic for another practice session. He saw the way its sputtered free through the scars on your arm and back. You had more magic than you knew what to do with and it resulted in lackluster results.

Black clicked the next file.

There was a different child running the same physical series of field tests. The next file with the same kid manifesting their power with much better control.

Most of the files after that were other kids running the same field and magic tests. There were a few more of you he watched, nodding in approval at how much faster and fiercer you grew until you were head and shoulders above your like-aged peers.

Courting you into his family had been a wise play. You were strong.

Then Black clicked on the file Rus had watched 29 times. It was short, only a minute or so long, but it was of you several years older. The room was different, bland and sterile. A label at the base of the video identified it as a mental health and wellness check up log.

You were wearing an oversized hoodie with the drawstrings hanging unevenly from the bunched up hood, short athletic shorts, and tall knee high socks.

*Oh*. 

It didn’t really matter what you said in the video, Black understood a bit too well what it was that made the movie so watchable to his pervert of a brother. To another human it seemed perfectly innocent, but his brother was a bit of a freak and a horn dog so nothing was safe—not even socks.

“I think I’ll be fine,” you say in the video, swinging your legs off the end of the chair you sit in oddly. You don’t look at the camera but seem distracted by something else. “It makes sense to situation me in the forward position.”

“How does that make you feel?”

You laughed and it was familiar enough even though Black knows he’s never heard it before.

“Honestly I feel better about it than being anywhere else. I’ve got better chances of surviving the same thing, you said so yourself. Maybe someone else like Tank could take up a forward position parallel with me but don’t move me backwards.”

“Logical,” the voice behind the camera states.

“Isn’t that the right answer?” you ask.

“There is no right or wrong, only what you feel is true to you.”

You nod along, listening while closing your eyes. “I’m not going to let anyone fall down. They just
need to stay behind me.” You look into the camera and Black almost swears at how unnerving that gaze is.

“Next question.”

Then the video cuts off. The rest, if it exists, isn’t found on any of Rus’ files.

Black leaves the computer to return to its hibernation and shortcuts to the only other place he can think of to find his brother.

The barn is derelict and musty smelling. There are holes in the roof and a mess everywhere he looks, but the bones of the structure were plenty strong and could deal to stand through a renovation. He shortcut up to the loft area and frowned when he saw the bottles reflecting moonlight. Three-no four bottles of Honey Monster Whiskey. He picked up one and sniffed, scoffing at the strong smell.

They weren’t that old.

“MUTT,” Black barked, but there was nothing but silence to greet him.

Black searched through the barn for a few more minutes, finding evidence of his brother’s attempt to clean the place up but no actual brother, not even a passed out one sleeping himself into a hangover.

Where could he be? Had he missed him on the way from one floor to the next? Was he being purposefully difficult and hiding?

From the loft area Black looked out and could see his property across the acer of land that separated the barn from the farmhouse. In the pale moonlight it looked charming if a bit worn down. In another few weeks he was sure he’d have it looking as pristine as the day it was built. There was a reason he and his brother had settled on this property, after all.

It hadn’t taken long to become close with the property and Black was secretly a bit intimidated by how fast he fell in love with domesticity after a life of play-acting malevolence in a world far more violent.

When the wood above him creaked uniquely he knew it was more than just the old farm house settling and shortcut up to the second floor.

Inching around the corner he spotted you in the hallway, walking barefoot across the floor with a bouncy rock-step way of moving. He could see in the low light how you held Phil close to your chest as you bounced with him in your arms. On previous nights he had caught you singing to Wendy or telling her stories until she was asleep under the covers, so wasn’t surprised to see you with the youngest child in your arms.

There was no reason to stay in the dark and out of sight, but that’s where Black kept himself, watching from a distance. You padded back into Phil’s room and tried to set him back down in his bed but as soon as he went horizontal the youngest child began to squirm and breath heavy, the way he would before a scream. You swooped back with him in your arms, cooing up at him and then rocking him back into the familiar rock step way of walking. You paced up and down his smaller room before moving out into the hallway again and then back into the bedroom to try once more, to no avail.

Black followed you from a distance when you moved out of the room, down the hall, and into the kitchen. He watched you set Phil on the counter, one hand rubbing at his tummy while you
rummaged with the other to pull out the carton of milk, followed by a microwave-safe sippy cup. You poured a little into the cup and then placed it in the microwave to warm up. You took Phil back into your arms and paced up and down with him while the timer on the microwave counted down.

“It’s fortunate you’re old enough for this old home remedy,” you whispered conspiratorially to the traumatized four year old.

Phil watched you blankly, not even a little bit sleepy. Black recognized the look and knew it would be a long night for you if you planned on staying up with him until he fell asleep. Phil sometimes got nightmares he couldn’t understand and it was up to Black or Russ (usually his brother) to calm the child or stay up with him until he could fall asleep again.

For a skeleton, staying up for a whole night was no great sacrifice. Black had gone a week without sleep once during a siege outside the palace walls. Sure, monsters needed sleep just like anything alive, but monsters didn’t need it like humans did—not nearly as much. There was a reason Black got so frustrated with the sloth of his brother. For not needing sleep as much as he did, Russ slept twice as much.

The responsible thing to do would be to take Phil off your hands and shoo you to bed. It was better that way. Phil wasn’t your child. He wasn’t your responsibility. He was someone Black promised to watch over, so he should be the one to stay up all night with the little tyke…

So why couldn’t Black make his legs move?

You sipped some of the milk and tested it before fitting the cap on the top and screwing it tight. You tilted it towards Phil and hummed, rocking with him in your lap as you sat, nursing him without reservation. Your humming was nonsensical and without pattern, just a collection of jumbled, soft sounds running into each other in your mouth. It wasn’t coordinated or cultured but… Phil’s wide eyed stare went hazy and blurred as his lids dropped.

You burped him on your shoulder and continued to hum all the way back up the stairs, through the hall, and into his room. Black hung back, watching as you paced a bit more around his room, going in circles until you were beside his bed. This time when you set him down, Phil stayed quiet.

Black heard the young boy yawn loudly and saw your arms empty. The look on your face as you stared down at Phil…

Black felt something in his metaphorical throat and nearly choked on it as he scrambled to get out of the shadows and into the safe confines of his room’s hallway before you could stand and see him. His body was shaking like there was a reason for him to feel fear when clearly there wasn’t! It didn’t make sense but he didn’t bother to try-he bolted like it was a reflex.

Before he could blip away he saw the eye lights in the dark that made him freeze mid-manifestation of his shortcutting magic. Across the way Mutt-Papyrus stood in the shadows watching like a fixture of the house, seeing every single expression Black failed to control. There was a smirk that Black could see only because of how it pulled at his brother’s gold canine.

‘i know what you’re thinking…’

The door opened and Russ stepped back into the wood, glitching into a new space while Black shortcut right back to his room, eager to hide his face and anything else his brother might see during a rare moment of weakness.
Elsewhere in the house, Stretch stayed up, lazy but awake with his back to the door and his skull to the wood, listening to all the little sounds that told a story in the house. He heard the footsteps, he heard your humming, he heard Peter snoring in his bed and Wendy tossing in hers. He heard the way you paced with Phil’s weight in your arms and the way another set of footsteps stalked you from a distance. And because it was Stretch who listened, he even heard the second voyeur who hid in the walls like a glitch in reality watching it all.

He closed his sockets and in the darkness of his mind he let his imagination paint the picture of what he heard. He could see the way you moved through the halls, oblivious to anything that wasn’t malicious.

The shorter brother watched you with far more openness, benefiting from the transplanted shortcut magic he had never meant to wield. Further back Rus stayed a part of the woodwork, safe where he was. Clipping through the layers of a simple tri-dimensional plane of existence meant he could watch from the safety of an unreachable perch.

Stretch could imagine it all, could see it in his mind, but the details were still fuzzy. He didn’t know what they looked like when the brothers watched you. It hadn’t been the first time the one named Black kept an eye light on you, but those times had been all revolving around you interacting with the young girl he was most protective of. Those times made sense.

Tonight was different.

And that had nothing to do with Rus joining in on the dirty habit. The younger brother was usually none too bold to wander so carelessly beyond the borders of his bedroom after dark. Something must have made him brave tonight.

Stretch opened his sockets and the image in his mind fell apart as he faced the darkness. He was still leaning up against the door, listening, but now his focus was on other things-future things. It had been a short bout of growing pains with the addition of the Underfell brothers, but Stretch had managed well enough with what he felt.

Now there was another set of brothers posing the same problem-seeing the same prize and wanting it for themselves.

In the dark Stretch didn’t bother to hide the way his skull twisted into an ugly expression. He knew what he looked like but he didn’t care.

Things were... unpleasant.

In addition to the new arrivals you had also managed to heal with the Comic—or this world’s Sans. Whatever bad blood had existed between you before was almost completely gone, and now it was as if you were closer to that guy than you were to him—which didn’t make sense. He had never hurt you, Stretch thought to himself spitefully. What was up with you forgiving that paranoid bastard so easily?

His mouth ached for something and he wished he still had his cigarettes on him. He wanted to smoke and calm down. All the thoughts in his head made him nothing but angry so late at night.

With his skull still next to the door he listened to you putting Phil to bed. He listened for the others
and heard them too.

‘now leave, now leave, now leave…’ but in his mind the chant echoed a little differently.

‘don’t look at her, don’t look at her, don’t look-don’t look-don’t look…’

Chapter End Notes

It almost feels like this is a bonus chapter and I'm not sure if that's a good thing or what-but here is more insight into a couple of the boys and what they're thinking. Black likes to think he's above his feelings (lol) and Stretch has caught the jellies.

Two more chapters before the new arc!
You had accepted Black’s offer, but it had been conditional. You wanted your own space, and while he seemed eager to convince you he could do that within his own walls, you asked for the barn instead. It had almost horrified him to consider it, but you were convinced you could put the work into it to make it habitable. Until then you could take up one of the spare bedrooms, but you were adamant about wanting a place you could call your own.

Eventually, Black agreed.

In the morning you came down to breakfast in your goldenrod colored shirt and polka dot skirt. Rus was still asleep somewhere along with Tron and Stretch, but Blue, Peter, Wendy and Black were at the table when you came down.

“So pretty,” Wendy exclaimed, causing Blue to turn around and Black to look up from his newspaper.

“Morning to you, too, sunshine,” you yawned, one hand absently running up the back of your skull to ruffle the still wet hair. You had gone running with Papyrus in the dark morning and showered before coming down for food. “Smells good.”

“It’s just cereal and muffins,” Peter laughed.

“Mmm, but those are really yummy smelling muffins,” you teased, reaching over Peter to grab at one. Peter squawked and then laughed when your chest pushed him into the table and pinned him down as you pretended to take your time picking out a fruit flavored muffin. He flapped his hands in mock distress under you and you played at being surprised to see him in distress. “Oh, I didn’t see you there.”

“You were poking me, ugh!” Peter complained loudly.

“Sorry, sweetie.” You kissed the top of his head in apology and he complained louder about ‘gross stuff,’ while his sister just laughed harder. You figured it was the necklace Black had given you that poked Peter from behind. You had stuffed it inside your shirt to keep it from getting caught on things while you worked.

“It looks like you all got started but I can make eggs for anyone interested,” you offer seeing the stove unoccupied. You were craving some protein and something a little heavier than cereal. You were always hungry, it felt like.

“You look very nice today,” Blue complemented. “Do you have plans to go out?”

“Maybe, I’ll have to check and see what the day looks like. It’s weird waking up and not knowing what to do,” you answered over your shoulder.

You pulled out the eggs, cut peppers, and slices of fresh deli ham. You found a package of shredded cheese in the fridge as well and turned back to look at Black who looked stiffer than usual. He had his usual mug of black coffee and newspaper, but you couldn’t see a plate for food to tell you if he had eaten or not. Blue at least had a dish with crumbs in front of him.
“Black, have you eaten yet? I can make you an omelet if you want.”

You watched him, waiting for a reply, but he seemed a little more out of it than usual. Maybe he was still waking up.

“…YES…PLEASE.” He inhaled and then coughed into his free hand."WITH THE…PEPPERS AND CHEESE, IF YOU WOULDN’T MIND.”

“Sure,” you answer easily. “No problem.”

Black was still watching you as you turned around to turn on the stove and spray down the skillet to keep it from sticking. You pulled down a bowl and cracked a couple of eggs into it before mixing thoroughly. It wasn’t long before you had a sizzling mess of yellow to add cheese and veggies to before flipping neatly onto a new plate.

It was less than five minutes, but when you turned back around with the plate you saw that Black still hadn’t turned around.

“Here you go, let me just grab you a fork.” You set the dish down and notice his mug almost empty in his hand and cool even though there was plenty in the maker. “You want any more coffee?”

“…PLEASE.”

You took the mug in exchange for his eggs and grabbed him a fork while he folded up the newspaper. You heard the clink of metal on ceramic that told you he was eating what you made for him. The coffee in the pot was still warm when you poured a fresh cup as straight and black as his namesake. You had figured out early on that he didn’t like to add anything fancy to his drinks, especially his morning coffee.

When you were done you set his coffee down next to his plate and returned to the stove to make something for yourself but paused when you heard someone in the doorway.

“m’lord is eating breakfast?”

With a grin you glanced back over your shoulder and saw Rus wearing a familiar shit eating grin that only set his brother off. Black’s skull erupted into color that he tried to hide by looking down as he ate. Rus hummed in acknowledgment before looking up and seeing you at the stove with another bowl of eggs ready to drip into the skillet. The smirk fell off his face and he looked more like his brother as a pale purple bloomed across his skull.

“Morning, Rus. Omelet?” You turned the bowl over and the eggs fell into the skillet with a sizzle. “You like cheese and ham, don’t you?”

“Rus likes everything,” Peter laughed.

“Not veggies, he’s worse than you,” Wendy snorted.

You turned back to the stove and did up another omelet, plating it with a fork for the sleepier skeleton before turning back and making an omelet for yourself, complete with all the added ingredients.

You took a seat between Black and Blue, across Wendy, noticing there was already a glass of orange juice poured for you. You side eyed Blue who was next to the carton with a knowing smirk that made him startle. “Thanks,” you say before eating your eggs.
A faint blush bloomed across Blue’s cheeks, and he uttered a soft mweh-heh.

Black finished his eggs first, but took care to make sure there was nothing left on his plate before washing it all down with his coffee.

It was a nice soft morning.

Hopefully one of many to come.

Black finished his things but didn’t pick up his paper or leave the table to put away his plate which you thought was odd, but suspected it was because he was tired.

The two of you had talked late last night after putting Wendy to bed about a formal contract for employment and means of pay, all of which felt too formal and professional for you. You had parted on the promise of discussing the details in the morning. You didn’t want to ask him if he had drawn anything up or if he still wanted to do so, you were fine working under the table. Maybe he stayed up late looking up contracts and legal papers or something. It would probably be best if you didn’t disturb him.

You stood to take your plate to the sink but Blue was already up, collecting your things to add to the pile built up between him and Peter. He picked up Wendy’s plate too and then paused beside Black’s side to stare at the empty plate before reaching for it.

“I CAN SEE TO MY OWN NEEDS,” Black barked, glaring at his look alike.

Rus snickered and rolled his eye lights from where he sat, eating another muffin whole, including the wrapper.

“Suit yourself,” Blue said, not sounding like he cared one way or another before taking the things to the sink. Peter raced over to help.

Wendy wiggled out of her seat and ducked under the table only to pop up beside you on the bench, taking up the corner between you and Black. She reached for your arm and ran a finger down the white inked designs under your skin. They were faint after years of healing, nearly transparent, and hard to pick up unless you knew what you were looking for, but Wendy had an eye for these things.

“You have tattoos,” she breathed in awe. “And they’re flowers, too.”

You tugged your arm up, freeing it from her grip and winked down over your shoulder before channeling magic into your hand. The white lines of your tattoo glowed a crackling gold red with vented magic. A second later the flames spilled out before being pulled back to flicker through the cracks. The room around you soaks up the warm red bloom of color from your magical fire.

“Is that why you always cover yourself up?” Blue asked from the sink, stars in his eyes.

You let the magic go and the tattooed flowers faded back to white. You bend each finger and then shake your hand lightly to get rid of the residual tingles that always came when you tried to channel magic through a body made out of matter instead of magic. Monsters had it so much easier.

“Nah, I just…there’s no risk of them leaking anymore, that’s just... a me thing.” You shrugged and tried to not remember how nauseated your scars used to make you. The ones on your arms were the least offensive but had still plagued your thoughts during younger years. Nowadays you didn’t care as much, but it was still easier to hide them under layers. And even if it’s a lie you repeat the words
that bloomed in therapy, “I don’t care who sees anymore.”

“They’re pretty,” Wendy insisted, eyes wide with childish honesty. There wasn’t an iota of fear or revulsion as she watched your scars and tattoos.

You giggle, covering your mouth with your hand to hide your smile. “Stop making me blush,” you mumble out between your fingers.

“don’t listen to her, wendy,” Rus chuckled from across the table. “do your worst.”

You playfully glared his way before lowering your arm to let Wendy keep exploring your tattoos. The peonies wrapped around your forearm between your wrist and elbow, leaving enough skin between their design and each joint.

“So, did you have a plan for the day or maybe something that needs to get done?” you asked.

Black blinked and his eye lights wavered in his sockets before he managed to find his voice again. “SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO GET DONE? WHAT… DID YOU HAVE IN MIND?”

“Chores? Something to do with Wendy and the kids? Something around the house. You’re renovating it, aren’t you? I can help out with that.”

Black’s eye lights dipped and made a quick scan of your clothing before returning to your face. “NOT TODAY, YOU’RE TOO NICELY DRESSED FOR SUCH MESSY WORK. IT…IT WOULDN’T BE THE WORST THING FOR YOU TO RELAX FOR A DAY. I’M SURE THE CHILDREN WOULD APPRECIATE THE COMPANY IN BETWEEN THEIR CHORES.”

“No chores!” Wendy whined with big pleading eyes.

Black purposefully looked away from Wendy, tilting his chin up as he spoke in his best, authoritative tone. “I’LL NOT HAVE YOU SPOILED ROTTEN. CHORES, YOUNG LADY.”

Wendy pouted and then looked to you, expression hopeful. So young and already she was playing the field like a pro. You could tell she was hoping you would offer to help out or get her out of chore duty altogether.

“I’ll get my own chores soon too. It’s only fair we all do them to help out,” you say instead.

“Don’t be a rotten apple,” Peter teased with a sassy smirk that, no doubt, came out as a result of her not getting her way.

“maybe some grocery shopping,” Rus said, speaking up. “we’re low on a few things and it would be helpful to have another pair of arms.”

“I can help with that, and it’d be a good idea to get familiar with the local businesses,” you say.

“THEN I SEE THAT AS ACCEPTABLE. MUTT, YOU MAY TAKE THE FAMILY DEBIT CARD THIS TIME AND DON’T FORGET YOUR LICENSE AGAIN.”

“got it m’lord,” Rus snickered before getting up to put away his things. Looking your way he added, “we can leave in half an hour if that’s okay with you?”

“I’ll be ready.”

In that time you returned to Wendy’s room where you were staying until the other boys moved out and emptied one of the spare bedrooms. You freshened up in the bathroom, looking over your hair
in the mirror before combing it down with your fingers so it curled over your bad eye. It would be
good enough until your hair grew out some more.

You ran into Papyrus in the hallway just as you exited Wendy’s bedroom. He seemed too alert to
be caught off guard and only brightened when he saw you.

He had mentioned closing on a property along with Sans later that morning. The call he had
received yesterday had been from the bank asking for availability on their end. It sounded like if
everything went according to plan, they’d have the keys to the first of the different properties they
had seized on by the end of the day!

It sounded like plenty of the land owners were eager to sell as soon as they heard of buyer interest.
For a lot of them, the properties were too run down to be worth salvaging unless someone was
dedicated to rebuilding from the ruins that remained.

“All honest work would do Sans some good, and as meaty as his pasta sauce may be, I know
Edge is a very capable skeleton who is almost as zealous as I am to transform this town into the
safe haven we both believe it can be.”

“And I’m sure even Red would be willing to lend a hand,” you laughed in good cheer at the sight
of Papyrus’ excitement.

“Ah yes, that is to say we will be busy with these matters, with helping the other monsters to settle
as well, but we won’t be so busy that you’ll have to worry or…or miss us.” Papyrus’ voice tapered
off into something softer as he fidgeted with his fingers. “I won’t be going so far from you, s-so
there’s no need to worry.”

You wanted to admit right away that you weren’t worried, but before you even had the words in
your mouth you realized that wasn’t true. You…were a little bit worried. You were worried about
going from living on a bus and sleeping three feet away, to being neighbors with acres of land
between you. What would it be like to wake up and not have Papyrus an arm’s reach away for the
rest of your days?

It felt like a step down.

“I’m going to be the most annoying neighbor ever,” you warned. “I’ll insist on seeing your face at
least every day, and if I can’t cause you’re traveling or something, then I’ll text you so much it
could fill up a phone book or something.”

Papyrus laughed and the familiar sound of it made you warm through and through. “I am not sure
what a phone book is, but I am sure I would not like it as much as what you would have to say. I
am glad there really is no need to worry.”

Before you could reply Papyrus took a step forward and braced his hands on your shoulders,
moving only enough that his gloved hands didn’t fall off your soft edges. You were smaller in
comparison, after all. He bent towards you, nearly looming over your smaller form.

“I’ve met a lot of humans since first coming to the surface, but you are undoubtedly my favorite. I
won’t be away for long.”

“Pfff, of course not. You’re a super star. You can do anything with just a little effort,” you laugh,
feeling warm through and through.

“Nyeh heh heh, the Great Papyrus is indeed a skeleton of great and effective compassion,” he
boasted. “Watch me and you will be impressed even now.”
“I’m always impressed, Papyrus.”

You reached out and wrapped your hands around his thin middle, pulling him closer to your body in a hug. You felt his hands slip off your shoulders and instead wrap around your sides while his head buried itself in your messy hair.

“We will still meet in the mornings for our daily runs, no matter the simple distance.”

“Absolutely,” you agreed.

You hated how you felt so uncomfortable when the thought of being parted came up. You had lived for years on your own and only spent a couple of months close to the others. Why did it feel so hard to part from them?

Papyrus pulled back suddenly and when you looked up at his expression you saw shock. “I almost forgot to mention it, but your dress-er, skirt and shirt, your clothes…you look so very nice today.”

“Thank you,” you laughed, feeling heat on your cheeks from the compliment. Papyrus sounded so honest and sincere when he praised you.

He touched your cheek with the back of his knuckles. “Hopefully I was not the only or the first to tell you so. But you do look beautiful today, you wear your smile so well.”

“You’re literally too sweet for me to handle right now,” you playfully complained. “Stop it.”

“The most radiant-”

“Stop!”

“Exquisit-”

“Papyrus!”

“Breathtaking-”

“Shut uuuuup!”

You giggled, splaying your hands across your face to hide the blush of color that turned your cheeks pink. Papyrus was laughing, trying to pry apart your fingers to better see how his words had flustered you. You fail to miss the look of pride that shapes his facial expressions.

“The most lovely of humans I ever did see, and it never mattered once to me what you wore as long as it was a smile,” he added softly.

“I’m dead now, are you happy?” you moaned, smiling so wide it made your cheeks hurt. “You killed me with kindness.”

“Nyeh heh heh, as expected of the great warrior papyrus.”

You pushed away with a final hug and made your way back into the kitchen.

A few minutes later Rus emerged to join you at the table with a pad of paper and pen in hand. He began to make a list of things you would need, and every so often he asked you to check the fridge to see how low they were on something.

“we also have a deep freezer for meats and other frozen meals. We should check it out for space if
we see something we like but don’t have room for in the main freezer,” Rus explained.

“Like ice cream?” you joked playfully. There were already several small individual tubs of different flavors crammed into the back. You counted at least eight.

“i knew we were missing something, gelato!”

You bit back your snickering and helped him construct the rest of his list before he finally seemed satisfied.

“anything else you think you need from the store?” he asked

“Do you have ground meat I can use? I had been hoping to treat you all to dinner tonight since Papyrus and Edge treated last night. I was thinking…burgers?”

Rus seemed to brighten at the suggestion. “Oh yeah, you’d wanna do that for us?”

“Only if no one else claimed the kitchen. I know some of your house guests can be pretty passionate about the food they eat.”

“it sounded like m’lord and blue had plans to make mexican food at some point together, but i’m sure they’d be willing to wait one more day if you told ‘em what you planned.”

You felt your good eyebrow raise as a look of surprise crossed your features. You weren’t sure how the two of them were going to get along long enough to make anything that wasn’t combustible, but you were glad to hear that Blue and Black were willing to work together on something. You’d have to ask Blue later on how the idea came to be.

“Hamburgers and hot dogs, a summer classic. I noticed you had most of the condiments for it already. I’d just need to grab some buns, maybe some extra ground meat, and the hot dogs themselves.”

“we can get all those things,” Rus said. He stood, folded the list a couple times, and then stuffed it into the front most pocket of his jacket with the fur hood. He fingered it nervously, glancing sideways at nothing in particular before starting to tug it off. “but maybe i should g-go change if we’re gonna go out.”

“Why? You look fine.”

“it’s…it-ain’t it a bit too casual?” he laughed.

You shrugged, reaching out and pinching a bit of the fabric between your fingers to rub. “It feels comfortable to me. If you like it you should wear it.” You worried he thought he looked scruffy in something less put together than his outfit from a few days ago so you add,” You look good,” hoping to encourage him.

You think it worked when he turns away and chuckles a soft nyeh heh heh.

“What’s that about?”

You almost start when you feel the voice as it vibrates through your whole body. Stretch has draped himself over your shoulders and his voice made your bones echo with the sound. You huffed and shrugged him off, catching the playful smirk.

“We’re going shopping. Do you need anything?” you asked.
“Oh yeah. That’d be great, thanks.”

You waited for him to explain what he needed but Stretch didn’t elaborate. Instead he just picked at the muffins left behind at the kitchen table under the plastic, peeling it back enough to sneak a blueberry one free.

“You…gonna say what you need or do I have to guess?” you asked.

“Nah, I can go with you. When were you planning on leaving?”

“now,” Rus answered.

“Cool, we muff-int keep those groceries waiting then.” With another knowing smirk he chomped down the muffin, wrapper and all.

Stretch didn’t seem off, per-say, but he seemed a bit more clingy than usual. You wondered if maybe the changes were getting to him and driving him to something he knew better.

“Is that okay?” you asked, turning to look at Rus who was noticeably more composed around Stretch as opposed to before when it was just you and him.

“there should be room in the car for another one,” Rus mumbled. His dark purple eye lights watched Stretch before fixating on you again, “but we probably should get going before anyone else wants to tag along, we still need room in the car to actually stuff these groceries.”

“Did you remember your license,” you teased, echoing Black’s words from earlier at the table.

Rus smirked, pulling a wallet out of his back pocket to wave tauntingly. “you think i’d forget? someone has to pay for all our things after all.”

“Yeah, sorry I’m broke so I’m not even going to try and scrape together some dignity and fight you on paying, just know I feel bad about it.”

“Why would you feel bad about it?” Stretch interrupted, leaning into your open side. “You’re doing a favor by helping out, providing someone a skilled labor during your free time instead of going elsewhere to find a job. The least anyone can do is feed ya.”

“I have a feeling you haven’t worked a whole lot on the topside side of this world,” you chuckled. You remembered several of your first part time jobs where you scraped together enough hours to feed yourself and pay rent on an empty apartment. Taking a break and eating meant not getting paid for that time and having to lose money on the food you ate so much of. In hindsight, the business practices of several of your part time jobs had been suspect, but they got you by when no one else would take on such an inexperienced worker.

‘No formal schooling? What do you expect someone to think with this?’

‘You can read, right?’

Stretch frowned at your comment and he looked as if he was going to say or ask something so you quickly brushed past and headed for the front door, turning to hold it open for the pair of similar skeletons. When they stood side by side, it was easy to see how alike they really were.

“Ready?” you called.

Rus was out first, leading the way to the ‘family’ car while Stretch tagged along at a much more
relaxed pace. To be nice, you don’t let the screen door shut on his face once he was in range.

You weren’t good with cars enough to recognize what sort of make or model the dark blue four door was that Rus climbed into, but it had enough space for all of you to sit comfortably. Judging by the symbol on the steering wheel it was probably a Toyota. You took the passenger’s side and Stretch climbed into the back to spread out.

You strapped in and thought the most you’d have to worry about was Russ’ choice in music, but-

“You said you had your license!” you hissed, bracing against the dash with one hand while the other turned white at the knuckles from holding onto the seatbelt.

“yeah it came in the mail, why?”

“Did you take a driver’s test!”

“nah that’s too much of a bother, I just added my name to the system and made the computer send me a backdated one to use,” Russ casually explained as he drifted off the road and overshot the right hand turn enough to end up in the oncoming lane. The roads were close to empty so it wasn’t the worst case scenario but-

“Russ that’s a stop sign!”

“yeah but there wasn’t anyone there.”

Chapter End Notes

Here is your domestic fluff injection for the day. Additionally, I need you to know that when I first shared this chapter with my friend via google docs the comments were godtier gold. My fav:

-Black blinked and his eye lights wavered in his sockets before he managed to find his voice again. “SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO GET DONE? WHAT… DID YOU HAVE IN MIND?”
-Me.

In my head Rus thinks he’s a great driver when really he needs to work on it more. There weren’t a lot of places to practice underground.

Next chapter is a shopping episode~ A very innocent shopping episode~
You were never more happy to see a parking lot in your life. Stretch short-cut out from his backseat and braced against a nearby light pole while you stumbled out the old fashioned way.

“I think maybe I should drive us back when it’s time to leave,” you say, leaning against the car.

“did you bring your license?” Rus asked, waving his wallet one more time and tilting up his chin.

He looked a little bit too much like a happy dog that was getting praised when he looked at you that way.

You frowned, knowing well and good that you only had your phone on you and had left your wallet (empty) along with your licenses behind.

“I will remember it for next time.”

You felt a tug from behind and turned to see Stretch hanging onto the fabric of your shirt. “I don’t have to ride back, do I?”

“Don’t worry about it,” you answered without actually answering his question. He knew as well as you did that he had the ability to short-cut back to a place he had already been to as long as it was within a day’s distance away (give or take a mile). He didn’t need to ask you to know that already. He was just looking for permission to leave.

“I’m not gonna micromanage your life and tell you what to do, but at least stick around long enough to carry food back to the car and load it up?”

“I’ll help. Just don’t ask me to ride in the deathtrap.”

“Deal.”

Stretch stayed close to you, his hands still grabbing at the fabric of your shirt as you walked around the car and followed Russ to the shopping cart pick up. When Stretch spoke again it was so soft you were afraid you might not have heard it correctly.

“I could take you with me…keep you safe…”

You glanced over to where Russ was pulling one cart free from being stuck, wedged in between two other carts in the turn-in sectional. He struggled a bit before moving onto a different cart that came away easier, only to set several others free and send them rolling. He panicked and scrambled to push as many back over the hump and into the cart pick up before grabbing the last one for himself. Once he had his cart he peeked out from underneath his hood to check for whoever might be watching. When his eyes meet yours they flashed with purple magic in surprise before he ducked his face and let the fur of his hood obscure his expression.

“I think I’ll survive, you can go home ahead of us.”

Stretch saw where you looked and shifted. He let go but drew up even with your shoulders,
keeping pace beside you. “I don’t need to do that…and who’s to say I couldn’t survive in a death trap the same as you. My brother is pretty good at ‘em, himself.”

Rus had stopped his cart and stood behind it, waiting for the two of you to catch up. There were only a handful of other cars in the parking lot, (more than all the other ones you saw on the road coming over) but it didn’t look busy at all even if it was tiny for a grocery store.

Nothing about the town of Blackberry seemed busy.

“We on an off day or what?” you asked, glancing around the parking lot once more.

“right now it’s not so busy, every other day of the week has more traffic and we just missed the morning rush,” Rus explained, eye lights darting to a fro as the three of you crossed the lot.

“You got it down to a science,” Stretch said.

Rus glanced back at Stretch, searching for something in the other skeleton’s expression. “…just observant by habit.”

“Well, all the better for us, come on.” You reached out and grabbed the front of the cart to tug behind you, taking over the lead.

The automatic doors wooshed cold air over your face as you all stepped in. Rus directed you into the leftmost section of the store to pick up the necessary pastries and fruits before you made your way through the rest, picking up each item on the list as it came across your path.

There was one tiny patch of an aisle reserved for monster food, and judging by the advertisements it was sold more as a novelty for humans to try. Rus explained that he and his brother got most of their food through a food delivery website that specialized in monster foods so the grocery store runs were mostly for the kids.

“Do you not like the human food?” you asked, loading a bag of ‘Popato Chisps’ that looked like it came from the MTT brand into the cart. The package of Cinnamon Bunny had a different, cuter, mascot advertising it to a wider market which might explain why it wasn’t with the rest of the monster food.

“me? its all the same to me for the most part, there’s only a little bit of a difference as far as i can tell, but Sa-Black is particular about it ‘cause, unlike me, he can tell. hes got a lot more magic and he’s way cooler about stuff like that.” Rus smiled and waved a box of goldfish. “i got the tastes of a four year old.”

“Is that why you can’t shortcut anymore?” Stretch asked.

You and Rus both turned at the same time to look back and see Stretch standing with a basket of his own, partially filled with candy. He slouched and stared straight ahead. He had almost the same face as Rus, but Stretch never flinched or looked away and that made a world of difference in distinguishing them.

“…uhh,” Rus fidgeted with the ends of his coat. “n-no, its not like that, sans is just…”

“No, no, I get it. You were the one who had the ability first. Nothing wrong with it. If you couldn’t hold onto it, its better to pass it on to someone else than collapse under the pressure. No biggie.”

Rus swallowed and you could hear his panicked breathing. You reached for his arm on a reflex you didn’t know you had, but he went still as soon as you made contact. Rus’ neon purple eye
lights were brighter and smaller, two ultra focused and condensed beams in the black sockets of his skull that missed nothing.

“It’s fine,” you say before you even know what you’re supposed to say.

You turn to face Stretch, to tell him his words are upsetting Rus, but you stop when you realize he already knows. Stretch knew it would rattle Rus, but he said it anyway. He wanted to unsettle Rus, like there was already bad blood between them and he was just wading through it.

It wasn’t a hard thing to accomplish. A weak wind could unsettle Rus and Stretch could be intimidating when he wanted to be. It seemed as if he was low key channeling some of that dominate energy that unnerved Rus. Why? Was it because they were alternatives of each other?

“Stretch,” you call out his name and you don’t say it gently, but you know you don’t say it in a harsh way either.

But it hurts him.

You don’t know how and you don’t know how you knew, but Stretch made a face and then he took a shortcut out, leaving you and Rus alone in the aisle. You curse under your breath.

“That numbskull,” you hiss before turning back to look over Rus. “You okay? You don’t look so good. Do you need to sit down?”

“s-sit down?”

He tries shaking his head ‘no’ but you drag him out of the aisle to the display stand for summer foods where there is a beach chair Rus sinks into too easily. You tug the cart over to leave it next to him and turned around to search for Stretch—cause you sure as hell weren’t letting him run away from those words of his—but you stop from a tug on your skirt. Rus’ fingers are twisted into the fabric and trembling slightly. His eyes were still pinpricks of neon light. You can almost smell the panic he gives off.

“Rus, can you look at me, look at my face?” you ask, kneeling on one knee in front of him, never minding your skirt. You reached up to take his face in both hands.

“-is right.”

“Rus?”

“…he…he knew, he was right and he said it and he knew…i-i-couldn’t when we-we came topside and s-san took it.” His hand move from the fabric to your bare arm, grabbing onto it. “he knew.”

“Stretch is a pretty smart guy, he probably just guessed since you and Black are supposed to be alternate versions of him and his brother, more so than the others. It makes sense.”

Rus’ words came out stilted and choppy, catching in his throat and then tumbling out fast and faster. “but why would he know that, why would he p-pay attention, why would he c-care?”

“You’re safe, Papyrus. With me, here, you’re safe right now. Stretch isn’t going to hurt you.”

“-he could!”

“But he wouldn’t. I wouldn’t let him. I know you might feel scared because, yeah, he is pretty capable, but ability to hurt doesn’t always equal hurt,” you say, remembering how Rus could see a
person’s EX and LV. For Sans that had only fed into his paranoia.

“Your brother is plenty capable but sometimes the people that can hurt us the most are the safest to be around. Just ‘cause someone’s dangerous doesn’t mean they’re a danger to you. Me and your brother are here to keep you safe, not to endanger you. With us you don’t have to worry about others.”

Rus’ eye lights trailed off, starting to flicker rapidly and you grabbed at his shoulders to draw back his attention, calling his name sharply.

“Hey, look at me. Are you scared of me? Are you frightened?”

“…” Nonverbally, he shook his head and answered ‘no.’

“Why not? I’m pretty dangerous myself.”

Russ’ eye lights began to widen, dulling from their neon intensity as they drifted down to the space where your soul rested. You took one of his hands and didn’t care that the gesture would have carried different implications in any other situation, you placed his hand over your heart to feel that heartbeat.

You let a little of your magic wash over him and it drags him down like a weighted blanket. You wrap it around him and he deflates into it, the worst of his rattles gone.

“…tch, you’re not dangerous,” he chuckled, sounding calmer than before.

“I’m hell’a dangerous, whatcha talking about,” you huffed. “I’m a badass.”

“Yeah, but you wanna be good and you’re… warm.” Rus ducked his head and leaned closer. “so warm.”

You let him rest there like that for a minute more without moving while in the background some old, slow version of some retro 80’s pop hit drawled on.

Eventually, you reach up, sneaking a hand between his face and his hood to rub the back of his skull with soothing circles. You felt him relax, melting bit by bit until his eyes were back to normal and he was breathing easy again, (even though skeletons didn’t need to breath).

“Better?” you ask.

When he nodded you pulled your hand back. He flinched turning towards where your hand used to be, looking like he just lost something, but he didn’t say anything about it.

“Rus, I need to go find Stretch now. He needs some comfort too, and a talking to, but I’m pretty sure his hurtful words came from a place of personal hurt.”

“Oh yeah, no, they did, he doesn’t like it when i’m close to you. that’s the only time he’s mean like that,” Rus said.

That made sense.

You had been pretty busy recently and ever since you took Sans back to pick up Red and Edge, or even before then, when you left the hotel on a bike with Blue, you hadn’t had a lot of time to hang out with Stretch or just…talk. You had actually spent more time with Rus than with Stretch, and while that wasn’t an excuse for his actions, it helped explain them.
He didn’t seem like the type, but it seemed Stretch could get jealous if he felt left behind. To add insult to injury, the skeleton he felt jealous of was just another version of himself.

“It’s no excuse.”

Rus chuckled. “maybe it’s cause we’re the same, but it…makes sense ta me.”

“Still no excuse for hurting someone else.” You stood and turned, but hesitated. “Will you be okay if I go find him?”

Rus blushed and glanced down enough for his hood to slide forward and hide much of his expression. “even if i don’t feel great about it, yeah, i’ll be fine this time…j-just hurry?”

You reached back down to give him a quick, tight squeeze that made him mumble in embarrassment, or maybe something else. With a quick parting kiss to the side of his skull you turned and trotted off for the far end of the store, knowing where you would find the other skeleton.

Stretch popped around a couple time, using shortcuts whenever you got close, but you could always see where he was with your map magic, so eventually he seemed to give up and let you catch him in the candy aisle where he slouched, shoulders up high and faced away from you, staring at something on the shelves.

You slowed when you realized what he was staring at.

“You don’t need them as much anymore, do you?”

“I still have plenty,” you admit, pushing back the package of rock candy on the shelf. “And yeah, you’re right. They’re not as necessary.”

“You’ve adapted,” he said without turning to face you.

“Stretch,” He stiffened at the sound of his name. “Please don’t run away from me like that. You know I’ll eventually catch up to you.”

“…I didn’t think you’d chase me.”

You sighed and stood next to him, facing him head on even if he wouldn’t look at you. “Do you wanna talk to me about why you think you were purposefully unkind to Rus? You’re too smart to not know how it would go over, you knew better.”

“I am smart.”

“Papyrus .”

He flinched enough to face you, eye lights flashing caramel orange in his sockets.

“Stretch, I’m doing this here with you, right now. I’m listening. I’m here. Talk to me.”

He didn’t.

At least not at first.

“…I’m not cool like my brother, and I-I’m not so broken that I need you, not like that Papyrus is. He’s a mess and you’re the best at messes.” He paused and watched you with his wavering eye lights before pushing on. “And I’m not as reliable or savvy like some of the others are. I can’t buy
“You don’t have to do or be any of those things.”

“I don’t?” he almost laughed, sounding almost offended. “What’s the alternative?”

“You shouldn’t need to feel like you’re lacking. You’re not. Stretch, look at me.” You reached for his hand and he let you take it but he flinched from the touch. “Stretch, I want you to believe me. You don’t have any reason to feel inadequate. I’m sorry if I let you believe that, but it’s wrong and it’s no excuse for hurting another person. I’m not going to leave you or ignore that.”

When he didn’t respond you shook his hand a little and he looked back at you.

“Stretch, you see me.”

And you hoped he understood what you meant. When you were at your lowest, when you were sick of yourself, when you were broken, when you were weak, he saw you and he didn’t look away. You needed him to understand that you were safe being vulnerable with him. He made you feel safe, but more than that...you didn’t feel like shit in his eyes when that was the only way you knew how to look at yourself.

“Please, stretch,” you whispered.

And then the tension between you rippled, fading like smoke after a fire.

Stretch chuckled, eye lights fixed on where your hand touched him. “You sure you don’t have a justice soul, or one of ‘em integrity blue ones? You don’t let things like that go.”

“I’m not letting you go either.”

Stretch bowed his head. “I don’t want your pity feelings.”

You almost pulled away, hoping he didn’t think that’s all you felt for him, but the moment you started to move away he snapped to grab back onto your elbows with his hands, dropping his basket. “But I’ll take them! I’ll take whatever I can get, I don’t care who’s coattails I have to ride on. I’m too greedy not to.”

He seemed to sag towards you, dropping his head and turning his face downwards until his forehead was almost on your shoulder, but he held himself back, hovering close but not close enough. You held his elbows while he held yours, supporting him.

“if it was pity i don’t think she’d let you touch her like that.”

Stretch flinched but when you turned to look back it was only Rus, tugging the cart behind him with a sleepy sort of smile that made his gold tooth stand out all the more.

Stretch started to pull away but you held on and tugged him back. “I won’t let you go,” you whisper.

He watched you a moment longer before straightening up and facing Rus. Unlike before, Rus stood with only a slight slouch.

“I said something that hurt you. It was wrong.” You squeezed Stretch’s elbow when his eye lights brightened too much to not be panic. It was enough to help him refocus. “Sorry for that.”
Rus nodded. “i guess it’s all good since you didn’t say anything wrong . it just freaked me that you could tell.”

“Stretch was also the first person to guess that Raven was my brother,” you added, giving his elbow another squeeze. “He’s really observant.”

“Yeah, observant enough to notice we actually aren’t the only ones in this grocery store and the middle aged lady at the end of the aisle really isn’t interested in Pringles?” Stretch teased under his breath.

You and Rus both jumped but Stretch just laughed, tugging you behind him as he passed Rus and headed towards the front. “We’re done. Let’s pay and go home.”

You grabbed for Rus’ arm as you passed and the three of you, connected, made your way out. When the lady Stretch mentioned started to not-so-subtly follow you towards the cheek out lanes, Stretch stood at the back, shielding you and Rus from her view. You didn’t seem to mind being seen, but the attention appeared to unsettle Rus.

One more thing for Stretch to notice.

“thanks,” Russ whispered, as he fumbled with the debit card.

Stretch just shrugged and looked away like it was the least he could do.

By the time you had all made it back you had decided you were going to teach Rus and Stretch both how to drive since Stretch said he was never getting into another car he wasn’t in control of or able to escape from.

After unpacking the kids and Blue roped you into afternoon cartoons. Black passed by and loudly critiqued the quality of the ‘MIND NUMBING ENTERTAINMENT’ but after finishing his work for the day he drifted into his lazy boy recliner with another brain puzzle from the paper to do while the rest of you watched tv.

At one point Rus leaned over to ask if you needed help setting up the grill but you politely declined since you had something else in mind.

An hour later the sun was low, but not low enough to set for, and the stack of ‘water dogs’ was almost as tall as the stack of regular human hotdogs and hamburgers. You stood over the empty grill with another patty of meat, mixed through with all your usual ingredients. You shaped it into the form you wanted and then your hands turned black, cooking it with your fire magic.

“How’d these taste so much like Grillby’s?” Sans sighed, dripping ketchup out of his mouth.

His plate was evenly stocked with water dogs, hot dogs, and hamburgers. You were grateful for Rus’ insight into how much meat would be necessary for a communal cook out with all the other skeletons.

“It’s the fire magic,” you laughed. Off to the side Peter and Wendy stood transfixed with mirrored expressions of awe as your tattoos flared with vented fire that wouldn’t burn anything but burger meat.

“Ya sure you can’t come work for me as a personal cook? I’d salary match with the gooseberry.”
“YOU ARE TOO LATE TO POACH MY EMPLOYEE, DULL MARSHMALLOWS!” Blackberry called out, hearing everything perfectly even as he cut up a hotdog for Phil to pick up and eat with his hands. “I HAVE A CONTRACT!”

“What a killjoy,” Sans sighed. You filled his plate with one more burger, already done up the way you knew he liked them, and he looked up at you with wavy eye lights that almost made a shape, but you turned away before you could see what they formed into. You had more burgers to nearly burn.

“I don’t know babe,” Red chuckled, sliding up to you and wrapping an arm around your waist. “I’m sure you and I could make a killing with an illegal hot dog stand of our own.”

You bumped him off with your hip and tossed the freshly cooked patty onto your growing stack. “I’m sure we’d make more than just a killing,” you laughed sarcastically.

“It’s soooooooooo gooood!” Blue sighed, kicking his legs back and forth from where he dangled off the railing on the porch. Beside him, the oldest child, Tron nodded in agreement.

“Thanks for preparing the toppings, Papyrus, and thank you Edge for mixing up the secret sauce.”

“I don’t see why you call it a secret cause if you told me what goes into it. What makes it a secret now?” Edge playfully grumbled, hiding his blush while Papyrus beamed brightly from where he sat at the picnic table, enjoying his own burger. Without the healthy toppings and sophisticated sauce addition he had been hesitant to indulge in ‘greasy pleasure foods’ before he found out that you would be making them.

“All it takes is a base of mayonnaise, some ketchup, dill pickles, yellow mustard, apple cider vinegar, and a pinch of salt and pepper. I figured it would be a crowd pleaser.”

“Consider the crowd pleased,” Stretch said, coming up beside you with an empty plate and a hungry smile. “Can I get some thirds?”

“You had thirds.”

“No, I had three of only the waterdogs and two of the hotdogs. I haven’t had a burger yet.”

You rolled your eyes but let him go, bumping him with your hip the way you had with Red earlier. “I saw way more than that on your plate, but fine, be that way.”

“Those weren’t for me.”

You looked back over your shoulder, watching Stretch take two burgers and another hot dog back to where Rus sat with Black and Phil, the youngest child. At some point, without your noticing it, Black had gone off to grab for himself a bottle of wine to pair with his burger. It was... an interesting visual.

Things were perfect between Stretch and Rus, but it looked like things were...moving in the right direction at least.

“I want a patty that looks like Micky,” Wendy chirped.

“Me too!” Peter echoed, bouncing on his toes with excitement. “I want mine to be a mouse shape.”

Just to hear them cry out in excitement you refocused your magic and made the fire burn purple with a red core through your tattoos. They sparked prettily and both children, along with Blue and
Tron who were closest to you, all cheered at the performance.

“Dinner and a show!” Red cheered before making a noise that made Edge reach over and hit him upside the head in brotherly admonishment.

There was enough of a breeze that it was nice to be outside for those of you with skin, nerves, and a preference on what sort of temperature an environment should be.

The friendly conversation around you makes you feel giddy and calm at the same time, which was an almost impossible thing to think about. You were so happy and excited to be surrounded by all your closest friends and people that cared about you, people you loved and cared about in return. That made you feel like you could take to the skies and dance in between the stars with enough burning joy to outlast them all.

Yet, at the same time, you felt a settling peace, like you were a puzzle piece that had finally found your slot in the puzzle. How many people lived and died never knowing what that felt like?

You heard someone call your name and looked over to see Stretch there again, back for more napkins. He watched you like he could unravel all your secrets, and you didn’t doubt he could. He probably already knew what it was you were feeling.

“I’m really happy right now.”

But you felt like you had to say it out loud anyway.

“I know,” he said with a grin that made his eye lights spark honey gold.

Chapter End Notes

Found Family and Fluff are my greatest weakness. This was the last part of the Bishop Knife Trick arc and the next one is less action packed with plenty of emotional developments (aka flirting and fluff tropes) and character exploration (aka more flirting and fluff moments). *wink wink* Ya'll deserve a break from saving the world.

Also, yeah, some things did happen on the surface pre meeting that resulted in Rus and Black switching out the 'Short cut' ability. I've never seen that done but in the context of this story I'm treating it like a video game ability you can equip or un-equip. Rus wasn't able to handle it anymore so Black took it for his baby brother and exchanged it for the ability to fold himself through reality and 'clip' through places. If you're asking if that's rare or dangerous the answer is 'yes' to both. Later on in the story we might understand the why/how that happened.

See you next week!
In the meantime I have another short side fic with the Undefell brothers that you might enjoy called, In the Time of Quarantine. The world is crazy, I hope you are all staying safe and indoors.
Summer had to swell, hot and sweltering, before it could stumble into anything less. And it did. Summer tampered off and smoothly transitioned into autumn and with autumn came a new shift in lifestyle, among other things.

Sans and Papyrus had made good on their plans to buy up what they could of the town and that resulted in the resettlement of several different monster families that had trouble coping with city life.

Their arrival was like an injection that brought the town back to life after teetering on the edge. Nearly four dozen properties changed hands as many monsters came up to purchase property with their own efforts. Along with the families came the businesses.

So the slow, quiet town of Blackberry changed.

And so did you.

You felt the disturbance before you heard it. You cracked open your good eye and peered out into the gloom. It was dark, well past midnight, and the only light in the room came from the filtered starlight that made it through the drag curtains. Seeing was next to impossible.

But you don’t need to see.

You hear the stumbling downstairs, followed by the familiar creaking of someone making their way up the stairs and you relax, recognizing the sound of their footfalls. You don’t even keep your head up long enough to greet them. Instead you let it rest back atop the pillow and breath easy, closing your good eye with every intention of going back to sleep.

Behind you the bed dipped and you grumbled incoherently as the covers were pulled up only enough for a new body to slip in.
“Whacha doin now?” you mumble, too tired to turn and face Red as he scooted closer to you.

“Heard you were dreaming alone, thought I’d join ya, sweetheart,” he chuckled.

You felt his arms wrapped low around your waist and tug you back against his chest. He had already ducked his head to nestle up against your neck and slipped one of his boney legs in between yours.

You know he’s lying, and that the skeletons have some secret pact between them of making sure at least one of them is always with you at night to keep you from your nightmares.

At first you had been apprehensive about it, thinking you sounded more like a chore on the chore chart and too much of a bother, but you had a hard time holding onto that thought the longer you indulge yourself. It was nice to fall asleep to cuddles. You weren’t ready to go back to sleeping without someone’s arms around you.

“Sorry I’m so late. Time got away from me,” Red explained before brushing his teeth up against the flesh of your neck. “You doing okay?”

You make a sound and it’s enough to set Red off chuckling. He knows better than to start a conversation after you had been in bed long enough to get so drowsy. He rubbed a hand over your stomach, teasing with the hem of your shirt, but not going further. He knew better.

You hear the floorboards creak again and then two dull thuds as Edge toes off his boots and then approaches your bed from the other side. You don’t react as much when he slides in, but you reach for his hand and take it as he falls asleep facing you, ducking his forehead enough so that his teeth kiss the crown of your head and stay close to your longer curling hair.

Between the two brothers there was no way you wouldn’t feel safe. Their intent was soft and strong and heavy, settling over you as thick as magic. You were protected. Nothing could touch you that you didn’t allow.

“What kept ya, boss?” Red whispered over your shoulder before snickering.

“Don’t act like you were here all this time. I’m not even able to shortcut and I was here less than two minutes after you,” Edge hissed back.

“No fighting in bed,” you grumble, barely awake enough to make sense of what you were saying. It was more a reflex than anything.

Red chuckled behind you and Edge bent closer, pressing another skeleton kiss to the side of your face, nuzzling with his teeth and whispering apologizes just as sweet. You could feel Red’s lazy hold around your waist tighten.

“Sorry, sweetheart.”

“We’ll keep you safe. No fighting, we promise.”

You didn’t stir or say anything more, but you were aware enough to hear the rest of what the brothers said to one another only for another minute before drifting off.

“…I can’t believe you were nearly late and then you nearly wake her up with your arguing.”

“We were both late, boss. And ’sides, it was an honest mistake.”
“…Did you hear about the vanilla wafer then?” Edge grumbled.

Red almost snickered. “You using pet names on the boys now, that’s cute.”

“I’m trying to be serious about something right now and if you want to brush it off then at least listen to what I have to say.”

“I already know what it is, you’re going to mention how on Papyrus’ day she let him share with his brother. That’s not as new as you think it is.”

There was a beat of silence before Edge eventually spoke up. “…He’s a bastard marshmallow to keep it to himself like that. I wouldn’t have known if Papyrus hadn’t mentioned it to me.”

“You gonna complain about it, Boss? I thought you liked how big ‘er heart was.”

“Of course I’m not going to complain about it, th-there’s nothing to complain about. It’s not like…isn’t not a commitment or anything. It’s just…it’s platonic for now.” Edge snuggled closer to you and shut his sockets like that made it easier to lie or something. “And even if it wasn’t…it wouldn’t matter as long as this doesn’t change.”

Red was quiet, content with how close he was at your back, nestled around you like a glove. “I get what you’re saying, but you don’t have to be so scared about it. You’re important to her, too important to forget or leave behind. You’re too cool, bro.”

“You’re not so insignificant yourself, brother.”

“Ya making me blush, Boss.”

“Sans,” Edge called.

“Yeah, Paps?”

“I love her.”

The confession came suddenly, but not unexpectedly. This hadn’t been the first time Edge had admitted his truth to Red, thought he had yet to say it to you directly.

“…i know.”

The darkness was thick as even the stars seemed to fail in their efforts to throw light into the bedroom. Your breathing was the only sound as both skeleton brothers lay easily still in the gloom of the room. Edge’s eye sockets were open enough for his eye lights to wander up and over your shoulder to gauge his brother’s reaction.

“I’m serious.”

“i-I know,” Red whispered, his voice tight with something close to panic. “I get it, trust me. I know. I-” the words felt too heavy in his mouth so Red ducked his face and kissed at the back of your head again, brushing his teeth up against your hair. “Me too.”

“It scares you.”

“To hell and back,” Red chuckled in confirmation. “You bet it does.”

“We don’t have to worry while we’re here. There’s no need for it now,” Edge said. “We’re safe, she’s safe, and the monsters we relocate are all flourishing. It’s okay to let yourself be vulnerable
this time.”

“...You’re the coolest, Boss.”

“Stating the obvious is moot, Sans.”

“I know I just—I know...I don’t want things to change. They’re good right now.”

“I’m sure that’s the reason young Blueberry has held his tongue as long as he has,” Edge huffed.

“You think that’s the only reason he’s not confessed first?” Red asked.

“What...else would be the reason?”

Red nuzzled your hair, spreading it out across the pillow before pushing through it to rest his teeth on the back of your skull again. It was late enough and you were tired enough that he could be sure you were asleep. He wasn’t sure if that made him relieved or...

“You don’t think we’re obvious as hell about it all? We’ve made a point of endearing ourselves romantically but she’s not ready for that or...or it’s not something she wants,” Red whispered over your shoulder to his brother.

“But she hasn’t pushed any of us away either.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Red sighed. He closed his eye sockets before going purposefully still. “This is all I need. You could dust me and I’d go down satisfied. Night, Boss”

Edge huffed but settled back in and closed his own eye sockets. It was late enough and the bed was too warm and soft to stay awake for much longer. He settled and spared his brother one last sentence before he followed his bedmates into sleep.

“Goodnight Sans.”

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When you wake Red is still in bed beside you, but Edge is already downstairs making you breakfast. You can smell the sausage and eggs all the way up in the loft and they make your mouth water. Only Edge would wake up so ridiculously early to make you a breakfast before your morning workout with Papyrus...

Papyrus?

You scrambled for your phone on the bedside and grabbed for it, cursing when you saw the time. Red’s arms stayed looped around your waist, moving with you as you scrambled. When you first tried to turn around and climb out of bed they locked into place and pulled you back.

“Red, let go, I’m late,” you hissed.

“No, you are not. I already talked with Papyrus and he’s gone off ahead of you,” Edge called up from the kitchen down below.

Red mumbled something indistinguishable into the pillows and you twisted around once more in an
attempt to break free, but it amounted to nothing. Red wasn’t letting you go.

“I—what do you mean you already called him? Why would you do that? Ugh, Red, really I need to get up. It’s already late enough.”

You heard the footsteps and Edge’s skull emerged first from the stairwell, followed by the rest of him plus a plate for breakfast and a bowl of fresh fruit dressed with whipped cream. He carried your lap desk under one arm. You struggled to get free before he could reach you but Red refused to let go.

“It’s how it sounds. I called Papyrus and told him you had a rough night. He agreed that you would best be served by a little indulgence. Now, Red, move enough so that they can sit up, I have hot food here.”

“I didn’t have a rough night. What are you talking about? I feel fine.”

“You were restless after the first few hours, even with both of us,” Edge said while setting up the lap desk with one hand followed by the plate of breakfast. “It wasn’t worth worrying about, but you’ve been faithful in your morning workouts even when he’s been away, so why not take the day off on your day off?”

Red didn’t let go, but he moved enough to make room for the lap desk that Edge nudged forward.

“It’s not a day off…” you grumbled even though you knew that technically it was the first of your two ‘free days’ in the week according to Black’s contract. He had been adamant about you having time to ‘HAVE A LIFE OUTSIDE OF OUR FOUR WALLS.’ In hindsight it was the smartest decision since you underestimated the work that went into childcare. Even with so many helping hands, there was a lot and it could get overwhelming at times. You…just weren’t used to it after living four plus years alone, even if that was how your teenage and early adult years had been like.

“You don’t need to be anywhere today, do you?” Edge asked in a tone that made you think he already knew the answer. Considering how he and Blue texted you didn’t doubt Edge knew everything that went down on the farm.

“Russ and Stretch are just taking the kids to the lake along with Blue,” you explained.

From the mattress Red barked a laugh. You let a stray flame blip out from your empty socket.

“Fire and water, not such a good mix,” you confessed. “Plus, there was somewhere else I wanted to be later today.”

Edged rubbed his gloved hands on his pants and then sat down on the mattress beside you, scooting back until his back hit the headboard. “You can’t get there without a decent breakfast. Let me know if you want any more.”

“You’re too good to me. Don’t tell me you haven’t eaten yet.” Your fork hovered inches from your mouth.

“I did have something, don’t worry,” Edge huffed. “It’s my brother you need to concern yourself with. His slovenly manner knows no end and I am forever doomed to be irked by it. He can’t even be bothered to rouse for food in the morning.”

“I understand the feeling,” you laughed.

Without guilt you took the first bite and proceeded to finish off the rest of Edge’s rich breakfast. You dipped a finger into the cream of your fruit salad to suck clean before using your fork for the
rest of it. By the time you were finished Red was awake enough to let you go.

Edge took your dishes and the lap desk away, shooing you into the master bath to shower and change for the day. Through the closed door you could still hear Edge yelling at his brother to quit being such a ‘lazybones’ and get up. They still blushed when you said that, but you heard them calling each other numbskull and lazybones enough to know the only thing lewd about the insult was the fact it came from you.

You emerged later with your damp hair twisted into a small bun and a handful of clothes you had been forgetting to clean out of the bathroom from showers past.

You had plans for later in the day so you were back in black jeans and a dark gray shirt that was loose enough to move around in comfortably without looking sloppy. It showed off the tattoos on your arms enough. At least the drab colors make your necklace stand out. For a change you left it on top of your shirt instead of tucking it in.

“Got a grand opening ya have to be to?” Red asked from the bed once he saw you emerge.

You dropped off your dirty things into the hamper and then reached for your boots. “Don’t laugh, you’re going to be there too. Sans was adamant about it.”

“Not complaining. It doesn’t happen until…noon thirty,” Red grumbled, wincing at the sunlight he had moved under. You threw one of your fluffy doughnut shaped pillows at his face, connecting with his skull and knocking him back out of the direct sunlight.

“Thanks babe,” you heard him call.

“Speaking of that, I’ve gone and left my watch in Wendy’s room again. I’ll need to pop over there real quick before we head over to Vanilla’s place.”

You turned down the stairs, hearing the muffled snicker from your bed as Red reacted to your nickname for Sans.

Edge was in your kitchen, cleaning more than he had any right to. It made you feel a little embarrassed to see him so engrossed in his tasks. Your place was a freshly renovated barn but it was still dingy. That’s what happened with a bare bones budget. You took what you could get and refurbished the rest. It wasn’t the cleanest of places but it was getting there.

You came up behind him and touched his back, breaking his concentration and stealing his attention. “Are you heading out now?” he asked.

“I’m just popping over real quick to get my stuff. You know I’ve told you this before, but I don’t want you spending all your free time cleaning.”

“I like cleaning.”

“It’s your day off, Edge.”

“Like I said, this is something I like to do and thank the stars for that, or between the two of us nothing would ever get done,” Edge called out loudly, throwing his voice up into the loft where Red still lazed about.

“You deserve to be happy and do something fun on your day off that isn’t cleaning for a change.”

“It’s not just cleaning, it’s cleaning your place. You let us stay over, it’s the least I could do.”
You huffed in playful frustration. “That’s not something you need to repay or even thank me for. You guys were the ones who helped me out and plus, you made me breakfast.”

Edge opened his mouth to say something but you grabbed at his hand first and the contact made him hesitate. You squeezed his hand through his glove and after a second he squeezed back. He stared down at your face, searching it with the soft light of his crimson eye lights until he saw something that made him settle.

“Most days I wish you believed you were as deserving of love as you are,” he quietly admitted. “The rest of the time I’m too determined to let you go on unbelieving only so I can have the satisfaction of convincing you with my own efforts. I like to do things for you. Don’t fret over me.”

You felt small, smaller than before, but managed to nod once for him. He smiled and squeezed your hand before turning back around to the countertop he was wiping down, thought his face stayed turned towards you and his body always angled in your direction.

“You know….I’ve never been good at doing what people tell me to do,” you say.

“I’ve heard that,” he laughed.

“Then don’t be too surprised.” You left to grab one of the Amazon boxes left half opened by the door and carried it over to the counter Edge had finished cleaning. “You were warned.”

Edge peeked inside the box and saw the book binding before reaching in with his free hand to remove the paperback title. “You minx,” he hissed in delight at the awful romance title that was the latest in a series you were both reading.

Neither of you could take the writing very seriously but enjoyed tearing it to shreds in giddy daiquiri filled critiques that never got bad enough to put you off from reading the rest in the author’s works. The local library didn’t have any more books in the series and Edge had resigned himself to starting something new.

“I started the first few chapters but I haven’t had the chance to make my way through the rest of it. I thought you might want to, I don’t know, say…actually relax on your day off. Maybe you could even put your feet up.”

“You mock my commitment to excellence,” he playfully chastised. “Oh, you are the worst.”

His begrudging joy only made your own grin stretch. “I’m glad you like it. I’ll be back later.”

He mumbled something that had you giggling all the way out the door.

The walk from the barn to the main house wasn’t far, and you had made the trip in the dark once or twice without issue. Black had insisted on laying some loose flagstone down to make a makeshift walkway between the two structures that helped cut down on the dirt and mud tracked into the house; You still slipped off your shoes by the door, regardless.

The house is silent as you make your way into Wendy’s room and find it a mess…again. It had been neat last night but you knew how much damage she could do in a day. Your watch was on the bathroom countertop and took all of thirty seconds to grab, but there were so many things left a mess in the room you couldn’t just leave. You started to pick up some of the messiest toys that looked like they might hurt if stepped on. The rest were for Wendy to pick up and learn some responsibility.

“I THOUGHT I HEARD SOMETHING.”
You glanced back over your shoulder and grinned when you saw Black in the doorway standing with his arms crossed. “I had to come back for something I left.”

“What was that, the mess of a six year old? Don’t touch anything more or she’ll never learn how to take care of her things.”

“I wasn’t planning on picking the rest up, just the things that would hurt the most if stepped on.”

“On your day off?”

“I was already here,” you answered with a laugh.

Black huffed and you had learned his mannerisms and tells well enough to know that was his ‘acceptable’ huff and not his ‘disappointed’ huff. Some days there were expressions you still couldn’t decipher, but there was enough you could recognize that you felt like you could say you ‘knew’ Black.

So, when you straightened and turned to face him in the doorway it confused you to watch his expressions melt into something caught between shock and… another whole mix of emotions you couldn’t decipher.

His eye lights had shrunk to pin pricks the way they tended to when he switched into a hyper focused state and their color went indistinguishable between red, purple, and pearl-white. The rest of his body went stone still, rigid like a taunt bowstring.

“…Black? Is something wrong?” He didn’t twitch so you asked again, “Are you fine?”

He doesn’t answer you right away. You take a handful of steps and stop just before you’re an arm’s reach away, being careful to give him ample ‘breathing’ room. From experience you know Black’s personal bubble is a bit bigger than the average person’s and he’s not one to normally let others trespass his boundaries so casually.

Stiffly, he turned his face up towards you and stared for another good thirty seconds before responding. “Yes.”

You weren’t convinced.

“You sure you’re fine? You seem a bit… unsettled by something.”

“Not in the slightest!” he answered too quickly. The words almost blurred into one another. A second later the color began to bloom across his skull, dark and far reaching.

You knew he was lying, you just didn’t know if you should call him out on it. It seemed like too cruel a thing for someone with as much pride as Black. He was one of the easiest skeletons to ruffle, much to your secret delight.

Honestly. Who wouldn’t think it entertaining? There was nothing shameful about enjoying a little feeling, was there?

“Well let me know if you need me for anything. I was just on my way out but I forgot my watch.”

“You are going out?”

You nodded. “Sans and Red are helping with another official relocation that I wanted to be a part of. It’s not far.”
Black fidgeted like he was wearing a suit that didn’t fit him. He never fidgeted. Sure he’d blush and bluster, but his body was never one to abandon his control even when his emotions got away from him. (That was more of a Blue habit.) It made you worry.

“Are you sure you’re okay? You’d tell me if something was wrong, right?”

“OF COURSE!”

His eye lights wobbled in their sockets and you saw them shift just a bit around the edges but they were too small to see the shape clearly. Also, your eyesight wasn’t exactly the best since the accident.

You scrambled for something else to say to help ground him, knowing he was the last skeleton to ask or accept help from someone or admit he was in need. You fidgeted, rubbing the back of your neck and jostled the chain. He almost flinched and you latched onto that, the first new reaction from him.

“Oh yeah, I’m wearing your necklace. All the other times it’s been tucked away but I guess it must have fallen out when I was bending over to clean things up, maybe?” You stroked the raw stone. “I guess you haven’t seen me wearing it before today.”

“…I…UH HEM, I DID NO-NOTICE IT ON OTHER OCCASIONS BUT DID NOT THINK TO DRAW ATTENTION TO IT. I-I SEE IT SUITS YOU AS WELL AS I HAD HOPE IT WOULD.” Black ducked his chin and averted his eyes for a moment, like the effort of looking straight at you was too much to maintain. But he was Black, so of course he managed to fix his eye lights back on you after only a moment. “IT IS GOOD YOU LIKE IT.”

“I love it.”

His eye lights flared enough with color and shape that you were almost sure you could distinguish the details of it, but then he looked away, coughing into his hand and suffering another darkening shade of flush across his skull.

“Thank you,” you say, hoping it’s enough to help him gain some more composure. “I mean it, I really do love it and I wear it almost every day.”

He was probably embarrassed to have gifted you something so fancy in hindsight. You weren’t dressing up enough for it today, after all. You didn’t think he regretted his choice of a gift, but…it was still too nice a thing for you. You were more grit and blood than class and poise.

Hesitantly, you reach for it and begin to pull it back to tuck it into the collar of your shirt, because it’s true about going out and you didn’t want it getting caught on anything or dirty.

Black turned back around to watch you and once it was out of sight, tucked safely away, he seemed to deflate a bit and regain more of his composure. He coughed once more and righted himself, standing with his hands folded behind his back once more.

“IT SUITS YOU BETTER THAN ANYTHING ELSE I’VE COME ACROSS SO I AM GLAD TO HEAR YOU ARE SATISFIED WITH THE TRINKET.”

You scoff, voice catching on the laugh stuck in your throat. “Trinket? Black, it’s the nicest thing I own.”

“FOR NOW THAT MAY BE. HOWEVER, DO NOT FORGET THE VALUE OF THE FAR GREATER TREASURE IT WAS MEANT TO COMPLIMENT.”
“You’re awfully sweet for someone who chastises children as much as you do,” you playfully tease, knowing well and good that Black was a marshmallow when it came to Wendy and the others. He might bluster and speak loudly, but he was like puddy in their hands.

“I AM A MALEVOLENT SKELETON OF UNBIASED CHARACTER AND CUNNING. I AM NOT SWEET!”

“If you say so, but you make me smile plenty.”

“THAT-” His eye lights wobbled again, but without the dilation you could better see the shape they were trying to make. They weren’t stars…

“Don’t think too much about it. It’s not a bad thing to make someone smile. No one’s going to take advantage of you for that here. New world, new standards, new life.”

“I NE-NEVER SAID SAID IT WAS A BAD THING. AS FORMER CAPTAIN TO THE RUTHLESS GUARD I WILL ENDURE READILY EVEN IN THE ABSENCE OF THE ADVANTAGE CRUELTY PROVIDES.”

“Glad to hear it. I like you the way you are and would hate to see you change.” You moved to pass him and step out into the hallway but patted his forearm as you walk by. He doesn’t flinch from the contact but you know better than to push your luck and not try for anything more. “I gotta head out if I wanna make it to the grand opening in time. Don’t work too hard on your day off. For once you have a quiet house for a few hours. Enjoy it.”

You didn’t hear his voice over your shoulder as you made your way down the hallway and the stairs but you figured that wasn’t anything to think twice about.

You buckled your watch onto your wrist as you walked, already feeling the bump and weight of your keys in the back pocket of your pants. That was all you needed. Your license was still where you left it, in the first cup holder of your broken down Camry from over a dozen years ago. Black hated it but had to admit your driving was safer and more practiced than his brother’s.

Soon after accepting Black’s proposal to nanny for a living Sans, Red, and Stretch had each taken turns shortcutting into your apartment and then shortcutting back over the course of three days until everything you owned was waiting behind in the run down barn for you…everything except your car.

Sans had been the one who took you back so that you could end things properly with the landlord and cut your losses with the apartment. Then the two of you had taken turns driving from the city up to Blackberry; a trip made, thankfully, in only two days. (It would have taken even less time if Sans hadn’t insisted on stopping every other hour for more food and drinks. Considering all he had helped do for you, giving in to his incessant requests was the least you could do.)

You slid in and fit your key into its slot, starting the car and throwing it into gear. The drive from Black’s farmhouse to the budding monster metropolis at the ‘heart’ of Blackberry was less than a ten minute drive. Along the way you passed a couple other farm-like properties with homes or buildings you recognized as belonging to newer monster neighbors.

Downtown is quaint in the old fashioned sort of way. There are still a number of shops and storefronts dead where they stand and just as empty, but slowly the town is reviving with the influx of new monster neighbors. In your opinion, one of the best things about Blackberry was how the people were so thankful to have some new life and new neighbors again it didn’t matter if they were monsters or human. You hadn’t been expecting that but you weren’t about to complain.
You’d take the kindness where you could get it.

You recognize the quaint brick building with a small private parking lot in back with a smile. It’s similar to the building back in New Ebott, but a little bigger and a just a touch more run down. You, Edge and Red had worked alongside Sans and Papyrus to dress it up as best you can and in comparison to what it had looked like when you first saw it…the place looked amazing.

You pulled up and found a parking spot out back, locking and slamming the car door behind you. Red must have heard the commotion since he came outside to look and grinned wide when he saw it was you.

“I thought something happened to you, sweetheart. What took you so long?”

“I can’t shortcut to where I want to be whenever I want. Some of us have to get around the old fashioned way. It’s a ten minute drive from the house you know.”

“You could always let me drive you here. I’d rather drive ya crazy, but I can settle for less.”

“I’m sure you can,” you snicker, following him inside.

The interior is familiar but new. There’s a bar in the center of the room and enough tables and chairs to pack in a nice sized crowd. At the back there’s a sign above the office labeled ‘Fire Exit’ that both Sans and Red instead on installing. You remember the Grillby’s in New Ebott having one too.

The jukebox is on and glowing, playing a smooth jazz melody that seems to play without ending and there are already a number of patrons loitering around or adding last minute touches to the ‘Happy Grand Opening’ sign Papyrus was in charge of hanging. He stood underneath it with a scrutinizing expression, eyeing it like it had personally offended him.

“It looks good, Paps,” you call out, diverting his attention.

“Oh, you made it!” he turns away from the banner and crosses the room in two long strides to reach you, calling out your name as he does so. He doesn’t bother with waiting for your reply but goes straight in for a hug, nearly lifting you off your feet.

“Sorry I couldn’t make it this morning. I hadn’t realized how tired I was I guess.”

Papyrus squeezed tight one last time then let go enough to see you properly. “While I might normally feel the need to chastise others for their laziness, there is no need for someone as hardworking as you to feel remorse for taking time to properly rest and care for yourself-unlike some brother of mine.”

“Hey, speaking of the man of the hour, where is he? I thought he’d be here by now. I was nearly late, wasn’t I?” You looked around for any sign of Sans, knowing he was the one who would be bringing Grillby back via shortcut.

“It’s my brother,” Papyrus sighed, sounding like that explained everything.

Behind you Red barked in laughter. “The Marshmallow ain’t ever on time, is he?”

“You are no better, Red,” Papyrus quipped. “I swear, with the two of you…I don’t know how Edge manages it so well.”

“Hey, we get the job done.”
“Hardly!”

A few of the nearby monster patrons chuckled at the familiar exchange. You didn’t recognize most of them, but there were one or two you could remember meeting after their resettlement. The red bird monster seemed especially excited to see Grillby again if him coming all this way was any indication. There were a few other dog monsters who gathered in the corner and were setting up a card game while they waited.

It felt familiar enough to make you want to relax again.

“If he’s not here on time he won’t be much later,” you finally say. “What’s left to do?”

“Absolutely nothing but worry over what has already been done! Should I have bought something scented to freshen up the room? He’ll be cooking and the natural aroma is much more suited to this sort of place but for now all you can smell is air!” Papyrus panicked, launching himself into a mini rant on all the things he was worried about until you grabbed his arm. He stilled at the contact and you sighed, all too familiar with his tendencies. He was a perfectionist to his core.

“It all looks great. Grillby is going to be so thankful and just love it, I’m sure.”

“I…ahem, well, I was not the most courteous of patrons to his establishment in the past, the menu never suited my tastes, but I would like to help a fellow monster in finding their best life atop the surface.”

“That sounds just like you, but don’t worry. It’s all going to turn out perfectly, trust me.”

“I…. I can do that!”

You let him go to straighten out tables and try them in different places on the floor while Red made himself comfortable at the bar, dozing lightly. You waited over by the jukebox, flipping through the different tracks and recognizing most of them from before. There were a few new additions, as with the digital age it became possible to quadruple the total number of tracks fit into a single machine without sacrificing the ascetic the body presented.

You found a couple tracks you enjoyed and added them to the line up for a handful of spare nickels. You needed to remember to leave nickels next to the machine since most monsters didn’t use cash and coins but stuck to either their gold or plastic credit cards that made the conversions for them.

Tracks from Daft Punk and tumbling Jazz played one right after the other, interrupted by some soft and old classical rock before returning to Grillby’s favorite tracks. At one point you looked back to notice a couple of the dogs bobbing along while Papyrus danced to and from his different tasks, and it was nice to relax while you waited.

But then there was static and you felt the magic in the air before leaning back to see out the front windows to where Sans stood in the middle of the street with his hands spread wide in a ‘ta da’ pose while a stunned fire elemental monster looking on in mute awe. You didn’t miss the beads of sweat on San’s skull from no doubt the magical exhaustion that came from taking a shortcut so far.

They exchanged a few words before Sans reached out to Grillby, tugging him towards the front door.

“Places, people!” Papyrus whispered sharply.
Everyone fell into place and when Sans opened the door and dragged Grillby in. The timing couldn’t have been more perfect. A cheer of ‘surprise’ went up followed by nonflammable confetti and then his usuals swarmed him.

You heard the familiar crackle of his fire speak and then the red bird monster was translating…a bit poorly. You suspected long ago his translation skills were more based off of body language cues and less the actual fire language.

Sans dragged Grillby to the bar and Red hopped down to make room.

“Fully stocked, hot stuff!” Red cheered.

“Only the best. This town needs some good eats,” Sans said.

Grillby’s fire crackled and you understood it literally, but even without the translation, it seemed Sans and Red still both got the gist of the message.

And then the flames around his face burned brighter for a moment, flashing differs colors as he saw you leaning up against the jukebox. You waved and headed on over, lightly punching Sans in the arm as you passed him by.

You heard him say your name in the crackle of his flames but doubted anyone else could tell what it was he said.

You don’t hesitate to wrap Grillby up in a big hug, never minding the flames that were all but harmless until he wished them to be otherwise. He reacted on a reflex, but then you felt when it hit him who you were or what you were doing as the returned gesture became all the more familiar.

“Glad to see you again,” you said into his shoulder.

He pulled you back and grabbed at your face, pushing back the bangs that you had purposefully brushed and curled so that they would fall over your bad eye. You should have known better than to assume Grillby would be any less observant.

“It’s fine,” you whined, “it happened a long time ago before we even met, I’m just not wearing a fake anymore. It’s fine, don’t be such a dad.” You pat at his hands and let your own flames spark out of your palms to show you were serious. Begrudgingly he let you go and stood back with his hands on his hips.

“…Have you been eating properly?”

“I’ve been eating properly. I just started training with Papyrus again if I look any different.”

“…Papyrus.”

You waved to Papyrus who had been hovering on the outskirts of the greetings, beckoning him closer. “Yeah, he’s also the one that made everything look so amazing. What, you thought that was Sans?”

The flames around Grillby’s face flared with a laugh and Sans complained loudly from the bar but didn’t protest more than that.

“…I guess not.”

“Paps?” you waved him over when it looked like Papyrus might be content to hang back and not
draw any closer. “Come here.”

Grillby turned to face Papyrus and extended a hand to shake, one Papyrus immediately responded to.

“I’m so excited to welcome you to our town and happy to see you like the new place. It might not be as close to the original as you were hoping, but the community is just as eager as any you may be used to, I can promise you that!”

“…It’s…perfect. Thank you.”

You watched with nervous excitement as Papyrus puffed up and laughed at the thanks, too pleased to contain himself very well.

“Wanna check it out behind the counter, hot stuff?” Red called out, already climbing up over the bar while Sans snickered into his hand.

Grillby flared and hurried to use the proper entrance to get behind the counter and shoo Red out, crackling through his flames about how that wasn’t appropriate. With the space now open, Sans took the opportunity to slide in closer to your side and lean over, voice hushed.

“I didn’t know the two of you were so close.”

“I told you we knew each other. I was a pretty faithful regular.”

“Yeah, but so is Doggo, you don’t see Grillby getting that friendly with any of the pups, do you?”

You eyed Sans weirdly. “What are you trying to say?”

“Nothing, nothing,” he chuckled nervously. “Just…I know the guy too. He’s…a funny guy.”

You snorted. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard him crack-le a joke.”

Sans’ eye lights sparked with extra magic, hearing your pun. “Not that way.”

You turned back around to watch Red make a nuisance out of himself, picking up bottles and condiments that Grillby had to put back almost as soon as they were removed. Red knew he was annoying too, but that made him all the more eager to get in the fire monster’s way if his eyeocket creasing grin was any indication. Grillby looked more like a dad running after a stray child than anything else.

“I’m glad he’s back at least. It’s a good feeling.”

“Heh, don’t tell him what I said about your burgers. It’s not a big dill, I just don’t wanna go bacon his heart.”

You snicker but shoot him a look of mock offense. “Oh cheese , are you really gonna use that sort of language in this sacred place?”

Sans’ eye lights wobbled and his grin stretched. “You know you love it.”

“I…don’t wanna taco bout it.”

Sans wheezed. “My thoughts e gg-xatly .”

You tried to hold it in but you hated how ruined your defenses were when it came to Sans’ awful
puns. It was too easy to find the fun in them and you were only a little frustrated with yourself for getting tricked into each rebuttal.

You pretend not to notice Grillby watching you oddly or the way Red seemed all too delighted with what he could overhear.

Chapter End Notes

Fans of the Underfell brothers get a treat, Black gets an eye full of you wearing his gift, and Grillby moves in to the neighborhood. It's a fun chapter, a domestic, fluffy, fun sort of chapter and it was a delight to write.
I'm fulfilling ALL my own personal wishes.

This is part 4 of 7 or the start of arc 4, (also based on a Fall Out Boy song), so we're nearly halfway done with the series and I'm...kinda excited? I feel so weird about this chapter because it's one of my favorites, but I wrote this in August when summer really was winding down. Now it's March and in my drafts I'm working on chapter 62 and the world is a mess.
Hopefully you are all staying safe, staying inside, staying sane and enjoying whatever joy you can steal from life with your own two hands.
Best wishes to you all, hope you enjoyed!
You make dinner for Sans and Papyrus.

All you really needed to worry about was making sure you took the kids tomorrow. Wendy still needed to clear kindergarten testing in person and you would go shopping for school supplies with Blue and Stretch after that.

But that was tomorrow.

Tonight…you could do whatever you wanted.

It was your night off.

It’s one of your free nights and you know they’re both going to be home so you show up at Sans and Papyrus’ place to make dinner. Sans was the only one currently ‘in’ since Papyrus was running errands for one of his new monster neighbors, but you knew it wouldn’t be long before he came back.

You knock to the tune of shave-and-a-haircut then wait until the door opens knowing Sans would have already recognized you by now.

“You don’t mind if I steal your kitchen, do you?” you ask as a courtesy. Even if Sans told you no you wouldn’t have believed him and what’s more you would have just continued on your way without paying him any more mind.

He smiled and stepped off to the side, opening up the way.

“Hey, what is it you humans say? My house is your house. You can just move in if you want.” Sans followed behind you and helped himself to a seat at the counter while you busied yourself in pulling out the necessary ingredients. “Actually, we got enough spare bedrooms if you ever feel like just crashing.”

“Sans, you were one of the people who helped me set up my own place in the old barn,” you laugh. “You know I’m good.”

“I know you have a place to call your own, I can’t say how comfortable it is by looks. Our beds are finer than what we hauled out of your closet of an apartment,” Sans teased.
He sounded just like he had when he and Red first saw your bed back during the move. They had been horrible about it.

“Hey, it gets the job done.”

“It’s not very big.”

You flushed at his words and dropped the package of ground meat onto the counter as your hands shook. “It-It’s big enough.”

“Yeah, for maybe a couple of humans, but me and Paps aren’t bite sized, cupcake .”

You could feel the heat of your flush spread up to your ears and turn them red. “Sh-shut up. You-you’re almost as bad as Red.”

San’s grin stretched wider across his skull until it was positively shit eating. He was enjoying your unease far too much. “You say that, but when’s the last time he got you this hot and batter-ed , eh, sweet tart?”

“What has gotten into you, recently?” you grumbled as you ducked your head to try and hide more of your blush.

“You’re the one that let me into your bed so don’t get upset when I criticize it.”

“You make it sound worse than it is!” you hissed, far too rattled by his words for the situation.

The two of you were alone in his house, there was no one else to overhear the conversation with both Red and Edge being out on work as well. It shouldn’t have flustered you as much as it had, but San’s comments had been uncharacteristically forward.

After Grillby’s relocation he had grown increasingly more jovial and confident, but more than that you had to blame his change in attitude on your decision to invite him to cuddles with you and Papyrus that one night a month or so back. He had been so hesitant at first you hadn’t expected him to show up again a week later with his brother, or again six days after that.

“What does it sound like?” Sans teased, leaning forward over the counter.

“You know what it sounds like. Make me say it and I might get mad enough to leave this food here uncooked,” you threatened.

“That would be the biggest mis- steak ever,” Sans joked, eye lights bright. “Come on, lettuce not fight about it anymore.”

“Sometimes you are insufferable.”

“Only sometimes? I must be doing better.”

You sighed and patted at your face, hoping to feel it cooled down. With Sans in his good mood you started to rip into your ingredients for the skillet served dinner. When Sans eventually came around and offered to help, you told him he could get the buns and condiments out after laughing at him for his offer. You hadn’t expected him to actually do it, but when you turned around the buns were ready and so were all the toppings.

“You’re making those burgers again?” he asked, sounding eager. “The ones with the egg in them.”

“Yeah, but that’s supposed to be a secret so shush .”
Sans stayed quiet for a good minute and thirty seconds before he had to interrupt your focus with another horrible joke.

“Hey, how do you make a hamburger smile?” He only gave you a moment to consider the question before rambling off the punchline. “Pickle it gently.”

“You must be in a good mood or something,” you snicker in spite of yourself. “What’s that occasion?”

“I need a reason to make a funny?”

You finished forming the meat into the desired patty shape over the skillet but made your hands burst into flame instead. Standing over the stove, you worked your own fire magic into the food until it was ready and from there you let it sit in the warm skillet while you readied the second and third patty. With Papyrus nowhere in sight you plated the first two out of three and offered it to Sans to dress himself the way he liked it.

You took the last burger for yourself and set it aside in favor of putting away the extra meat for whenever Papyrus got back since Red and Edge would be gone for the night.

You looked up when you heard the sounds Sans made as he melted across the countertop with the burger between his hands. “Don’t tell Grillby I’m cheating on him or even that I said this, but these are the best,” he sighed.

“Thanks, your secret is safe with me,” you laughed before joining him at the counter. “There’s not that much difference since he was the one who showed me how to make them this way, with fire magic.”

There were a couple of bags of different flavored chips and even more monster chisps to pick from when adding a complementary side. You licked the excess sauce off your thumb before reaching for a bag to pull open.

Sans moaned again, finishing his first burger and dripping ketchup out the side of his mouth. You didn’t bother to even grimace anymore when he used the sleeve of his blue hoodie to wipe his face clean. It wasn’t fair to Papyrus who did all the laundry in the house.

“Can you cook for me every night?”

“No, you have money, you can bother Grillby for your magic burger fix. You’re there every time I stop by so I know you’re his favorite customer.”

“Yeah, I said ta not tell him any of this, but yours are the best.”

“Why would you give me blackmail material you lazy bun?” you joked, watching for his reaction as he realized what you just said.

It was a rare day when you could make his eye lights shift into shapes but you recognized the change when he turned to face you anew. You bit into your burger and pretended to ignore him while Sans sagged a little more in his seat.

“…How abouts I hire you out as a personal cook, say once a week? Bonus, you can have your own bedroom to crash in if you’re here too late.”

“I live ten minutes by bike just down the road, Sans, why would I ever need to crash here? And besides, I’ll be booked up more in the afternoons coming up soon. The kids will be starting school
“You’re gonna get lonely without ‘em?” he asked, picking up his next burger.

“It’s only school and it’s only for a few hours during the weekday, but it’s far away enough that Black said he would take them via shortcut each morning so they didn’t have to wake up at unreasonable hours.”

Sans made another sound as he bit into his second burger and chewed his way through a good third of it before he had to pause and moan. He sagged against the countertop and turned to you with his eye lights shaped like hearts. “Seriously, you should just marry me k?”

You snorted, rolled your eyes, and bit into more of your burger, content to eat in silence while Sans finished his. Some of his jokes were funnier than others.

You were nearly finished with your burger when you heard the front door open and then the familiar stomps of Papyrus leaving the mud from his shoes on the welcome mat before coming inside.

“I smell human cooking and it is love-ly!” he cheered, coming into the kitchen and making a beeline for you. He grabbed for you and hugged you to his body, wrapping his arms around you enough that he was able to touch his shoulders again. “You came!”

“I said I would,” you laughed, pulling away. “Busy day?”

“A productive day!”

You eased off the stool and headed back into the kitchen. “Let me get you a burger. I said I would wait until you were home before-” Papyrus’ hand on your shoulder and Sans’ hand on your wrist both stopped you before you could walk too far from your plate.

“You didn’t finish your food, kiddo,” Sans explained.

“I would be the world’s worst host if I didn’t let you finish your own meal before making mine!” Papyrus added.

“It’s not a lot left and it’s not gonna go bad if it gets a little cold,” you chuckled before making your hands flash with heated fire. “I could just toast it up again.”

“Sometimes it is the principal of the matter and not the details of it that one must adhere to. I will go change and come down again in six minutes and forty-five seconds. That should give you ample time to finish off what you have left,” Papyrus said.

“Plenty,” you laughed, agreeing with Papyrus. “Go change into something comfy. I’ll be ready when you come down.”

Papyrus beamed bright but left to head into the hallway and up the stairs to his bedroom. “Do not rush, you still have six minutes and thirty five seconds,” he called from somewhere you couldn’t see.

“Eat, cupcake,” Sans encouraged.

“You’ve been hanging out with Red too much, I can see him wearing off on you with the nicknames.”
“You don’t hate them, do you?”

You took another bite and shook your head. “Nah,” you answered around the mouthful before you had to chew and swallow. “It’s fine. I’m not as attached to my actual name as you might think since it-well, I’m not sure what my real first name is anyway, only the name I took for myself to keep from having other kids call me SevenA all the time. Nicknames are nice.”

“I’ll keep that in mind, tart.”

You laughed, finishing off the rest of your burger before standing up to round the kitchen island and pull out the ground meat from before. “You planning on sticking to food nicknames?”

“Only the sweet ones.”

You laughed but made another two new hand-burgers, knowing that Sans had the room for a third patty at least.

You hadn’t been keeping track of time but Papyrus showed up abruptly and promptly, grinning from ear to ear. In place of his (crowd pleasing) battle body he was wearing a neon yellow crop top with the words ‘c00l boy’ printed across the chest as well as some casual shorts.

And while burgers weren’t Papyrus’ first choice in a meal, he admitted loudly and proudly, that your burgers were the exception because you made them with ‘love instead of grease.’ He and Sans joked back and forth about being able to taste the love in your food but you could only laugh at their misplaced earnestness. They were just far too kind for their own good…or delusional in Sans’ case.

Monsters said they could taste food and honesty in home cooked meals, but even with magic you had never been able to pick up on anything. You weren’t sure if it was a collective joke or just something you’d never understand as a human. Regardless, it was a compliment and you appreciated the kindness.

“If you’re staying does that mean you would be amenable to breaking in our new and improved home movie system?” Papyrus asked once the extra food was put away and the kitchen cleaned up.

“You have a new home movie system? What was wrong with the tv in the living room?”

“Two words,” Sans interjected, “recliner seats.”

“It’s an authentic home theater experience with the surrounding sounds and monster sized seats perfect for MTT holiday specials,” Papyrus added.

“How could I refuse?” you asked, knowing all too well that one or two movies would soon turn into three or four, until it was two AM and you were all too tired to be responsible about your choices.

You knew how it would go. You’d end up snuggled and sleeping on the couch again…together, but that was only if you were lucky. One of your first nights over you all ended up in a mess on the floor half under the coffee table. One of these days you were going to make it to that guest bed in time, but you doubted that day would come so soon.

“I have been stocking our cabinets with the classics of your species but tonight we will be indulging in the finer side of monster culture,” Papyrus exclaimed.
Sans shot you a look past Papyrus’ elbow and you snorted but ignored the older brother’s look of shock/horror in favor of taking Papyrus by the arm and following him to the second story wing that had been under construction until only last month. One of the rooms was still closed off with a sign designating it as a ‘work in progress’ room that Sans and Papyrus couldn’t agree on the theme of.

Red and Edge, while they still worked for Sans and Papyrus, lived in the detached guesthouse, so the main house building felt more empty than it really was.

The movie theater room was just as impressive as Papyrus promised it to be. The lush recliner seats were extra plush, tall, and wide to accommodate monster sizes. For you they were massive and perfect for snuggling up in. There was a trunk at the back next to the popcorn machine with extra pillows and throws you could use to cuddle with during the movie. Papyrus knew you too well.

“Looks amazing, guys,” you praised loudly from across the room. “I’ll be sure to crash more frequently.”

“Please do! Our house is always open to use. Feel free to treat it like your own. We even have a spare bedroom you could use or decorate the way you want for any sleepovers!”

Papyrus sounded so much like his brother. You shot a look over your shoulder at Sans who chuckled at your playful glare before shrugging his boney shoulders at you.

“I’ll make sure to keep that in mind, Paps. What sort of movie were you thinking of putting in for tonight?” You ask, defusing the situation and turning the conversation back to less personal matters. Papyrus was only too glad to pull open the display case and show off the vast array of dvds he had collected in the last five and a half years above ground. He even had a highly coveted VHS collection that he pulled from to show off his monster favorite classics.

You loved watching how animated he got once he started to roll on and on about the things he was most passionate about. It was hard to listen to him and not smile.

To no one’s surprise, midnight came and went, and the second movie rolled into the third movie because that’s what you do when you start a trilogy. The final installment in Mettaton’s space western spy flick with murder, romance, and a long lost twin brother stretched on until the wee hours. You were barely awake when Papyrus shifted in his sleep so that his upper body crossed over your armrest and edged into your personal space.

You expected Sans to be just as passed out but instead he was up and hobbling over to the both of you. Before you could ask his hands were on you both and you were dropped onto a long, California king sized bed decorated with a soft reds and a cream colored comforter, already pulled back and folded for you.

Papyrus reclined naturally and his hands reached for you in his sleep, tugging you down with him. You didn’t resist and you probably wouldn’t have even if you did have the energy. Papyrus knew you too well to not know the shape or feel of you even when half asleep.

Sometimes when you snuggled he would subconsciously start to heal you even though you weren’t hurt or in any pain. It was just something he tended to do in his sleep with you and no one else. That was the sort of monster Papyrus was, far more sweet and generous than any other human or monster you had met before.
“Sleep tight kids, don’t let them bed bugs bite,” Sans chuckled, pulling back the comforter on both of you.

You reached out for his wrist, stopping him before he could get far. “What are you doing?”

“… Tucking you in?”

Your brain felt fuzzy, but you forced out the rest of your words. “No, where are you going, I mean. You’re not leaving are you?”

“I-ah, Paps already looks like he’s fine. He can-”

Maybe it was because you were so drowsy or maybe it was because the movie was so bad you were still loopy from trying to keep up with its convoluted plot, but you tugged Sans down with more strength than necessary, tripping him into bed beside you while Papyrus stayed wrapped with his arms around your waist.

Sans stuttered out your name and tried to crawl away but you dragged him back and fisted your hands into the fabric of his hoodie, pinning him in place against the pillows.

“We’ve talked about this, Sans,” you said.

“You… you looked so comfortable with Papyrus….”

You sagged back and then titled, falling onto your side and letting go of Sans only partially. Your hands were still in his hoodie, but your grip was weak. In the dark Sans’ eye lights were quivering pearls of light.

“I’m comfortable with you too. It’s not an exclusive deal here. It’s just… it’s just sleeping.” You could feel it in your mouth, the way the words started to slur with sleep even as you pushed them past your lips. “So ca’mere…”

He chuckled, giving up and giving in. “Whatever you say, princess.”

You scoff into the pillow, too tired to even crack and eye for him. “No sweet tart?”

But you were asleep before Sans could even think up a way to answer you. Instead he settled in beside you, reaching one arm up under the pillow beneath your head to better cushion you. Papyrus could wrap himself around you, his lanky form suited it, but Sans much preferred curling up alongside you, supporting you, or just… watching you until he fell asleep. You were… his favorite thing to see when he closed his eye lights for the night or opened them in the morning.

If someone would have told him a year ago that the girl he stayed up late reading about and digging up information on would be… in the same bed as him and his brother, he would have laughed at the terrible joke.

Being so happy only made the fear of another reset all the more crippling. The science said that wouldn’t happen, not with so many trans-dimensional anchors present, but… Sans was paranoid with good reason. He had lost track of all the different times he had woken up only to realize too late that his yesterday was the rest of the world’s today.

That kind of fear never died.

That kind of fear adapted.
So maybe there would be no more resets, so what? There were plenty of other dangerous things that could take you away from him.

With half of your face pressed into the pillow he could barely make out the scar that stretched over your eye, but he knew it was still there...along with all the other scars you hid and covered up.

He didn’t want to leave, so he risked a dip into his pocket with only one hand and pulled out his phone. The screen was dark with the light turned down as far as it could go, but he could still make out the names and numbers in his contacts as he scrolled through to open an old message thread.

He wasn’t planning on losing his favorite sight.

Chapter End Notes

Take your best guess one what sort of shit Sans is planning on stirring up.

So, this is the shortest out of all the chapters in part 4 (Hold Me Tight, Or Don't). At one point I considered axing this chapter and just skipping over it, but I liked the idea of casual dinner and movie nights too much, especially now when such simple pleasures feel so out of reach. Hope everyone is doing well and staying safe.
You were packing a satchel to go when Black came downstairs looking more irritated than usual. Wendy and you shared a look of understanding before she whispered, (loud enough to not be a very good whisper), “Mr. Blackberry has his angry eyebrows on.”

“Oh no, I wonder what that could mean,” you playfully bantered.

“What?” Peter asked suddenly, only just hearing the tail end of your sentence.

You were about to answer when Black’s screaming for ‘Mutt’ made you pause and then dissolve into snickers alongside the kids. Even Tron, the most stoic of the bunch, chuckled. “It might have something to do with his appointment today.”

“Appointment. I didn’t know skeletons could get sick,” Peter said.

“Not that kind of appointment. It’s a playdate,” Wendy sagely corrected her older brother.

“IT IS NOT A DATE!” Black roared from the other room.

A moment later he stomped back across the walkway and up the stairs with something folded under his arm. You recognized it a second later as a blank canvas. You couldn’t tell what was inside the small satchel he pinned to his side underneath his elbow, but you were willing to bet they were painting supplies to complement his canvas.

“He’ll have fun. Hanging out with different people is good for you, even if you don’t get along at first,” you explained to the children around you while only half believing it. For their sake you would always be the optimist.

“Who is he going to go play with?” Peter asked.

“He’s not playing,” Wendy whined. “He’s going painting. I told you this already.”

“No you didn’t!”

Tron looked up from his book and locked eyes with you over the heads of the bickering siblings. You grinned and nodded, understanding without words his feelings. Even though Wendy was younger, she was sharp and likely gifted while Peter…struggled more. Really it was just his inability to focus that made some things take longer for him to pick up, but it still frustrated him the more and more he noticed his younger ‘baby’ sister correcting him. Tron was often caught in the worst of it and had endured far more tantrums and fights than you.

Phil grabbed at your ankles and you turned back around to scoop him up and rest him on your hip. He was getting heavier for a four year old. How long before he was five? He wasn’t that far behind Wendy even though they weren’t biologically related.

“Who’s ready to go? If you don’t have shoes on I’m leaving you home and you’ll miss out on Dairy Queen.”

The fighting broke off as both children scrambled to find their flip flops and sandals. With Phil on
your hip and Tron ready by your side you were ready enough to start heading towards the door. As you passed the entrance to the basement, or ‘Mutt’s Domain,’ the wooden door creaked open and the skeleton himself emerged looking pleasantly ruffled.

“Good morning, glad to see you up before we left. Isn’t this sort of early for you, Sleeping Beauty?”

He turned your way at the sound of your teasing and his skeleton smile grew wider. “nah, i’m getting ready to hibernate after an all nighter. m’lord just needed a few things from the downstairs.” Rus’ eye lights fixated on Phil, drooling absently onto your shoulder. It made him chuckle and reach out to pinch Phil’s cheek.

“Nahmah face!” Phil protested, slurring his first two words into a single sound.

“sorry, tiger,” Rus laughed. “you’re just so squishy.”

“What were you staying up all night for?” Tron asked Rus.

“oh you know, this and that, nothing too important ya need ta worry about, but maybe next time we can do some coding together.”

Tron’s eye lights went bright at the mention. “I’d like that. Stretch said he’d have me help him out with some stuff this week too.”

You reached over and rubbed the back of Tron’s head and he bent into the touch, almost as starved for affection as Rus. “We don’t want you overworking yourself so close to the start of school. You’ll get exhausted.”

“that’s where you’re headed?” Rus asked, sounding almost worried. A little worry was normal for Rus, typical even, and today was no different. It was the burden of knowing too much, you assumed.

Second only to Stretch, Rus was the most observant person you knew as well as one of the most anxious. He might not have been as strong as his brother, but he was ten times as observant and clever in his own ways.

“I’ll take good care of them,” you promised.

You reached out with your free hand and rubbed at the side of his skull. Much like how Tron turned towards the touch, Rus nuzzled the side of his head into your hand and deflated a bit as some of the anxiety melted out of his posture.

“take care of yourself too, you’re important…” he mumbled into your palm before kissing it the way skeletons did. You wondered when the last time it was that Rus had actually slept, since he had shadows under his eye sockets and was acting a little…”mushier” than usual. You didn’t mind. You knew him well enough to know that it was just a fact of his character, to grow cuddly and clinging when he was tired or sick.

Seeing the affection Rus showed for someone else, Phil turned clingy and reached out for Rus, making grabby motions with his hands. “Mine turn, mine, mine,” he childishly whined.

Rus was happy to kiss Phil’s hands and then laugh at his satisfied expression.

“Someone’s jealous,” you laughed before shaking your head.
“there’s no need for that, i’es got plenty of kisses to spare.”

You heard Tron make a sound of acknowledgment beside you but didn’t think much more of it when Peter raced into the room first, looking proud in a pair of camo colored crocs. Wendy skittered in a few moments later, looking exhausted.

“Ready to go?” you asked even though your back was towards them as you headed out to the garage.

“b-be safe!” Rus called, voice colored with worry once more.

“Rus, it’s me, of course we’ll be safe,” you called back, sounding too confident to be careless. But he let you go off with a wave and a smile, watching as the children scampered like duckling into line behind you before returning to his room to sleep away the rest of the morning…. and maybe most of the afternoon.

Black glared at the brick exterior of the building before him. While much of the town had fallen apart or fallen into disrepair over the last two decades, one building that survived the test of time was the local library, a well loved treasure in the town of Blackberry and not too far from that fire monster’s new grease pit you were so fond of.

Black, of course, had his own library card and was familiar with the system of check out, he had taken the kids out on a number of outings earlier in the year, even though Wendy was still learning how to read the most basic words on her own. She could recognize the word ‘play’ and the names of all her family members, but little more than that. Peter was a little better, and Tron had a voracious appetite for books while Phil was still just a drooler who liked to listen.

All that to say, Black knew about the library well enough. He wasn’t an outsider and he wasn’t scared of the building. Ha, the IDEA! As if a building with four walls and a roof could scare a skeleton as cunning and malevolent as he!

“I see you found the establishment without issue.”

Black turned and snapped his posture back into place. His heels clicked and his eye lights shrank as he quickly assessed the new arrival. It was only fair, since Edge was doing the same thing-only he didn’t have to tilt his head back too far to see up.

“I AM PROFICIENT IN NAVIGATING MY OWN HOME TOWN. SUCH AN INSIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENT PROVED TO BE UNCHALLENGING WORK.” Black then nodded to Edge’s canvas as it poked up out of the fabric bag he wore over one shoulder. “I SEE YOU HAVE ALSO COME PREPARED.”

“Naturally. To present one’s self for activities with anything less would be downright insulting,” Edge quipped back before taking a step back to make more distance between Black and himself. “I wouldn’t expect such careless behavior from you, but I would anticipate it in my brother if you ever happen to be in a situation where you rely upon his help.”

“THEN THANKFULLY I AM NOT YOUR BROTHER.”

“Nor am I,” Edge quipped.
Black drew himself up as much as he could, standing ramrod straight and at his full height. He was much shorter than Edge, and that was to be expected considering how tall Rus was, but Black refused to let such trivial matters impact his confidence. He would stand proudly and with conviction regardless of who was set up opposite of him.

Edge has impeccable posture himself, so he cast an impressive figure even among monsters, and Black had to admit—BEGRUDGINGLY—that Edge carried himself well for a Papyrus. Unlike Mutt or the other one—Stretch!—Edge came prepared and with an alertness in his eye lights that made Black wary.

“I believe the scheduled time for the event will begin shortly.”

It wasn’t an invitation, just a statement, and Black could respect that, so the two of them turned to head off inside and got set up before the rest of the audience trickled in. As opposed to the last time Black had visited, there was a significant influx of new monster neighbors populating the interior of the library, some perusing shelves or using public computers, while others set up for the event.

It didn’t matter that Edge was able to set up his easel first or prep his canvas before Black. It wasn’t even by much! It didn’t matter if you were first if you were wrong or sloppy! And it wasn’t that big a deal anyway because Black managed to prep all his paints and brushes first.

*Ha.*

Black kept himself from gloating when the event organizer walked out and waved to the class, introducing themselves. In the background a pair of assistant volunteers unrolled a long white tarp that was used to catch the projected video feed for their lessons.

Behind their instructor the video featured a man in white overalls managing an oversized paint brush across the screen before the assistant paused the video to allow their presenter time to finish introductions and instructions.

“Now we’ll get set up with the correct paints for today…”

Black and Edge both mimicked their instructor’s methods for selecting and measuring out the correct paints before picking up the correct brush. Everyone in the room turned as one to the screen as the video rolled and a pleasant looking man with an afro of hair and a soft smile came into focus.

Step by step Edge and Black were guided through the process of turning a blank canvas into a dreamy mountain landscape with crisp white glaciers highlighted in shades of Prussian blue.

The man on the screen was as soft spoken as he looked and in addition to all his instructions his voice carried kind and thoughtful annotates about “doing whatever makes you happy” or what ‘feels right’ because there was no right or wrong in art. It sounded a lot like what you might say to the children, encouraging their imagination the way you did during play time.

The man’s voice was far too soft, how lucky for him. Black had the tones and volume of a captain of the guard that, unfortunately, contributed to some of his *perceived* drawbacks. Not that he wasn’t adaptable or *resourceful*. Folding you into his home had to be proof enough of that.

You had become a vital component in his house and Black was hesitant to admit it, even to himself, but at this point you were far too important to do without.

So…
The idea of the other households vying for your time was MOST VEXING. Just-just because the kids would be in school for so many hours didn’t mean you weren’t…needed around the house. Even if there wasn’t anything for you to do… it-

Black pulled back sharply and frowned at the mistake on his canvas. The valley between his mountains was too deep and dark. It wasn’t what was on the screen and not what he had intended at all.

“Oh wow, what lovely creative choices,” one of the aids complimented from behind Black. “I love your bold exploration of the canvas. Excellent job on making this piece unique.”

Black glanced sideways at Edge and inhaled before drawing up his back and righting his posture. “YES, WELL IF NOTHING IS RISKED THEN NOTHING SHALL BE GAINED, DO THEY NOT SAY?”

An elderly gentleman in the row ahead of theirs flinched at Black’s tone and he made a note to quiet his voice in the future. The elderly were all so sensitive to sounds. Black had thought the older humans got the worse their senses grew.

“It’s not the volume, your majesty,” Edge tisked. “It’s the magic you put into your words. Humans don’t do that. The older ones are more sensitive to it.”

“What?”

The man ahead of him flinched and Black frowned. He tried feeling out the taste of words without magic in his mouth before repeating himself.

“What do you mean?” Black asked.

The old man didn’t flinch.

“Just that, the older humans are more sensitive to the magic we lace our speech with. Kids can tell too but it doesn’t bother them as much. The only other people it annoys are people with magic.”

Black dropped his brush into the mason of water and sat still for a moment more before turning in his seat to face Edge. “But…she has magic?”

“Yeah, she also said it wasn’t that big of a headache so it was enough to avoid it instead of saying anything to you or Rus about it.” Edge glanced sideways at Black and then his eye lights were back on his canvas. “I wasn’t supposed to tell you about it if it was just her, but there are other humans who will suffer if you remain unaware.”

“She never…mentioned it. Are you sure she could even tell? How would you know if it was even a bother to her?” Black snapped, hating how small his doubt was. He wanted to believe Edge was lying, but he knew better and that frustrated him.

“Don’t believe me if you don’t want to.” Edge nodded at his mountain and then set his brush into the can of dirty water. “But as important as that conversation may be, it was my intention to address a different set of concerns.”

FINALLY!

“Oh?”

Black didn’t say anything else for a moment more, as the room around them busied itself with a
varied myriad of different tasks, none of which made enough sound in Black’s humble opinion. The room was too soft and too quiet for the number of bodies present. Why were they all so damn quiet? It wasn’t ideal for conversations.

“Yes, I have been working with the prime brothers, or the ones we haven’t given official nicknames to,” Edge began, “and something about your living situation has been weighing on my mind for some time now.”

“You think there is something untoward with my present situation?” Black all but hissed, imaginary hackles raising.

“A question more than a suspicion. Your choices warrant as much curiosity when one considers your background and the world you came from. From what I’ve heard it was little better than the one my brother and I traveled from.”

“Doubtless.”

“And yet, the first thing you do when you come topside is take in a brood of children. Why?”

Black’s eye lights flashed with magic. If he had been tense before it was nothing in comparison to how he now held himself. Edge didn’t flinch but kept his composure intact and his attention straightforward.

“You are insinuating something I do not kindly tolerate,” Black all but hissed out, voice dropping a good full octave.

Edge, much to his credit, remained unruffled. “It’s just a question. Why take such offense?”

“You know why. I won’t forgive you for interfering with my family, much less for insulting my honor. You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I’m not talking about anything, I’m asking a question and you’re not telling me what I want to hear.” Edge tapped his brush against the water can.

“And that is?”

“What are your intentions with those four?”

It was such a simple question but it was such a loaded answer. The imbalance shook Black and kept him from answering. He had confessed to you easily enough, but you were different. Black didn’t feel like he needed any walls with you, not after…not after seeing your soul and the way you were with his children. You were just as precious to him and dear to his heart as any family member and then some.

Edge…he was still an outsider—an outsider Black would decimate if he needed to. Unlike the others he had both the ability to shortcut like a sans, and the prowess of a fully developed Papyrus. He was confident he could take any of the Judges or their brothers on, even the original.

“If you come for my family it will be the last thing you do,” Black warned.

Edge looked away from his canvas and met Black’s stare head on, nonchalant as ever. “It isn’t my intention to do anything so improper. They seem happy and healthy, plus our human seems to trust you well enough, so that’s typically enough for me, but it didn’t feel right until I asked you myself and saw in person what sort of reaction it would earn me.”
“…Reaction?”

“Think objectively for a minute, will you? A captain of the guard, one who’s taken four children and killed them to bring down his barrier, adopts four such children once he’s topside. Isn’t that just curious? Is he guilty or is he just falling into an old habit? Perhaps he plans on taking them back with him to bring down the barrier if ever he should be pulled back to that world again. Those are all questions a decent, concerned skelle-fellow should ask.”

“They are groundless concerns,” Black hissed. “I would never bring any harm to my family.”

“But they’re not your family. Rus is. Those kids are just people you’ve picked up along the way.”

“Not true!” Black snapped. “They’re not of my bone and magic, but they’re mine all the same. Papyrus and I, we both made that decision together. They needed us and we were going to be something good for a change. Believe it if you want, or don’t. I’ll not give you any ground to act as you see fit if you come after us.”

Edge looked back to his painting and then flicked his eye lights up to the man on the screen, smiling and waving goodbye as the ending bit looped into credits. He didn’t say anything for another small moment.

“You know what a drill sergeant is above ground?” Edge asked.

“I am familiar,” Black huffed. “Nothing compared to the captain of the guard, but a harsh and formidable occupation nevertheless.”

“Indeed. All that shouting… it is hard to imagine it.”

“Imagine what?”

Edge gestured back up to the screen and then down to their art pieces. “That man we followed, the painter, he was once such a fellow, all anger and harsh rhetoric for those under his tutelage.”

“You…are mistaken,” Black hesitated to say. He glanced back up at the screen just in time for it to loop back to the smiling man. He was the last one Black would suspect of being military material. Even for a human he was too soft.

“He changed.”

“…” Black didn’t have words.

“When my brother and I first emerged topside the humans who took us in were very persuasive of this philosophy. Also, they were fans of this painter and would make us watch the videos when days were rough. But, they were always steadfast in their belief that people could change if they wanted to, monsters and humans alike. So, I am willing to believe you’ve changed. I just needed to confirm it with my own eyes today.”

“You were… testing me?”

Edge inclined his chin and glared down the ridges of his nasal cavity. “Obviously.”

“You are a credit to your station then. I was ready to decimate you.”

“You were ready to try,” Edge quipped.

Black barked a sharp laugh. “Believe whatever helps you sleep at night, Papyrus.”
Edge hesitated before reaching for his painting supplies, but only for a minute. Black had already turned around and was packing his things up with double speed. A minute later he had his painting and then he was gone, a shortcut away.

Chapter End Notes

More Skeleton scenes! How many of you were worried when you heard Black had a 'date' with someone else?
Yeah, he and Edge are some of the most severe iterations but I wanted to give them some more character development in this chapter. It's a little different but I enjoyed it and I think it fits in okay.

Thank you all so much for the feedback and comments. I love reading them, especially now when I can't leave the house. You guys are the best. :) Stay safe and stay healthy!
Shopping all on its own was plenty exhausting. Shopping with kids… it should count as an olympic sport.

By the time you got to the last leg of your trip you had broken down enough to let Blue pick something out for you just so long as you didn’t have to grab it yourself. You were willing to put up with anything at that point. The three of you corralled the kids out of the mall, breaking down at the last minute to shill out a few quarters so they could get something fun from the wall of dispensers. Your only rule had been no candy. You were ashamed to admit you pretended not to notice when Peter broke down his three quarters for a handful of Mike and Ike bits and a sticker tattoo. He showed you the tattoo and you were willing to let him think he had been sneaky…for now. Later on when he least expected it you would bring it up as a means to encourage him to get his chores done.

And Black thought you were good with kids?

You were a hot mess half of the time and the other half you were just a mess.

“You gonna be good to go for movie night tonight?” Stretch asked once you made it home and got the kids unloaded.

“Sure, I just need something strong to drink with it,” you whispered behind your hand, watching to make sure Wendy made it inside.

“We can manage that I think,” he chuckled. “I’ll have to pass on anything harder than soda. I’m a terrible lightweight compared to Blue.”

“You?” you scoffed sarcastically.

Stretch flushed in embarrassment. “Hey, a glass or two of wine is enough for most people.”

“But not you?”

“Hon, you were there. You saw. I-I can handle a glass or two.”

You huffed to hide your chuckle. Stretch liked to think he was tougher than he was, but you had been there the last time you broke into the wine. He hadn’t downed as much as you or Blue, but he flushed fast and got friendly real quick. If you remember correctly he had to be carried to his room by Blue by the end of the night before he could get too handsy. He had been almost as bad as Russ, and that was saying something.

“It’s okay. You don’t have to drink with me. One of us should stay level headed.”

“Hmmm, tall order considering who you’re watching with,” he chuckled.

Stretch and Russ were both equally light lightweights. You could hold your drink well enough, but tonight you didn’t want to. Tomorrow morning was free and the only place you had to be was Meet
the Teacher night and that wasn’t until evening. You would be fine.

“I wanna get messed up,” you admitted under your breath before you could stop yourself. Stretch snickered and blushed a dark clementine shade of orange with gleeful magic. You playfully glare up through your lashes at him and his blush only darkened. “Shut up.”

“Can’t help it, honey. You’re cute when you’re frustrated.”

The two of you headed on inside and put away your bags, making sure the totes with supplies were ready to take to the school. You headed off to your barn house out back to change from your day clothes to something more comfortable. When you came back in Happy Sushi patterned pj pants and a matching nightshirt Stretch only laughed while Blue cooed about how cute you looked.

‘Ready for bed before six o clock.’

“Oh hush, it’s your turn to cook, mister,” you pouted, moving along.

It was Tuesday so of course it was a taco night. And for all your complaining you slipped into the kitchen behind Blue to help him with the ground beef and the cooking of his famous friendship tacos. He had gotten so much better at making them, even if he did insist on adding the edible monster glitter.

Russ roused and Black came down just in time for the five of you to take seats at the table where the kids were already…suspiciously, ready and waiting.

The kids were never ready at the table before you.

“Oh no, what did you do now?” you asked over the plate of heated shells, catching sight of Tron’s guilty smile and Wendy’s quick exchange of unspoken words with her brother, Peter.

“Nothing!” Peter sang playfully.

You slid onto your bench seat and Black started to serve those at his end of the table while Blue helped those at the other end. Everyone was set up with their own taco of sorts and halfway into the meal before Wendy spoke up, sounding ever so innocent.

“So, I got to see the teachers at my new school today.”

“Tell me about it,” Black encouraged. “What did you think of the school or the people there?”

Wendy rambled on while you helped yourself to seconds, having already heard her thoughts during the ride back. You made a grabby hand motion for the hot sauce and Blue laughed at you but passed it down.

“So, it got me thinking…” Wendy trailed on, tilting her head to the side and batting her eyes. You grew weary, knowing Black was highly susceptible to manipulation with that move. Wendy was about to ask for something. “Can I say you and Y/N are my daddy and mommy tomorrow night?”

What?

Stretch choked and Blue dropped his taco onto his plate. From his seat Tron glared daggers at Wendy while Peter huffed angrily.

“What made you think that?” you asked, regaining your voice first. It looked like Black was still
frozen where he sat.

“Cause I don’t have a mommy or daddy but Mr. Blackberry takes care of me like a daddy and you
take care of me like a mommy, so it’s it just okay to say that? I’ll be the only one there with no
mommy or daddy.”

“Is it that important to you to be able to give us those labels in front of others?” you asked, treading
carefully.

“But…it’s true, sorta. You are kinda like…ummm, well, like a mom should be. R-right?”

“I wouldn’t know, sweetie, I never knew my mother or father and grew up without. I can remember
wanting one at some point, but in the end it was only the family I made that I got to have.” You set
down your shell and moved your plate up to cross your arms and set them on the edge of the table.
“What do you think about your family here?”

“Wh-what?” she stuttered.

You asked your question again, softly. “What do you think about the family that you have here?
We may not be mommies or daddies but we’re still a family, aren’t we?”

Wendy looked from you to Black to Russ and then to Blue and Stretch before her eyes landed on
her brothers. Peter was her biological brother, but Tron and Phil were still just as true as siblings.
Labels didn’t change that.

“BE- ahem , be as it may, while that is true, Mutt-er, Russ and I were conversing on this topic
when we had to sign you up for school. Officially at least, I am…registered as your adopted father
and Russ is your legal uncle. We had planned on telling you before Meet the Teacher night, but
this is most fortuitous an opportunity to address it.” Black shifted in his seat, angling towards the
children more. “If you want to, you may address me however you so chose, just know you have…
options now.”

“I can call you dad?” Peter asked.

“If that is what you want,” Black clarified.

Tron’s eyes went wide behind his glasses. “For real?”

“Daddy!” Wendy cried, jumping out of her seat and reaching for Black.

He caught her easily and tipped away from the table to save her dress from ending up on his plate.
She was crying and Black might of had to duck his head into her chest to hide the lilac colored
tears that leaked free from his own sockets. You felt warm just watching them.

“You okay with being my uncle?” Tron asked, looking to Russ.

“Yeah, uncles are cooler than dads, aren’t they?”

“ Heck yeah!” Peter cheered, standing up in his chair.

“Sit,” you said, snapping at him to get down. Peter pouted but obeyed. Once he was in his seat his
pout melted into a smile so wide it would have been impossible to hide. “I’ve never been able to
call anyone dad or uncle or anything before.”

You shared a look over the table with Stretch who was grinning along with the kids and Blue
beside you cheered in celebration. And as tired as you were, you couldn’t help but raise your water glass in a toast. You’d have to have more conversations with Wendy and the others about labels, but for now and tomorrow there was a peace you didn’t dare disturb.

“To new families, whatever we call them.”

The kids went to bed without much more fuss. Before going to bed Wendy told you that she’d work on convincing you to marry Black so that you’d have to become her mom. You squeezed her nose and then bopped her forehead to get her to stay in bed when she wriggled.

“You sound like you’re already dreaming, get under those covers missy.”

“A song tonight, a song!” she cheered instead.

“You’re too wound up for a song.”

“Please,” she begged.

You turned towards the door, knowing Black was nearby. Now would be the perfect time for him to show up and insist on a proper bedtime schedule, but the doorway remained empty. It didn’t look like he was in the mood to rescue you tonight.

“Please?” Wendy asked again, this time so softly you felt your heart break a little bit for her. As manipulative and spoiled as she was…

You turned around in the bed to lay down beside her and started to hum. She settled into her pillows and pulled up her covers.

“Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens…bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens, brown paper packages tied up with strings these are a few of my favorite things…”

Wendy’s eyelashes dropped, but stayed open enough to watch you in awed delight as you dipped your voice low for the melody.

“Cream-colored ponies and crisp apple strudels, doorbells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles, wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings, these are a few of my favorite things. Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes, snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes, silver-white winters that melt into springs, these are a few of my favorite things…”

Before you could sing about the dogs that bite or the bees that sting Wendy’s eyes were closed, but you sang on, too keen to the presence hovering just outside the door to leave halfway. You got to the halfway point in the song before it repeated and moved from her bed to turn off all the lights, leaving one plugged in.

You continued to sing in the dark, voice growing slow and dipping to even deeper, softer levels. You would never be a soprano, but you could still sing a halfway decent lullaby.

“When the dog bites…when the bee stings…when I’m feeling sad… I simply remember my favorite things, and then I don’t feel…. so bad …. .”

You eased the door shut behind you and then turned to glare playfully at Black who stood with his back to the wall, a coy smile stretched across his face.
“You did a better job than I,” he admitted bashfully.

“I wouldn’t know. You were pretty absent in there, daddy .”

He flushed at the name and tried to hide the smile but failed miserably. You might have seen him shiver but it was dark in the hallway so you weren’t sure. “I will admit when I am outmatched. Wendy will never go down so easily for anyone but you.”

You had noticed at the dinner table Black’s speech sounded different, and now alone in the hallway you could pin a reason to it. He was taking his magic out of his words the same way Blue, Edge and Papyrus would.

“When did you decide to start pulling your magic out of your voice?”

He almost flinched at the question but recovered quickly. “I noticed that it was having a negative impact on the health of the elderly humans around me. It is not so difficult a task to accommodate others.”

“But there are no elders here now, Black.”

He looked away and you felt your shoulder drop as you put two and two together. “Edge told you didn’t he?”

“He…might have mentioned it. Though I wasn’t sure why he had to be the one to let me know I was hurting you. I’ve spoken with Russ about it as well but you likely didn’t notice as the impact of his change was miniscule.”

“Still, that’s…awfully sweet of you. Thanks for being so considerate.”

Black blushed. “You are too generous with your compliments. I am not sweet.”

“Mm, I think you’re sweet to me though.”

“Then you are the exception, not the rule.”

“I can live with that,” you laughed.

Black coughed to compose himself and then glanced past your shoulder. “You and my brother are watching movies tonight, I take it?”

“It is Tuesday,” you confirmed before the idea bubbled up. “Do you wanna join us? It’s my turn to pick the flick.”

Black glanced up at your expression and then away again. “Maybe next time. I wouldn’t want to intrude on your time with the others. My brother enjoys himself so rarely it seems.”

“I think he’d actually like to have you there, and I would too. It wouldn’t be an intrusion.”

“You are unaware of one of my glaring faults then. I have the unfortunate fate of being unable to control my impulses while consuming media. I’ve annoyed my brother far too many times to know he prefers watching his movies without commentaries.”

“Why do I have the feeling you’ll be able to keep it in check for just one night if you really tried?” you teased playfully.

“Because you have far too much faith in hopeless cases, my dear.” Black smiled and then reached
for your hand. You let him take it as he bowed his head down to brush his teeth against your knuckles in a gentleman’s kiss, before turning your palm over and kissing there as well in some not so gentlemanly manners. He only grinned wider when he heard your sharp intake of breath.

“Next time, my dear, it is a promise you may hold me to.”

And then he was gone leaving you alone in the hallway with a darkening blush that no one had to see. Black wasn’t supposed to be the smoothest operator but he seemed to be surprising you these days.

When you stop to consider it, he was the only one you weren’t…snuggling, sleeping, cuddling with at night. You had fallen asleep with his brother a handful of times, (Russ really was as touch starved as you first suspected him of being), you had a place at Sans and Papyrus’ house, Blue and Stretch had sandwiched you in your bed before, and Red and Edge were good enough about finding their way to you on their own.

You felt a little guilty to be even thinking about the boys that way. It really was as innocent as it sounded, all you did was snuggle and sleep. Even if Red did have some wandering hands, you never let it go far enough to get uncomfortable. You…weren’t ready to let anyone see you so intimately.

And besides, it was the boys. Your boys. They weren't ...well, sure they were romantic and friendly and familial…but that was just the way they were. Right? You had all grown close after going through so much together. It was...normal, wasn’t it?

You stared down at your hand, feeling the phantom sensation of Black’s kiss. It had been enough to make you flush and that fact had delighted the skeleton quite clearly. But maybe it was the same sort of delight you got from flustering him or Stretch or even Papyrus. It didn’t have to be anything deep or meaningful, did it?

You forced your feet to move and you found yourself slipping down the hall, down the stairs, and into the basement level where Russ lived. He had a couple of rooms set up for himself downstairs but in the main area there was an L section couch plush enough to sink into and an impressive media display area. Russ had almost every gaming system consul set up underneath his plasma television.

In a cabinet against the nearest wall there were shelves and shelves of DVDs he had collected over the months from various stores and outlets (even though he could just as easily download any move he wanted using his computer skills).

One day you hoped to have a lounge area as comfortable and set up as Russ’ but for now you were content to crash along with Stretch and Blue.

“Did you bring popcorn?” Blue asked, poking his head up over the edge of the couch.

“Nah, figured you were still full from the eight different tacos you scarfed down,” you teased playfully.

“I had four, don’t exaggerate,” Blue huffed cutely. “But I suppose that’s fine. We just have plenty of drinks so I was wondering if maybe I should get up for some snacks to balance them out.”

You looked past Blue to the opposite wall where a wet bar was set up with several different concoctions. You recognized a couple of beer brands on sight.

“If you want popcorn I can make some real quick. There’s a microwave down here somewhere,
isn’t there?” you asked, turning to face Russ with your question.

But before he could answer Blue had vaulted over the edge of the couch and cut across the room to the far cabinet where Russ hid his favorite food treats from the kids. The whole two bottom shelves were stocked full of an assortment of different alcohol cases and bottles. The third shelf and up was where the sugary monster cereal, monster dog treats, and candy was stored away. There was a big glass jar filled with brightly colored wrappers you recognized right away.

Black still had a bigger stash.

“I would never ask you to do something I could just as easily do for myself, that’s not how a gentle-skellie behaves.” Blue reached up and used some blue magic to pull down a box of popcorn packages. “Besides, aren’t you picking the movie tonight?”

“Yeah, I thought you might appreciate something slower.”

“No more superhero flicks?” Stretch playfully whined, eye lights bright in the dim of the basement with private mirth. “Those are my favorite to sleep through.”

“Hey!” Blue squeaked from the microwave.

Russ came over with a tall tumbler filled with something fruity mixed in with tequila that you accepted with a sigh of gratitude he only chuckled at.

“I’m down for something slow,” Russ said. “Maybe a mystery?”

“Or a slasher thriller?” Stretch chuckled.

“How is that slow?” Blue whined from the microwave. “You’re terrible, brother.”

“Sorry to disappoint, but I don’t think this flick is either of those things. It was really popular like twenty some years back I wanna say, when it first came out it won a bunch of awards. Bonus, it’s about a monster from before humans even knew about the monsters underground.”

Russ straightened and even Stretch stood up. “Uhh, is it… appropriate though?” Russ stammered, glancing between you and the television screen. “Aren’t monsters normally the bad guys?”

“Hey,” you called, drawing his attention and holding it. “Trust me?”

And that’s how the four of you ended up on the couch, sprawled out with a drink or two each and three different bowls of popcorn each flavored differently with either extra butter, cheese, or a combo of avocado oil and salt.

It started slowly but before long the story unfolds and the boys around you pick up on the fact that the monster in the movie isn’t at all like the monsters in most movies. A mute woman visits the aquatic creature dubbed ‘asset’ and friendliness turns to flirtation and then-

“She likes him!” Blue gasped, only to be shushed by Stretch and Russ.

Normally your movie nights had a lot more conversation and banter, but you finished your first margarita and three fourths of the movie before anyone spoke up.

“The monster isn’t the monster,” Russ breathed, sounding almost quiet enough for you to miss.

You scooted back into the couch and moved so that Russ could crawl over and lay his head down on your side. Blue moved in closer to your opposite side, bit unconsciously. You swore some of
these boys had special radar for when you were ready to cuddle or something.

“Sometimes things aren’t so obvious,” you whispered into the dark.

You brought your arm down across Russ’ shoulders as he curled up alongside you, nearly purring from your touch while Blue settled his skull down on your opposite shoulder. At some point Stretch had gotten up out of the corner to crawl across the floor and plant himself between your feet, lifting one leg over his shoulder so that he could lean against it as he drifted.

The movie nearly ended in tragedy, but in beautiful cinematic magic the tragedy became something far more beautiful as the woman and her monster lover descended beneath the waters into a new world where the conventions and social constructs could fall away in the face of something greater.

“They got their happy ending,” Blue breathed in awe as the ending credits began to play.

“Surprising. I thought they’d have some poetic tragic tie up but…I wasn’t expecting that,” Stretch added, sounding more awake than usual. Movie nights were his favorite naps, after all. “Didn’t you say this was popular?”

“Yeah, it was the most popular or the best movie made in the year it was released. I was a wee thing back then, but it resurged in popularity after the monsters came up from the underground and people were face to face with real monsters,” you answered.

“And no one in the general public remembered those old wars?” Blue asked.

You hold back the sarcastic chuckle when you remember Hightower and the place where you were raised. Of course some people still remembered, but the rest of the world got to live on, oblivious and free.

“Humanity…I don’t know what to say but, maybe humans have always been a little in love with monsters deep down somewhere in their hearts. I’d like to believe that’s why monsters have integrated as well as they have into our society.”

“We still get stared at plenty,” Blue laughed, “but one can hardly blame the humans for marveling at magnificence when they see it.”

You laughed but reached over to brush your lips against the side of Blue’s skull, turning it flush with color as he heated up. “No doubt about it.”

“I can see why you liked this movie, I think,” Russ breathed, voice hushed against your side. “It was so…lovely. It felt like a dream I want to believe in.”

You trace a pattern with the back of your knuckles against the side of his skull, making him shiver in quiet delight. “Oh really?”

“You don’t think you’re living the dream right now?” Stretch chuckled from down on the floor. In the dark it was so much easier to see the dark brown orange light from his sockets. Most of the Papyrus had eye lights harder to distinguish unless the surrounding darkness helped, but even in full daylight you would have seen the way Stretch’s eye lights shone with private mirth.

“You can wake up from a dream,” Russ murmured.

Stretch didn’t say anything back to that, but once the movie looped back to the title screen he tapped the outside of your leg before untangling himself to get something more to drink. He
wobbled a little and you remembered how low his tolerance level was.

“At least, I’m glad you liked the movie. I made a good choice this time?”

“I loved it,” Blue exclaimed, sitting up and pulling away from you only enough to turn and face you more fully. “I especially liked the part that didn’t make sense when suddenly she’s in a dress and dancing with him on a stage somewhere.”

“It didn’t make sense to you?”

Blue scrunched up his skeleton face. “It…did? I think I know what their intention was. That’s what she was thinking about or what she dreamed about, right?”

“Something like that. I don’t have all the answers but I think you’re right about it being in her head. The song she sang was what her heart felt and the dance, that was a feeling too. Haven’t you ever just felt a new emotion with someone and related it to something else?”

“The way you relate our souls to sensations instead of colors?” Blue asked. When you nodded he sat back to think it over. “I… I’m not sure. There is a good chance that’s true but I can’t think of an instance where it would have happened right off the bat.” His eye lights sparkled with neon light before fixing on you. “But I guess I can relate to the girl feeling like she wanted to dance with the person she loved. That’s a happy feeling right?”

“Yeah, dancing usually is.”

Blue tugged at your wrist and you stumbled to your feet, Russ sliding soundlessly off your side and onto the couch as Blue pulled you close. With a wide grin to match the mischievous mirth in his eyes, Blue took one of your hands in his then slipped the other arm around your waist. When you were so close to him it brought into focus how tall he really was. Compared to his brother and the others he seemed snack sized, but you didn’t have anything to compete against him.

“Blue, what are you doing?” you giggled, already reaching up to rest your free arm on his shoulder like it was the most natural thing in the world. Behind you the title menu swelled gently.

“It’s a feeling and I’m going with it. Won’t you let me take you along?” he teased, tugging you out and away from the couch.

You let him lead and Blue turned you in his arms, stepping with something close to practiced ease as he angled you around the room’s obstacles and into more open space. And as tired as you were, you couldn’t help but want to keep up when he spun you out or dipped you over his arm.

From the couch Russ watched on with a tired smile that was a near carbon copy of the one Stretch wore as he watched you dip and twirl in the arms of his brother. The music behind you looped again and Blue pulled you close enough that the watery blue lights from the television screen painted you both in aquamarine hues. The shadows made Blue seem even more handsome. Almost handsome enough to admit your heart was hammering in your chest.

“So this is how you feel right now?” you asked close to Blue’s ear cavity.

“I actually feel like dancing you straight outta this house and into the stars with me, but this will have to do for tonight,” he chuckled. “You are the best feeling. I would dance to you forever if you’d let me.”

“You say the most beautiful things,” you admit.
“And yet they all fall short of doing true justice, my sweet,” he laughed.

“I think you’ve had one too many to drink tonight.”

Blue barked a laugh that was echoed by his brother at the bar. “You should know by now that your human drinks don’t have any sway over my faculties. I could drink you under the table and still be lucid and sane.”

“Take it easy there, cowboy. I don’t want you hurting yourself.”

Blue looked as if he was about to quip back with another joke or exaggeration but when he looked your way the lights in his eye sockets spun lazily into upside-down heart shapes. His expression went gentle all over and his dancing eased into the slow drift of uncoordinated and unplanned steps until he was just holding you in the middle of Russ’ basement and swaying.

“Then, don’t go where I can’t follow you,” he whispered, voice so soft and low you almost believed you hadn’t heard him at all, but he rubbed your hand in his and leaned in to duck his head and whisper again. “I’ll be fine if we could just stay here like this.”

“Oh? Not interested in bedtime snuggles then?”

Blue chuckled. “I meant-just together. I just wanna stay the way we are right here right now at least. Together.” He glanced back at Russ and Stretch. “All together.”

You moved the hand from his shoulder to his skull, rubbing the base of it lazily in affection. You love the way he flushes and melts for you under your gentle fingers.

“Well that’s plenty doable from a mattress, isn’t it? I’m wiped from a long day and it’s well past my bedtime. Your brother looks dead on his feet as it is.”

Russ stood up from the couch and clicked off the tv and movie player before coming up behind you. Not caring that you were still connected to Blue, Russ draped himself over your back, resting his chin on the top of your head and looping his arms around your stomach.

“M sleepy too. Cmon guys.”

Stretch followed behind as the three of you made it to Russ’ room where you broke off only long enough to brush your teeth before returning to the bed where Stretch was already asleep at the edge, being tucked in by Blue. You crawled up and snuggled into the middle most section of the mattress and opened your arms enough to accept both Russ and Blue’s cuddles.

You felt Russ curl up beneath your arm with one of his legs entwined between yours while Blue edged up on more and more of the pillows. You found a hand under the pillows reaching for you and when you reached back for it you knew Stretch just by the feel of his phalanges.

When you slept the music in the back of your brain was something low, sultry, and perfect for a freshly polished dance floor where no one moved faster than a slow heartbeat. Outside a moon hung low and full, leaking her filtered silver lights in through the thin windows at the top of the basement.
'Moon river, wider than a mile, I'm crossing you in style some day... Oh, dream maker, you heart breaker, wherever you're goin', I'm goin' your way..... you drifters, off to see the world. There's such a lot of world to see.... We're after the same rainbow's end, waitin' 'round the bend, my huckleberry friend, moon river, and me...'

Chapter End Notes

Another fav chapter of fine, to be honest. I love The Shape of Water and apologize if you've never seen it, but hopefully the reference to it in this chapter didn't need too much context.

Also, a note on the timeline, in my head when I was writing this I sorta set it ten or so years in the future. So if you get thrown off by the idea of a movie coming out twenty years ago when it came out something closer to six, that's my explanation.

I've got the Meet The Teacher night coming up next chapter but then after that some more skeletons need the attention. Who have you been missing? I'm always curious what ya think.

Stay safe guys!
Black was, for lack of better words, painfully over prepared for Meet the Teacher Night at the new elementary school Wendy, Peter, and Tron would all be going to. He had printed out, highlighted, and copied the class supply list for each of the three kids and had even gone so far as to prepare a simple ‘thank you for teaching my kids’ gift for each of their teachers.

And it was a gift, not a bribe because, while that was a leftover habit from his time underground, he knew that some body lotion and self care accessories wouldn’t take anyone’s favor very far.

The school systems of humans were particularly critical about alcohol and so he hadn’t been able to add any of the wine or brandy. That was unfortunate, the poor teachers would probably need it by the time November came around.

“You’re going to do just fine, bro,” Rus said around another yawn.

Black suspected if Rus could, he’d much rather crawl back into bed with you and sleep in for a few more hours. (NOT THAT HE BLAMED HIM!) But, you had left early for a run with Blue and Papyrus instead.

Even on a day off you were determined to stay in shape and build up your stamina.

“I am not sure how many other special teachers or aids we might encounter. Should I bring extra gifts just in case? Administration would undoubtedly view it as a bribe so they’re all out. Social media pages on most of them were pretty sparse anyway.”

“You’re fine. But now I’m worried.”

Black turned around to face his brother and scowled. “What for?”

Rus made a face. “I’m worried because you’re the one stressing out about this. That’s my job. Why are you making me say the condescending things like, ‘it’ll be fine, don’t worry about it’ even though we both know I have no way of making it fine?”

“You don’t own a monopoly on worrying.”

“Between the two of us I do,” Rus snapped back.

He sounded more irritated than Black could ever remember Papyrus sounding when they lived below ground. It was enough to calm him and ground him in the moment. What was he worrying for? It was so unlike him.

“You are right,” he admitted, clasping his hand on Rus’ arm. “I am sorry to have antagonized you so. It seems you are not in the mood to humor my shortcomings.”

Rus groaned. “-din’t mean it like that,” he mumbled before rubbing his face.

“Why are you so agitated?” Black asked. He might not have had his brother’s skull for observation, but he wasn’t blind and he was a good brother. He knew Rus well enough to be able to tell when there was something off. “I thought you would be in a better mood considering the privileges of
your company last night.”

A faint lilac dusting took over Rus’ skull and he grumbled, covering his face with his hands. “D-Don’t tease me about it. That’s no-not it, just…” The look of agitation on his face shifted into something more open and honest. Black recognized the worry in Rus’ eye lights for what it was.

“What happened?”

Rus looked away but Black moved, purposefully using his ability to shortcut as if to remind Rus that there was nowhere he could go that Black couldn’t get to first. There was no running from this older brother.

Rus’ shoulders sagged more than typical as he stared down at his shoes. “Nothing bad, I just… last night she seemed like she was…restless in her sleep or something…and I-it got me worried.”

“Papyrus?” Black called when his brother didn’t say anything more without provocation.

Rus refused to meet his brother’s eye lights as he continued to stare at the floor. “I…peeked a little.”

Peeked?

The first thing that came to Black’s mind made his own skull flush with violet color but then a half second later he remembered who he was speaking to. His brother might be a bit more lewd than the average monster, (with sub par standards in who he chose to share his intimate acts with), but he wasn’t the type of pervert to take advantage of another person no matter who they were or how he felt about them. Also, Papyrus was too much of a marshmallow for that in the first place.

No, what Papyrus meant had more to do with his Judgment skill and less with human underwear.

*Oh Stars, did adult humans even wear underwear to bed?*

“What did you do?” Black asked, before his imagination and curiosity could get the better of him.

“I had-I had just wanted to see what it was that was upsetting her. She’s usually a pretty easy sleeper but she was so cold and…her face, in the dark I could still see it, even with us there….”

“*Papyrus.*”

“I think it was just a dream, but there was void there, in her mind, swallowing her up.”

“It’s normal for some humans’ fears to imitate the void-”

“No, it wasn’t an imitation, I know what the void feels like, don’t forget who started off with that ability,” Rus cut in. “The void isn’t darkness, it’s not empty space, it’s something else and it was there in her dreams.”

“…She…has used the void with us before to travel via shortcut to locations. It is not a stretch to infer this method of quick travel left her with some adverse reaction that’s only subconsciously manifesting itself.”

Rus looked up for a split second and it was long enough to spot the additional guilt.

“What else is there you need to say?” Black asked, feeling apprehensive about the entire conversation. He didn’t like the idea of it and wished he could just…talk to you about it. Papyrus was the one who liked secrets and subterfuge. He liked addressing his problems head on.
“I read her files, some of them a while back, some more recently. This world’s Sans had them so I just helped myself mostly.” Papyrus began to play with the ends of his shirt, tugging at it and curling it around the ends of his finger bones. “I…found the other files later on after some pretty deep data diving, ones that guy didn’t even have. It mentioned the void space but… not much more than that. I had to infer most of the rest.”

“And you didn’t… address this with her, did you?”

Rus’ guilt was clear enough to his brother, but Black didn’t want to press the issue any more. He was tempted to know whatever it was Rus had uncovered, but knew better. He wouldn’t. You had shared much of your past, anything they had asked you had answered. That would be enough for him. He didn’t want to dig up your secrets from behind your back.

“You should know better than to unfairly take this out on me and my justified concerns for tonight’s events,” Black sighed, standing with his arms folded behind his back. “How immature of my baby bones brother.”

“Sans,” Rus whined, using his brother’s original name for a change.

“You should know well enough now what you should do. She’s due back from her morning workout soon. You can speak with her outside if you don’t want the children eavesdropping.”

Black turned and headed out of the room, leaving his brother with the last bit of advice he would need to get over his hurdle of guilt.

Black retreated to his room and shut the door, letting it latch behind him on a swing. He heard it click shut and turned the lock with blue magic before heading into the bathroom to shower. Unlike his brother, he liked to have clean bones. Just because he wasn’t a human that sweat didn’t mean he was unable to get dirty. A day’s worth of dirt and dust was enough to taint the pristine color of one’s bones.

Mechanically he cleaned himself and then cleaned the bathroom, leaving it just as clean as he found it before seeing to himself. He had chosen for himself the outfit for today and seen to it being hung up the night before. It wasn’t his most glamorous uniform, as it was missing most of his medals, but the cut of the jacket and the shiny brass buttons did enough to help him strike an impressive figure. The Jacket was black with double breasted brass colored buttons and a wide belt to keep it snug enough to complement the curve of his skeleton. His dress pants were red and tucked neatly into his elevated military grade dress boots.

He stopped in front of his mirror and picked at the corners of his shoulders, keeping them sharp. He was…presentable.

Sound from outside drew his attention to the window and he went over to catch sight of you, playing with fire in your hands and venting out of your arms as Peter cheered for the sight of it. Wendy sat on Rus’ lap not far away, but far enough to avoid the halo of fire you drew around yourself. It passed harmlessly through Peter who only squealed louder in delight. He bounced and looked as if he was trying to beg another trick off you, but instead you just laughed and ruffled his hair. You turned back towards the Barn, waving to Rus and Wendy before you departed.

Rus looked…

Happy.

Ah, so the two of you had already talked. That hadn't taken long. He had only been getting ready
for the last…hour and a half? Not that long.

But really, knowing what he knew about you, Black wasn’t surprised. Your soul was fiery and determined, but there was no violence left in it. You forgave too easily and believed too readily. Even though he had benefited from that trust…well…

You were probably too trusting and that made him nervous.

Black left for his office and set to organizing inquiries and reports. There were several different properties he owned that incoming monsters were looking to rent from him in place of owning. Some weren’t sure they’d stay and others just weren’t financially ready for the commitment. That was fine.

Much of the business of settling new monster neighbors he diverted to Papyrus and his team. Without Papyrus there to field the requests and act as Realtor and agent, Black wouldn’t have even humored the inquiries in the first place. He wasn’t so generous as to share, but you were eager to see the town revive so maybe…he could make an exception this time.

Really, he hadn’t expected surface life to change him so much.

Peter cheered loudly, running down the halls only for Tron to chase after him in what sounded like exasperation. Not far behind Wendy’s gleeful giggles punctuated the noise and Black felt himself sag in his seat.

The door to his office swung open and Phil tottered in, looking pleased with himself and his accomplishments. Knowing Rus or Stretch or maybe even Blue wouldn’t be far behind, Black stood up to collect the youngest child into his arms and take him back with him behind the desk to hold while he worked.

When Phil made his ‘grabby hands’ Black had a spare stack of papers and a box of crayons ready. All his important documents were out of reach so Phil could do as he pleased. If he colored off the page it wasn’t like that would be the end of his desk, either.

What was the point of money if you were only ever going to get upset about things so easy to replace?

You came by a little later with brunch-time snacks and to take Phil. Black insisted that Phil wasn’t a bother and didn’t need to leave but you saw through his exaggerations easily enough when the evidence was all over his desk.

“Focus on your work and get done what you need to in order for us to all leave tonight. Shortcutting the whole clan is too much which means we have to factor in driving time.”

“A hassle,” he grumbled.

“A necessary hassle, I’m afraid.” You set down the plate and coffee mug to take Phil.

“I can walk,” Phil complained clearly. His vocabulary was expanding and his sentences were getting longer too, even if he was the quietest of the four.

“And that just leads us to so many problems,” you hummed playfully. “Help me make lunch.”

Phil grumbled under his breath but nestled his head into the crook of your shoulder just underneath your jaw. “Fiiiiiiine.”
Black waved as the two of you disappeared out the door and down the hall. Once left alone, he began to tidy the desk and organize Phil’s drawings into the accordion file folder under his desk.

With his surface area back under his control, he dug into the mess of new and old business, determined to be dutiful about it after weeks of avoiding it. There was a letter from that awful aunt woman, for instance, that he really didn’t want to have to open.

It would be so much easier to just work on another wing of the house or build up another stone wall around the property to deter wandering animals. He liked physical work. He was good at physical work. The paper pushing was just a necessary evil that he would excel at and add to the myriad of his talents!

But…

That didn’t mean he had to like it.

He tore open the envelope with a letter opener and pulled out the messy scrawl.

-  

Meet the teacher night started early enough that they could go out, visit, and then end the day with dinner at a nice restaurant that also had coloring place mats for the kids, like Chili’s.

“And I can get whatever I want even if Wendy doesn’t like it?” Peter asked for what was nearly the third time.

“Of course.”

“And it can still be the same as Tron’s?”

“Yup.”

“Can it be chicken nuggets?”

It was cute and forgivable mostly because you realized that Peter had never been to a restaurant before. You made a mental note to take the kids out to Grillby’s one day soon. He had mentioned wanting to see them after you explained what you were doing in the town of Blackberry.

Black wasn’t a huge fan of take out, and the only reason he even tolerated it anymore was probably because of you. He and Rus were both more than willing to cook a nice homemade meal no matter what sort of day they had.

Black’s Yucan SUV was the only thing you could all fit inside and he, thankfully, was the only one who was allowed to drive it. Rus was strictly forbidden from ever touching the wheel lest he start getting ideas.

The drive down wasn’t bad. It was easy going for the first twenty five minutes before the farm and residential areas faded into something more built up. The grocery stores were all chains and there were more than two to pick from.

Before long the road to the school came up and Black drove in behind a short line of cars that had assembled before you. A few families lingered in the parking lot, recognizing one another or fussing with a pop out stroller. You even spotted a monster couple with their son walking up towards the front.
“It’s cute, isn’t it?” you asked, looking back at the kids.

Tron just shrugged and Peter made a sour face while Wend starred in mute surprise. Rus followed after you with Phil, bending down slightly to hold his hand as Phil insisted on walking himself.

Black grumbled as he answered a text before putting his phone away. “It seems Blue and Stretch will be conveniently in the area an hour from now and wanted to know if they could join us for dinner,” he explained when you shot him a look. You accepted a bag of supplies from the trunk as he unloaded the rest using blue magic.

“When was the last time they came this far south without a reason?” you laughed.

“Never.”

You accepted one more bag of supplies just in time to avoid the trunk closing on you. “They must be lonely. Since Stretch has started working at the plant, Blue’s been catching plenty of side jobs to keep himself busy and unfortunately, that means their schedules don’t always match up with ours.”

“It’s not necessary for them to,” Black huffed loudly, keeping the magic out of his voice. He side eyed you once and then dropped his gaze as color spread across his skull. “Though I will admit to being grateful for his efforts.”

You were wearing the dress Blue had picked out and wearing Black’s necklace proudly atop it all. You felt a little overdressed when you saw the other families, but next to Black in his military type uniform you fit in just fine.

At least you think you do.

You find Tron’s classroom and start there, since he’s the oldest and the one with the least amount of supplies. His homeroom teacher was pleasant enough and Tron was his usual polite self so when you left the room with the hairs on the back of your neck raised you…couldn’t understand why. Rus and Black seemed fine so you shook it off and followed them down to Peter’s room.

It was a little noisy in first grade and the teacher had some concerns about Peter’s reading considering his record from kindergarten back before he and his siblings ran away from the orphanage. When the teacher asked if someone would be willing to help him at home it finally clicked for you.

The eyes.

The eyes of the people in the room kept finding you, sliding over you to Rus or Black, only to come right back to you heavier than before. While there were monster families in the school—almost every classroom had a monster kid or two—there were no mixed families to speak of. And in addition to that, you weren’t nuclear in model. It wasn’t clear who you were ‘with’ if you were with anyone.

When Peter’s teacher asked if you could help him with his reading at night her eyes didn’t know who to land on.

“He’ll have the help,” you promised her. “He has a big family watching out for him and plenty of helpful uncles.”

Some of the eyes slid off and away, but you could feel the tension still in the air even when it looked like no one else could. There was still a lingering curiosity along with a measure of judgement hanging on.
Black handed over the supplies and gifts and the seven of you made your way to the final stop of
the night, Wendy’s kindergarten room. There were more parents there, snapping photos and cooing
in awe about how big their babies were. There was an informal Photo Booth area where the teacher
had taped up a rainbow colored sky. Next to it was a small table with signs and props. Rus thought
it hilarious and took each of the kids through it while you went with Black to talk with the teacher.

Wendy’s teacher had a line going and while the two of you waited a mother edged in next to you
and nodded to the photo booth area. “Is that one yours?”

“Pa-pardon?” you squeaked, a bit taken aback.

The line inched forward.

“The family there, one of those little ones is the reason you’re here, isn’t it?” the woman asked
casually.

You forced yourself to try and relax. You had fought androids and monsters and nightmares alike,
but the small talk of adults scared you worse than any of it.

“Yeah, Wendy’s made it to kindergarten. She’s the one with the braids,” you answered, pointing.

“My, how cute. My son is the one making a mess at the desks with his father. I asked my husband
to help keep him in check but you can see how well that went,” she chuckled.

The line inched forward a little more.

“Your son is adorable.”

“It’s his age showing,” the mother jokes. “Hopefully the two of them can be friends in this
classroom. He’s not had the attention span for much else I’m afraid and I’ll apologize ahead of
time for whatever blunt curiosity comes out of his mouth. He has no filter.”

“It’s his age,” you quipped back, trying on a more honest sort of smile. It would be good if Wendy
could make some more friends outside of the family.

The mother laughed as the line inched forward again, close enough that you could see you were
only a family or two away from saying hello to the kindergarten teacher. You were close enough to
hear, at least, the couple at the front ask how many monster children their daughter would be
interacting with during the day.

Beside you Black went stiff and you felt cold in your blood as you carefully memorized the faces
of the duo. Wendy’s teacher smiled, but it was a thin, strained sort of smile that inspired some
hope in your soul. She was clearly displeased with the question.

“We’re actually very excited to welcome any number of monster children this year, but
unfortunately I wouldn’t be able to give you a number.”

“That’s not an illegal question though,” the father complained, sounding like the sort of man that
introduced himself as a taxpayer before he started his fights. Beside him the woman was watching
the door nervously, but you noticed her eyes flickering over to where Rus played with Phil and
Wendy.

“It’s not an illegal question but it’s still not one I would answer. All the children are welcome here
as long as they’re in need of a school.”
“O-of course, we weren’t sug-we didn’t mean to sound discriminatory. Heavens, no,” the wife laughed. “Our neighbors are monsters even.”

“Well if that’s all, you can let us know if you need any other supplies or snacks in the future. We’ve already signed in so…” the husband tugged the woman along and left the way they came.

Beside you, the mother who still hadn’t introduced herself whistled low. “Sorry to see them go. It didn’t bother you too much, did it, to hear what they said?”

You felt the trap for what it was but still played off an innocent expression to match your tone. “No, of course not. Why would I?”

The mother nodded to Black, looking him in the eye first before answering you. “Since you’re coming from a blended family of sorts, aren’t ya? Plenty of people around these parts are easy going enough not to care, but you’ll occasionally run into the old fashioned types. It might be hard on your child too, you know how kids can be.”

Her words were blunt but didn’t ring with any malicious undertones. And she wasn’t wrong. Wendy would eventually come up against the issues you were already dealing with from just walking down the hall next to Black and Rus. While monster integration had become less of a social issue in the past couple of years, interspecies relationships were still another separate issue. Hell, Black had even asked you about it before signing Wendy up for Kindergarten testing and after her request to call you Mommy and him Daddy.

As much as you wanted to shield her from the harsh edges of the world, you knew that letting Wendy grow also meant letting her risk hurt. The two went hand in hand. You knew that like you knew that no one on this earth cherished or loved Wendy and her brothers more than Black and Rus.

“Yes,” you say, looking back towards the mother with a sharper gleam in your eye, “That will be a concern in the future, but we’re confident in the love and support we’ve instilled in her to stand up to both bullies and children who don’t know any better.”

Black reached for your hand, preening at your confidence as you continued.

“We’re also confident in the staff and teachers here to help keep the classroom a safe space for everyone. I have faith that with time and patience the other families will adapt as well.”

The mother nodded and smiled before extending her hand. “I’m Amani, and my son’s name is Asher. Hopefully they’ll be friends.”

You shook her hand and offered her your name before she moved to shake Black’s, meeting his eye lights with her own unwavering stare before letting go and leaving to collect her child and husband from their mess making.

Black reached for your hand again and squeezed it a little just as the last couple ahead of you stepped away. Before you could greet Wendy’s teacher you heard him whisper a soft ‘thank you’ that was only meant for your ears.

“You must be Mr. Fellswap, I remember your email,” the teacher said, reaching out to shake Black’s hand first before reaching for yours. You repeated your name and she smiled before offering yours. “I’m happy to share my classroom with your daughter. She looks like she’s enjoying herself.”

“She is very social, but she can be a bit of a princess so please don’t hesitate to correct her when
she steps out of line,” Black laughed. “But she is very much a fan of your classroom and has told me she’s more excited than scared to start school, so thank you.”

“The pleasure’s all mine.”

Later on in the evening, as you made your way out of the school with a small stack of files and paperwork you would need to complete and return on Monday, Black noticed the looks you were receiving. More than him or his brother, you were the one looked at the most.

You caught his attention and spared him an easy sort of smirk. “We should have role played a bit better if I was just going to get stared at this much.”

Black snorted, coloring lightly. “Oh, and how would you think you’d have fared if that were the case?”

“Hey, if we planned it out ahead of time I’d of killed it in there. Did you see how many of them were looking at my hand to check for a ring, or yours then Rus’?”

“A silly notion as skeletons do not wear rings.” Black waved his phalanges in front of his face and you saw how thin they were. A ring would slide right off unless it was custom made. “I would have gifted you with a collar first, as is the custom.”

“Kinky,” you snorted.

Black flushed darker and then whirled around to check and see if any of the kids were in earshot, deflating only a fraction when he realized they had all moved on ahead with Rus. “N-Not like that. It’s a-it’s not much different from your own customs if you were to think about it, only the placement is changed.”

“So if you were to ask me to marry you, are you saying you wouldn’t get me the biggest gaudiest, most expensive ring you could find and/or make?” you asked with clear disbelief in your voice.

“Of course I would adhere to both custom-” Black snapped his teeth shut, going rigid as he realized what he had just said. When he looked up at you from between his hiked shoulders, you were smiling wickedly, enjoying his discomfort far too much.

“You don’t have to get so worked up over it,” you teased in a sing-song voice.

“I AM-am not getting worked up over anything!” he stuttered, almost forgetting to hold back the magic from his voice as he lied to you about his composure. When you reached for his hand he avoided your face, but didn’t pull away.

“Don’t fret, your majesty,” you teased, watching as he shivered at the pet name. “I’m just being a little silly.”

Past his shoulder you could see a mother pause in the unloading of her car to stare at the two of you. It made you want to lean closer into Black’s side and make it more obvious that the two of you were friendly. They could infer the rest.

“That’s your idea of a pet name?” Black chuckled.

“You don’t like it.”

Black smirked. “I can just do better, dearest.”
“Beg your pardon?” you laughed.

“Feel free to beg, my pearl. I won’t stop you.”

“Wow,” you snickered behind the curl of a handful of papers, using the forms to hide your smile while Black tugged you along.

“Come, empress of my heart, we’re keeping the family waiting.”

“Black, no, come-on.”

“Enough dawdling my love, do try to keep up.”

“Oh no, what have I unleashed?” you moaned into the papers.

“Really, my jewel, you should have known better,” Black chuckled as he tugged you towards the open and waiting door.

“You’re worse than Red right now.”

“Don’t be silly, pet.”

Like a good gentleman should, he held your hand as you climbed in and winked over your knuckle before pulling away. After the door closed you allowed yourself to melt a little bit in your seat and admit to yourself that Black was far better at amassing embarrassing nicknames than you. When he opened the driver’s side door to climb in you glanced up from underneath your lashes and smirked at how pleased he was with himself.

Rus glanced your way and from the look on his face you didn’t doubt he knows all about why his brother was in such a good mood. The only person alive more observant than Rus was maybe Stretch, (though that wasn’t saying much since they were both alternate versions of one another.)

Well, if a little teasing pleased him this much it was probably fine.

You pulled out your phone and texted Blue where you were planning to eat as well as a map so that he wouldn’t accidentally take a shortcut to a different restaurant in the same chain.

**You**: Just left, here’s the address if you still wanna eat together.

When Black pulled into the parking lot and saw the pair of brothers your heard his private groan as he complained about ‘interlopers.’

“Something wrong, M’lord?” you asked, preening at the way Rus snorted from his seat when he heard what you called his brother.

“No, nothing amiss at all my diamond. Shall we go join the two of them?”

“Whatever you say… Mr. Blackberry King.”

Chapter End Notes
My fav comment made on this chapter by Jaylene: "This is off-topic, but black and me give me some serious sound of music vibes sans (can't help it lol) the nazis" & "omfg he really is captain von trapp"

I did not plan on writing so much Fellswap/Swapfell for this story as they were the pair of brothers I was least confident in my portrayal of, but damn if they're not utterly domestic and adorable. Next chapter is a Papyrus ones and I'll be branching out to more of the boys. Juggling so many precious characters is hard and it would be easier if I cared about any of them less.

I headcannon that Black chose Fellswap over Swapfell as a last name because he minds being compared to the fell brothers less than the swap brothers *coughBluecough* But I've been writing this since September and reading UT stories since then too and I still can't clearly tell the difference between any of the swap/fell mashups. So, forgive me if I mislabel.

Also, what was your favorite nickname? I'm curious.
Chapter Summary

Being a monster mascot isn't all that it's cracked up to be, is it?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Papyrus fidgeted by himself, he was feeling unusually wound up after having to skip out on his regular morning run for the sake of monster mascot business. He didn’t mind a break in routine, he understood that it was necessary sometimes, but his favorite part of the day was when he was with his friends and...he was beginning to realize with more clarity that the ‘friends’ from social media work and the ‘friends’ who were also family were not the same. He enjoyed being with Blue, and even appreciated working with Red and Edge. And especially you.

“We’ll be ready for you in five, sir,” a human with a headset announced curtly before walking off.

Papyrus stood and posed in front of the mirror, making sure to double check his teeth when he smiled. He had to be extra careful whenever he was on television, since those scenes and moments lived forever. He was actually amazed with home much of him was up on the internet, free for someone to find and follow.

His manager, a busy woman who always knew what to say or what to wear, had picked out his outfit for the day but it still felt off for some reason. It was a nice suit! Tons of monsters and humans would say he looked dashing, but it wasn’t... him.

He had told his manager he wanted to move away from the more public persona and focus instead on quieter work. That suited her just fine as a new generation of monsters was coming up and one of them might need her. His outfit for the interview would be one of the last things she did for him.

“One minute!” the stagehand hollered.

Papyrus ducked his head and stepped out of the small dressing room on the side to get into position. He’d wait in the wings until his name was called. He knew the routine well by now. The way he smiled and waved was something he could do without thinking by this point. In the beginning his exuberance and style was too messy and energetic for the camera.

‘It’s better to save that for live crowds,’ his manager had explained.

Backstage the crowd grew silent as the host spoke to the camera and rambled on with a rehearsed bit. Then his name was called and Papyrus was striding forward, steps measured so he wouldn’t cross the stage too fast, smile practiced, wave perfected.

He shook his host’s hand and settled into the seat next to him, crossing his legs so that they wouldn’t appear too gangly or unusual. They hadn’t pulled out a different chair for him because he wasn’t supposed to be visually bigger than his host. It was a struggle considering the average height of humans.

“Well I think it’s real admirable what you’re doing with the outreach program. Everybody deserves
a home that suits them,” the host loudly praised.

“That is the idea, isn’t it? Something that fits every person perfectly.”

“Speaking of the perfect fit, what is it we hear about you and Pink Lilly? She’s been dropping your name an awful lot these days.”

Behind him on the screen there were photos of him with the pink feathered monster who was an ‘influencer’ in monster circles that humans really enjoyed following on social media sites. She had started breaking into small time monster music production with MTT records.

“She’s really quite talented,” Papyrus answered honestly before he could get the cue from his manager. “And to have that in addition to the drive to ‘make it’ is truly admirable. I appreciate the example she sets for all our younger friends and fans.”

“Are you sure that’s all you appreciate?” the host tease with a sly wink.

Papyrus looked up past his head to where his manager was giving him the ‘wrap it up and move on with something else’ look. There was a ‘high potential for his words to be taken out of context’ and now that mattered more than ever.

“She’s a wealth of talent and always an example to strive for,” Papyrus carefully answered with his trademark happy smile. “Speaking of talent, I’ve been taking a page out of your book and attempting something seemingly random to not-so-great success!”

The audience laughed along with Papyrus as the host flustered in good nature and then blushed before asking Papyrus what he meant. Then the crisis was averted as Papyrus recalled for the viewers how the host had embarrassed himself dog walking all five of his girlfriend’s dogs at once, only to be the one walked.

“I need some fitness help!” the host laughed at Papyrus’ imitation of being dragged around on set. It had the audience in tears. “Papyrus, leave your card with me, I need to hire a personal trainer.”

“I don’t work with amateurs anymore,” Papyrus laughed, falling back into his seat with a comical grace that made him seem approachable.

The host laughed and thanked Papyrus for appearing before the camera rolled off for commercials. Once the screen was off the host dabbed at his face and shook his finger playfully at Papyrus before getting up. “I’ll pin you down with a paramour one of these days,” he teased.

“Don’t strain yourself, Charles!” Papyrus laughed back.

His manager was back and guiding him off set to get some snacks before they stopped for his final evening suit fitting. At the end of the day there would be a charity gala on the lawn he was invited to attend.

The suit was just another outfit in the long line of things he’d never wear on his own, but everyone told him he looked handsome in it, so that was good enough for the evening. He’d be able to leave on time to make it home, and then in the morning things could be normal again.

“I hear the lawn is going to look stunning after sunset,” one of the stylists gushed just past his shoulder. “The lights are supposed to be as stunning as stars.”

“It is sure to be a radiant evening then,” he quipped, almost sounding as bad as his brother for the sake of earning one more smile out of the human.
“You should make sure to make a wish before you leave,” they urged and Papyrus promised to do just that.

Once fittings were complete, Papyrus stepped off to the side while his manager worked out some final, financial details with the employees. The signs hanging from the wall advertised mostly human fashions, but because of their unique tailoring capabilities monsters were among the bulk of their clients.

Several of the advertisements made Papyrus pause, as they displayed humans in clothing that looked as if it was coming undone for someone. The pair of models stared off as more of their bodies were on display for a clothing company. It…didn’t make sense to him how that brand of advertisement was expected to work.

Someone had once chalked it up to monsters having less of a sex drive than humans, but that wasn’t enterally accurate. Most monsters had a perfectly healthy sex drive, but Papyrus just…wasn’t one of them. He was more emotionally driven, if he was being honest with himself. What his partner looked like or wore didn’t matter as much as—

It’s a blue soul, it means integrity, right? …it’s one of my favorites. It makes me feel like I’ll be okay.

Papyrus absently reaches up and rests a hand over his chest, right above where his soul would be if it were to be pulled free and made visible. A normal, boring, inverted soul with no color except for when you felt it.

He felt cold down to his bones and hunched his shoulders against the sensation. He didn’t like having to wait by himself in the lobby of a tailor’s shop, he didn’t like having to be so careful about how he smiled, how he moved, how he sat. He didn’t like being away from his family. He didn’t like being away from you.

He… hated it.

And he felt guilty for hating it because he was living his dream. He had a thousand different friends, and strangers knew his name. People paid him to show up and talk at events or parties, posting photos with him like prized treasures on their blogs and profiles. People called his name when he walked into a room, but nobody made him feel the way you made him feel.

You felt like home.

“Papyrus, ready to go?” his manager called out.

And he wanted to go home more than ever.

“COMING!” he called back, forgetting himself for only a moment.

When he finally made it home a day later the sky was already shaded in bleeding colors of a late sun set. In spite of his weariness he stepped into his home and felt a thousand pounds lighter.

He stomped his shoes on the mat out of habit, since there was no mud or dirt left on the expensive Italian leather. “I’m home!”
“Welcome back bro.”

Papyrus hesitated only a minute to ponder after the smell before his smile stretched wider and he was bounding into the kitchen singing your name. You straightened with a baking sheet in your bare hands, skin black where it made contact with the metal. Blue was also in the kitchen while Stretch snoozed lightly at the counter behind Sans.

“Welcome home,” you echoed with a soft smile that made Papyrus want to melt.

Sans laughed and Papyrus couldn’t find it in himself to fluster or deny how happy he was to finally be home, where his family was.

“Long day?” Sans guessed.

Instead of putting on the bright facade, Papyrus nodded and moved around the counter to help take the sheet from your hands. “Oatmeal cookies with the dinosaur eggs? You remembered my favorite!”

“We made a couple different types for you to try too, don’t just stick with the one,” you said.

You wiggled your fingers to turn their burnt color back to a healthy shade before wiping them on the ends of your apron. It was one Papyrus had picked out for you and left in his kitchen, knowing you would use it whenever you cooked or baked in their house. It had a frilly front pocket and a background pattern of those short little dogs with the cute butts you couldn’t stop laughing at whenever you saw them out in public.

‘They just wiggle so cute! Look at ‘em go. Waddle little guy, waddle.’

The one Sans had picked out for you was hidden somewhere in the back of the laundry room where he would never find it again because he NEVER DID HIS OWN LAUNDRY so he didn’t deserve to see you in an apron as awful or punny as the one he had picked out. ‘Romaine calm and lettuce carrot on’ didn’t even make sense if you were baking!

“How was your day? You’re going to be on tv again tonight, aren’t you?” you asked.

“Oh, we should watch it!” Blue exclaimed.

Papyrus smiled but felt the familiar knot of discomfort somewhere deep in his chest, nestled in his soul. He…didn’t like the idea of you watching him be that other version of himself on the screen, or be that person who had to dodge dating rumors and insinuations that had no grounds in reality. He helped plenty of people and monsters alike, that didn’t mean he wanted to…do anything with them!

“Or,” he excitedly exclaimed, “we could instead watch the sequel to that movie from last time while I tell you about my day!”

“That sounds like something we’d all enjoy,” you hummed, glancing into the living room where Stretch dozed. “Blue, wanna go help find the movie? Papyrus can help me set these guys on the cooling rack and find snacks.”

Blue cheered and bounded off, berating Sans and then his own brother as he made his way to the media system. Sans sat at the counter watching you in the kitchen until a face you made triggered a quiet chuckle.

“Got it, sweets,” he hummed before turning around and shuffling over to the couch.
Leaving you and him alone.

“Thank you,” you whispered as he dutifully moved your cookies from the tray to the cooling rack with a serving spatula.

“I’m always happy to help out in my very own kitchen, nyeh he he.” His chuckles were soft but honest and you seemed to know that by sound alone. “But what about you? The kids are in school now. Aren’t you missing them?”

“Maybe a little, but I have other things to take up my time and other friends to visit with during the day. The barn still needs some more work done on it.”

“Anything I can help with?”

Your smile makes his soul beat a little louder and he can feel his magic shoot tingles into his arms and hands the way it sometimes would whenever he anticipated having to use it. Papyrus was quickly learning that the anticipation of your next smile or comment was tantamount to the anticipation before a battle. Humans called it fight or flight instincts. That didn’t make a lot of sense though since humans couldn’t fly and kissing had nothing to do with fighting.

Papyrus blushed at the thought and turned his face away to hide what little color had made its way onto his cheekbones. He hadn’t meant to let his thoughts wander…like…that!

But!

He did wonder all the same. What might it be like to kiss you? He wasn’t sure if you would be interested in someone with no lips but that shouldn’t be as big of a problem once… things were figured out!

Mismatched monsters coupled all the time. A human and a skeleton were really much more suited than any other pairing he could think of. Humans were skeletons…just with more plump and squishy bits that were warm and soft.

Papyrus dared a peak at you pulling down different packages of popcorn and monster chisps. The bones in your wrist and fingers stood out the most. In the light he could almost see where each knuckle sat under the skin. Your neck and collar too, there were plenty of places where you looked like him, or almost like him, enough like him.

“Help me carry these, sweets?” you asked, looking up from the bags you had gathered into your arms. “I’ll pop the popcorn and get us some bowls for those.”

“A most excellent decision,” he absently replied, sounding almost as far off as he felt.

His head was a bit more meandering than usual and he wondered if that had anything to do with the dissatisfaction he had been feeling in regards to his duties as monster mascot. He had a hard time not escaping to his thoughts whenever he wanted to be somewhere else, but that didn’t make sense for the moment. There was nowhere else he would rather be than right beside you!

You hummed, setting the timer for the popcorn and then pulling out a few Halloween themed bowls to pour the treats into. He noticed with mild amusement how one bowl had a pattern of skeleton bones and bats around the edges. It had been something you picked out while shopping with Sans.

“How was it really?” you asked, your voice a whisper as you peered up through your lashes at him with a knowing look that he could never hide from.
Papyrus took a step closer to you and hung his head, feeling silly for acting so childish. He was supposed to be more energetic, more excited about life, more…more…

“I… went to the party but didn’t stay for the end. I couldn’t.”

You reached for him and he let you pull him towards you. He dropped his face to rest against the top of your head while his arms loosely wrapped around your back. He could feel your arms resting on his hip bones.

“Tell me about it?”

“I just stood there,” he breathed. Behind him the microwave counted down the seconds with a dull humming. “I went to the party and I was supposed to greet people and shake hands and mingle but I…I couldn’t remember the last time any of them had…reciprocated. I had nothing to offer and nothing to ask for so I just…stood there to see who would approach me.”

“And?”

“People said my name, waved hello, and moved on. Everyone there needed someone else. It wasn’t me and I wasn’t needed and-and…I think I’m okay with that.”

A year ago he wouldn’t have been. But a year ago he and Sans were still distant and he hadn’t met you or any of the others. A year ago he had been orbiting around a desire for fame and notoriety that never feed him like one of your smiles did.

“Papyrus?”

You called his name so softly he wanted to melt into that sound and never become solid again. You were warm and you felt like home. His soul vibrated with the comfort you cultivated in him.

“I’m okay not having a hundred friends if none of them can talk to me without wanting something. I…have Sans and he’s like he was before we drifted apart which is sometimes insufferable since he still can’t pick up his socks or cut it with his terrible puns. But, he’s my brother and I’m so happy he is home to greet me and be there when I come back.”

He pulled you closer and closed his sockets, feeling your warmth. Behind him the microwave was nearly finished.

“And I have you,” he whispered into your hair. “I have you. I’m not trading that for a million empty friendships. Not in a hundred thousand years. I was silly not to want this sooner in life.”

“Oh sweetie,” you whispered into his chest, holding him even as the timer to the microwave went off behind you, blaring and beeping for attention. He held you to him almost swaying as the way you breathed, rhythmic and soothing, lulled him.

“We’re skipping the previews, hurry and get out here with that popcorn!” Blue laughed, nearly making you jump out of your skin. You had been lulled just as well and Blue’s outburst had shaken you out of that.

“I feel,” you began, reaching back to get the popcorn while you talked, “that you’d be up for a talk sometime later tonight. That okay with you?”

“Are you staying over tonight?” Papyrus asked, sounding hopeful.
It wasn’t necessarily his turn but if you made a decision to stay over someplace that didn’t matter. Whoever was next on the cuddle chart would just wait. It felt like it had been too long since he last was able to just hold you all throughout the night, but maybe that was because he had missed you during the morning’s skipped workout time.

“I have a feeling I’ll end up crashing here,” you said while putting another bag of pop-corn into the microwave to pop.

“We have a spare room for you.”

“I noticed.” You grinned up and from underneath your eyelashes you almost looked mischievous. “But I’ll probably just pass out on the couch if it’s all the same to you.”

“…I have a bed too,” he offered before he could consider the implications.

You were so used to skeletons cuddling and sleeping next to you that it didn’t seem to phase you whenever someone offered you a bed to share, but Papyrus usually wasn’t the one to offer it. Sans was the brash one when it came to matters that could easily turn lewd (even if he tended to bawk when you so much as looked his way). Honestly, when Sans offered it was usually his brother’s bed he was offering up because he was a much better wingman than a flirt.

Papyrus knew that to humans his offer could sound…suggestive, but it really wasn’t! He just wanted to…hold you and sleep next to you, with his arms around you, close to his side…

And curses if he sounded selfish but he’d trade all the faces and names of people he had met once he came topside if it was just you that could stay in his arms. All he wanted was you.

“I was thinking more of a pillow fort?”

Behind you the second bag of popcorn finished and the microwave blared for attention to remove it. You smiled sweetly once more and he chuckled. “As long as I get to stay with you. We’ll make the most magnificent pillow fort castle together,” he said.

“Oh, that sounds like a deal,” you laughed while pouring out the popcorn.

Together you carried the snacks out just in time for the movie to play in earnest. It wasn’t as good as the first in the series, but it had enough laughs and moments of action to keep you all entertained until it was nice and dark out.

Papyrus got up to help clean up their snack bowls while you tugged couch cushions off with Blue’s help to begin to make that pillow fort you had talked about. Stretch showed up in the kitchen a minute later with the rest of the snack bowls, throwing out the crumbs and kernels before passing them over.

“Blue and I heard honey is staying here tonight?”

Papyrus almost felt guilty when he remembered who was supposed to have snuggle privileges with you.

Almost.

“It’s more convenient this way. Going home would be a hassle.”

“Maybe, but I know a shortcut.” Stretch leaned against the counter, staring dully at the blank wall beside the fridge, ignoring Papyrus who was an arm’s reach away.
Papyrus hummed, washing out the last of the dishes. “You and Blue don’t have a reason to fret. Tomorrow will come sooner than you know.”

Stretch huffed and it sounded like a breath of exasperation. “You must of had a real bad day to not even offer ta’ share.”

“It… can get crowded.”

Papyrus pulled down a dish towel to dry the bowls on and noticed the look Stretch wore. Papyrus wasn’t dense enough to not know what was going through Stretch’s head in that moment. He knew of all the skeleton siblings Stretch was one of the more, possessive of their lot, and he didn’t take disappointment well. But he seemed more mellow after settling in better with Black and Rus.

“Sorry,” Papyrus whispered.

“No you’re not. Don’t lie, it doesn’t suit you, and don’t apologize either. I wouldn’t.”

Papyrus almost snorted. “But I’m not you.”

Stretch made a sound but pushed off the counter and dragged himself into the living room to where you and Blue were putting the fort together. He stood behind one of the stripped bare couches to watch and Papyrus could recognize the look on Stretch’s face too well. They were different people with different souls from different worlds, but there were still some ties that bound them.

Some things were the same.

“Work in the morning?” you echoed, standing up from the bare bones of the fort and frowning. Blue made a sound as well but reached for you to hug before joining his brother at Stretch’s side.

“Don’t sweat it, honey, we’ll catch up tomorrow night. Your place?”

“I can cook!” Blue offered.

“Or I could do that since you’re both coming off of work,” you laughed. Blue looked ready to protest but you smiled sweetly enough to melt his protests. “Let me?”

Papyrus lingered in the kitchen while you said your goodbyes and made plans with the others. That’s how it always went. No one ever showed up uninvited, but the whole process of drawing sticks for the snuggle order was something you hadn’t been notified about.

Papyrus took a cookie for himself to nibble on while you said you goodbyes, only emerging after the pair of brothers were out. You saw him and frowned, brows furrowed in concern.

“You okay?” you called.

The expected answer was exuberance, but for once he felt like being honest with the things he never admitted. “I will be. I’m very tired though. Not in my body, but in my soul I think. Things just got a little...loud for me.”

Sans was already asleep inside the mediocre tent but with a little extra help from a tall friend, you were able to prop up a frame for the blankets to drape over.

“Can you tell me about it?” you asked.

Around you the house was quiet and every creak and groan that came from the old bones of its framework settling seemed muffled as he followed behind you. In the quiet he felt like he could
say anything. When you reached for his hand he felt like he could sing if you asked him to.

“I’ve…felt like this more and more recently with my media work. I’m…phasing out the monster mascot work and turning it over to some of the other monster stars.”

“I remember you mentioning it before. How long have you felt like being a monster mascot didn’t fit you anymore?”

“Not terribly long,” Papyrus rushed to explain, fearing you would worry or think him incapable of self managing. “But, before I took the job with Sans I had been considering a retirement of my position. It didn’t feel right anymore, but it was what I was good at? What else could I do but be a personality for others? Plus… it felt like people almost needed me.”

“There are tons of things you could do,” you laughed. “You’re smarter than a whip, and any workplace would be happy to have someone as positive and pleasant as you.”

“I don’t feel very positive right now,” he admitted in a mumble that was so out of character he was almost worried you would not believe him, so he forced out a chuckle. “Just…tired?”

“I’m-don’t take this the wrong way, but I’m glad you can say that to me? It’s amazing how exuberant you are on a daily basis, but forcing yourself to be the bubbly one when you don’t feel it has got to be grueling.” You touched his face with the tips of your fingers. “You deserve days when you don’t save the world with your positivity. You deserve to rest your smile, no one can keep that up forever.”

“Well, a skeleton can because we don’t have any muscle.”

Your eyes went wide for the joke and he had to laugh at your wonderstruck expression. You called his name like a whine and reached up to hold his face with both hands. He laughed a little harder and reached for you when you were close enough, pulling you to his body and pinning you there with arms crossed behind your waist.

“I was making a serious point, you funny bones!?”

Papyrus just laughed harder, snickers morphing into the familiar ‘Nyah ha has’ that the world would remember him for, even if it was only for you in this moment.

“Me? You know the funny bone isn’t actually a bone at all and I have no ulnar nerves to deserve your- neh -to, snk -to deserve such a vulgar, nyah , ha , such a-a lewd, nyah-haha ha ha !”

What was he getting so mopey about?! He felt light as a feather. He could carry you like a feather and maybe that was it. You were in his arms and you were laughing at him so hard you had tears in your eyes and it was making you hard to breath.

“Oh, sweetie,” you sighed, resting your hands around his neck instead of on his face. “You know I think you’re the literal embodiment of sunshine, right? Please feel free to be honest about what you’re feeling in your soul with me. I care about you, alright. I want you to rest when you need to.”

Papyrus rocked gently with you in his arms. “I am resting,” he hummed happily. He felt like a battery recharged with you in his arms. He didn’t want to let you go. As long as he had you he could do anything. “But maybe…stay like this a little longer?”

“Anything,” you promised so easily.
Papyrus rocked with you in his arms, feeling a rhythm to his movement that wasn’t unnatural or learned. It felt easy to sway with you, listening to nothing but the quiet and your heartbeat. So close he thought maybe he could hear it.

Human bodies were never silent. Their breathing, their heart beating, their blood pumping…their bodies were so vibrant and your’s was one he was expertly accustomed and attuned to. The way you breathed made him want to try it even though there would never be any relief in it. The more he was around you the more he wanted to mimic what you did. The more he wanted to be a part of you, even if it was a reflection.

Absently, as if guided by an old habit, he slipped his hands out from behind your back to rest one on the curve of your hip and take your hand in the other. You left your other hand around his neck and he didn’t mind it one bit as he turned and stepped with you. There was no music but he could hear the crack of your fiery red soul or maybe it was your heartbeat, and it was enough to dance to.

You rested your head on his chest and he felt it when you hummed, it was a vibration that made his entire skeleton echo. It sounded like a song without words when you hummed into his chest, and he felt the steps he took around stray furniture fit in with the way your voice rose and fell. It was a waltz of your own making and he would gladly lead you through it.

The way you moved antagonized his imagination into picturing the way he would lead you across a ballroom in different clothes in a different time and different place. He’d lead you like this and you’d stay in his arms like this. You’d stay with him from song start to song end, you’d blush and before you could leave he would take you into the steps of the next song, and then the next, and the one after that one too.

Feeling inspired he stepped over a stray pillow with the ease of his long legs, carrying you over it effortlessly so that your toes never touched the ground. You sighed through a smile and tilt your head back to watch him and he realized it was because he was humming your melody like an echo.

Oh, he liked the way you looked at him.

He turned with you in his arms once more and you followed, never minding the fact that you were back at the beginning of whatever it was you had been humming. He was happy to take over and take you with him across the room once more, passing his snoring brother under the blanket fort.

Maybe he was being a little spoiled. He knew better than to believe Sans was really asleep, the snort sounded far too forced after all. His brother was bowing out for this small turn around and on any other day Papyrus might try to guilt his brother into joining them, like he knew Sans wanted to do, but not tonight.

No.

Tonight Papyrus wanted to be selfish. Tonight he wanted to take and to receive. He didn’t want to have to share you with Stretch or Blue or any of the other brothers who looked at you like you were their world. Tonight he just wanted to keep you close and maybe believe in the imagination that you were his and only his.

Just for a moment.

Just for a spell.

Just for tonight.

“You ever done this before?” you lazily asked, staring up at him through your lashes. Absently,
your fingers around his neck tickled.

“Only in my dreams.”

“They must be nice dreams.”

“I’ll take you there.”

Your eyes sparkled with an emotion that made him think of all the nightmares that waited for you once you were alone—the nightmares he protected you from.

“I’d like that,” you said in a voice so soft it might as well have been a whisper.

In the morning, others would be waiting for you, and the day after that still more. You were a freedom he couldn’t pin down, (not that he wanted to!) and he understood what that meant, but… tonight? Tonight he just wanted to hold you like this and forget about all the others, the forced smiles, the camera, the suits that didn’t suit him (heh)…tonight he fit right where he was in your arms and that would be enough.

Chapter End Notes

So I guess this is one of those more atypical chapters, but I liked writing from Papyrus' POV for it.

I thought a lot about what life must be like as an influencer/monster mascot and how that can change a person after five+ years of it. Fame is nice, and helping people is great, but dang if coming home isn't the best feeling in the world when everything else gets loud.

Also, these kids are setting up that poly framework and they don't even know it.
Fever dreams were a trip for most people, but yours were haunting. When you woke up both your eyelids were crusted with old tears, even if only one of them worked. Your head was pounding with the echo of old terrors and making you dizzy.

But you were safe.

You weren’t...you were out of all that now. That was your past. Not your future. Instead of pits into the dark and tests of endurance, you were struggling with fifth grade math and waking up on time to make breakfast for others. It was exhausting in a new and different way, so it was no wonder you ended up passed out in the field out back.

Of all the people to find you stretched out and buried among the tall grasses just past the pond, you wouldn’t have guessed it to be Red. He was notoriously lazy and ‘deathly allergic’ to exercising after all. There wasn’t a reason for him to be leaning over you with a stretched out skeleton grin that made his eye lights stand out in their sockets.

You blinked when the bee resting on your forehead got up to fly at Red’s face and then zip away, towards the wild flowers on the other side of the pond.

“Hey, what you gonna call a bee that can’t make up its mind?” he asked you.

“Lost and confused?”

Red’s grin grew wider. “A maybe .”

“Isn’t it too early for you to be awake?” you mumbled, reaching up to tug out the blade of grass from between your teeth where you had been chewing it. You got your hands under you and pushed up into a sitting position.

Red reached out to pat some of the dirt off your back and elbows, grin never ceasing. “It’s almost noon, doll face.”

“It was like, nine when I left,” you said around a yawn. “How’d it get so late?”

“Did you come out here to catch some zzzs?” he asked while reaching for your face to feel it. “Damn, and here I was hoping I’d be the one turning you pink. I think you caught too much sun.”

You groaned, poking at your face and feeling the heat. It wasn’t from sunburn, but the annoying fever you had been fighting back for the past week was flaring up again. No wonder you fell asleep outside after your run. That also explained your lackluster performance for the amount of sweat.

Well, it was bound to happen after working so closely with children who had just started attending school, or as you affectionately called it, the germ factory . Peter and Wendy had already had a cold each, but Tron was, thankfully, staying strong.
You pulled yourself up and stood, feeling the stick and grime of your sweat plastering your shirt to your body. You didn’t have the head for it, but you probably looked and smelled awful too. Why was Red still looking at you like you were something worth watching? Or just…someone worth the attention?

“So what are you doing all the way out here?” you asked.

“Would you believe me if I said I could see you from our new digs?”

You pushed the wild mess of hair out of your face before his words sink in a heartbeat later. “New digs? No way. Where?”

You were pretty far out in the middle of a field you weren’t sure who owned. You knew Black’s property went up and covered the pond, but you had fallen asleep a good way away from the watering hole.

“Come on, I’ll show you, just make sure to tie your shoes before we get there. I don’t want you falling for anyone else along the way.”

“Red, even if there wasn’t gravity on earth I’d still fall for you,” you teased back with a playful laugh as you watched for his reaction.

Comically, Red staggered and grabbed at his chest where his soul would be. “Oh sweetheart, I’m no photographer, but hell, I can picture us together.”

“I think your content is in need of a little development, big guy.”

Red laughed but reached for your hand and tugged you along saying, “That hand of yours looks heavy, let me hold it for you, doll.”

You wanted to tease him back, to keep the jokes going, but the sunlight made the world hazy so you closed your eyes for a moment and blindly followed behind Red, trusting him to take you where you needed to go.

It wasn’t far.

Next to the field there were a number of scattered copses that buffered up a new line of property and one of those properties was the one Red and Edge had managed to secure for themselves after some aggressive refinancing.

Like Blue and Stretch, the Fell brothers didn’t have a lot of gold to go off of, but they had enough to make a fair living once it went through the conversion process. Edge had busied himself at one of the local Mills as a ‘man of manual labor’ while Red juggled a number of side jobs, one of which was shortcutting express pizza and BBQ deliveries door to door. Once you found out you had made it a point to order when he was on call just to see his face.

After a couple of months later it sounded like they were finally ready to split from Sans and Papyrus’ generous hospitality and settle into their own place. Blue and Stretch might get a bit miffed when they heard of it being all official for Red and Edge, since that made them the only brothers still relying on another’s kindness.

“You off from work today?”

“It’s corn dog day.”
Corn dog day was when he sold corn dogs with a monster twist from a mobile stand…illegally without a food handler’s license. You had warned him about getting in trouble but he just showed you Sans’ old food handler’s license before comparing a photo of himself to the other skeleton.

“If anyone asks, I mean, technically speaking I am Sans Serif.”

On corn dog days he set his own hours and worked whenever he felt like it. Still, it seemed like one of his favorite jobs so you were surprised he wasn’t downtown with his cart for the noon rush.

You followed Red through a thin scattering of trees that eventually cleared to reveal a small stone foundation, A frame style house with a few patches and missing shutters around the windows. Outside, there was a picnic table with benches set up as well as a grill and some stump shaped chairs.

“It’s cute,” you gush before you can worry about sounding like an adult. “And it’s so out of the way too, that’ll be good for the two of you since I know Edge likes his quiet.”

“Ehh, Boss don’t mind the noise, he just don’t like it when I’m the one making sounds,” Red laughed. We closed on it last week and got the keys and everything. Wanna see the inside?”

Your smile must have been answer enough since Red tugged you inside after him, holding open the door. Inside the interior was sparse and still needed a little help. It looked like Red and Edge had moved or thrown out a lot of the leftover trash and furniture left behind by who had come before. There were still discolorations and outlines of dust on the floor that marked the absence of objects like ghosts across the floorboards.

“We still got ta get the place dressed up, but that’s Boss’ job mostly. He’s the one with an eye for design. I just make the messes.”

“I’m sure you’ve been more than helpful getting this place cleaned up.”

“Eh,” Red admitted with a shrug of his shoulders. “Maybe. It’s fun though how excited Boss has been about the whole project. He did most of the work, tearing things down and pulling things up. He’s got plans to replace boards and knock down walls and fix up the fireplace. He’s been watching too many of those home makeover shows with Black I think.”

“Hey, it’s only too many when they start talking about shiplap on the walls,” you playfully warned, already knowing about Black and Edge’s shared interest in HGTV home reno shows. If Black had the television on while he worked it was almost always set to the home network or food channel that Blue was so fond of.

“Spare me,” Red dramatically moaned.

“Only if you tour the rest of your new place.”

“Babe, though you’d never ask.”

He offered you his arm like he was playing at being some fancy gentleman type but you indulged his joke and latched on as he led you to the exciting empty closet sized room where a washer and dryer would go if they had one, the two downstairs bedrooms rooms, an office space room, the back porch, a door to the basement, and finally the loft second floor.

“It’s a bit small up here for the Boss, so we’re not sure what to do with the space. There’s a room up here too, closet and everything.”
'A guest suite?'

Red glanced sideways at you once before coughing. “If we made it one would you use it?”

“Me?”

Red hiked his shoulders, covering more of his face with the fringe of his jacket’s hood. “Yeah, I mean, you know. Uh, I’s a heard that marshmallow and his brother picked out a room to decorate up all nice and fancy for you whenever you stay over and, ye-yeah the digs aren’t nowhere near as good as theirs, but it’s a…it’s a decent place, yeah?”

“It’s a wonderful home,” you gently affirmed. “And you’re going to make it yours.”

“Just ours?”

“If that’s what you want, I’ll help out with designing that guest room, but not until you and your brother have your own spaces set up and comfortable. You guys come first in your own house.”

“You’ll come with the Boss and me to pick out curtains and furniture then?”

“I’d be de-lighted.”

Red’s easy smile split his face and his eye lights wobbled in his sockets, glowing pale red and shifting into fussy hearts or spades as he laughed along with your joke. “Babe, you’re too bright for your own good, you know that?”

You rolled your eyes but spared his pun a small snort. “Now that the kids are in school I have a ton of free time during the middle of the day. We can put something on the calendar for this week if you like, just not Saturday or Sunday.”

“I got it, a day when the kids are in school, that should be easy enough for the boss to manage.”

“What do you think you need, anyway?”

Red led you through the house layout one more time with suggestions and questions for your opinion. You noticed there were already a number of yellow colored sticky notes stuck to different sections with notes from Edge about repairs he intended to make before the house was ready to decorate. There were a few cracks in the walls he wanted to touch up and there was even a note next to the fireplace about pressure washing the stones(?) to return them to their ‘previous luster,’ whatever that means.

By the time you both made it back to the kitchen, the clock on the newly installed stove said it was 1:20.

“You sure you don’t need to go for corn dogs today?” you asked.

Red waved your concern away. “I work when I wanna. Something more important came up. I’d rather be here with you. Sides, I make a good deal more at the delivery place.”

“The Slice of Heaven Pizzeria?”

“Ah no, that’s the other, other delivery place. I meant the one with the packages. I get a nice bonus whenever someone pays extra for the express shipping. I make pennies at the corn dog stand but I like it best so I keep it up.”

“Your illegal corn dog stand,” you playfully mocked.
“Yeah, that’s me, resident bad boy in a collar. But hey, speaking of food, you wanna go grab a bite with me, say Grillby’s?”

“You ever known a person to turn down Grillby’s?”

“Aside from the Boss?”

“Aside from your brother, of course.”

“I was hoping it’d be enough to win ya over. I’ve been dying for something greasy with fries. You mind if I take us with a shortcut there?” He was already reaching for you to pull in closer and hold.

“I’m kinda gross from workout this morning.”

Red laughed and in the filtered sunlight that made it through the grim on the windows, Red’s gold canine tooth sparkled. “You smell fine and look great, sweetheart, trust me, ain’t nobody gonna care about it but you. Don’t you want some protein?”

You rolled your eyes but slipped your arms up behind Red’s head and leaned in. “Lead the way, slick. I know how to keep my distance.”

You fell in and out of the void as easily as falling asleep-unable to feel the beginning or end of it. And as fast as a shot, it was over and you were standing outside the brick front property that was bustling with lazy business in the early afternoon. It was just after the lunchtime rush, populated by both human and monster alike.

There were a number of humans who had stumbled in to see what the hype had been about, and a good half of them decided to stay or come back later. The slow pace of life the townspeople were accustomed to suited Grillby just fine and it worked out better for him compared to his place in the city where life was faster than light.

Still, it seemed the bulk of his clientele were his monster faithfults.

The door chimed as Red tottered in, playfully stepping in with what he thought was a swagger to get the fire elemental’s attention. Grillby noticed Red’s gold tooth grin and seemed to deflate. More than Sans, Red had made himself a famous face around town for being a mischievous bar fly it seemed. It hadn’t taken very long to build up that facet of his reputation.

But then Grillby noticed you and the edges of his flames flickered in a familiar greeting you understood. Lazily you waved and the flames at your fingertips crackled like the logs on a fireplace. It made Grillby chuckle, shaking his shoulders so that even the doggo monsters could tell he was happy.

Red hopped up into a seat first and you followed, sliding onto a stool at the bar beside your friend. Grillby’s flames wavered when he glanced to Red, tone weary, before his attention was back on you, asking how you were.

“Nothing to complain about. I’ve been good. Looks like business for you isn’t so bad either.”

Instead of keeping the conversation in the language of flames Grillby put in the effort to use spoken words. “…Not too busy…not too slow… just right.”

“Sounds like you made it, Goldilocks,” Red chuckled, eyes flashing in delight at the joke.

Grillby’s shoulders dropped a bit. “…The usual?”
“Please and thank you,” you answered for both yourself and Red.

You rested your elbows on the countertop and settled your chin between your hands, cupping your face gently. “It smells great here. The beef, the grease, the fries… I need a candle that smells like this for whenever I’m hungry.”

“Or you know, you could just come on over and show up for the real deal,” Red laughed. “I’ll even treat this time.”

“Nah, I’m good, but thanks for the offer. Don’t you have a tab going?”

Red made a face that could have been a pout if he wasn’t in such a good mood. “Nah, that’s only for the marshmallow himself. The rest of us have to use our wallets.”

You snorted. “Like you should, you dweeb.”

Red shot you a wounded look that was almost as poorly put together as his pout. It made you roll your eyes and snicker, but that’s what he wanted, so you can imagine the smile that came back onto Red’s face meant you had pleased him somehow.

“So says the only human who eats on the house,” he playfully mocked.

His comment made you shrug, expression a tad shy of smug since what he said was true. You got the ‘Sans’ treatment at Grillby’s though you weren't sure why.

You tapped the countertop before slipping off your bar stool and making a beeline for the jukebox in the corner, playing smooth jazz the way Grillby liked. You flipped through the tracks before setting up a couple to play with the last wrinkled dollar left in your pants. If you had any leftover change you’d spring for a third track, but you’d be content with September by Earth, Wind, & Fire before something a bit more electronic came on.

You swayed on your feet, gently moving to the soft rhythm that flowed out, stepping when the energy picked up. You didn’t feel up to dancing between the tables, but you had been known to do just that if the mood struck you. It was enough to just sway with the music.

Before the first song was over you heard the plates on the countertop and turned back to see Grillby setting out the burgers for both you and Red, followed by the boat of fries. Red pointed to a bottle of mustard behind the counter and Grillby didn’t even try to stop him from using blue magic to bring it over.

Grillby shot you a look over Red’s head that communicated perfectly without words the plea for help as he watched Red smother his burger patty in gobs and gobs of messy mustard.

You offered him a sympathetic smile before sliding into your set.

“Grillby, this smells divine,” you moaned before picking up your burger to bite into. You melt a bit in bliss before swallowing and flashing him another new smile. “And it tasted just as good as it smells. I’ll never be tired of your food.”

His flames flickered with blue color around the edges before he ducked his face and turned back around to grab the alcohol from the back wall and pour a drink for Red. He turned to you and his flames flickered with the question. ‘Would you want a drink too?’

“I think… I’ll be fine without today, but thanks for checking. You have something softer but still not water?”
‘Never touch the stuff!’ his flames chirped cutely as he turned to mix you a drink better than any specialty chain could offer.

You watched him pull something pink down from the shelf and mix it with lemonade and then another bottle of tea. There was a little more flare as he transferred the liquids from one container to the next and from the way his flames flickered proudly you knew he was showing off a little, the way he did whenever he went off menu for you. The drink came together in a frosted glass with bobbing ice that he set down in front of you with a red and white striped straw. It was cute, just the way you liked it.

You reached for it and made a delighted sound. “What is it?” you asked.

‘White tea, lemonade, and pink guava. Figured you’d be tired of all the local fruits by now.’

“Ah, well I’m not sick of anything yet, it is nice to have a taste of something new. Thank you, it’s perfect.”

His flames flickered blue around the edges again, but he ducked his face and turned around to busy himself with another customer’s order.

A table behind you the dogs playing cards snickered at something happening in their game and further down the bar a lava monster girl flirted with a local human. You heard the song behind you replace your second pick on the jukebox but found yourself bobbing along to it all the same.

You were nearly done with your burger when you called out to Grillby, since he was close to your section of the bar. “How is Fuku doing in school? Is she still at that community college?”

Grillby answered using the language of his flames and you listened as he rattled on about how his poor daughter was too scatterbrained to settle on a major and having trouble picking a field of study. It was so much easier when she was in high school and all her classes were pretty much just picked out for her.

From his seat at the counter Red watched you listen to Grillby, trying to figure out what was being said based off your replies when you didn’t offer a translation. Still, your answers had plenty of clues for him to go off of, so that he eventually was able to add his two cents about picking a major suited to a person’s tastes.

Then Grillby asked you about ‘your kids’ and how they were doing.

“The-they’re not my kids exactly, I just help out with watching them and take them home after school and…stuff. But they’re good.”

Red inhaled sharply and you caught him trying to hide his snort of laughter behind his hand. You glared at him and tugged the boat of fries closer, out of his reach, in retribution. They were a little cold compared to when they first came out, but you were able to warm them up in your hands with a little fire magic of your own.

Red reached for some of the newly reheated fries but you tugged them to you again and kicked him lightly to back off because those were your fries!

Grillby chuckled but prepared a new boat of fries for Red to keep him satisfied.

“There’s…less than ‘ers” Red whined when he saw what Grillby set in front of him.

“…She …finishes hers.”
You stuck out your tongue, feeling too much like the child that successfully tattled to the parent about something someone else said.

“I finish my fries.”

“…You and Sans both…leave the sharp ones.”

“They’re stabby fries,” Red protested, sounding like he expected his excuse to be accepted. You rolled your eyes and Grillby’s flames dimmed just a tad.

“That’s fine, I’ll eat your leftovers.”

Red made another face. “How are you still hungry?”

“You’ve known me for how long and you’re supposedly surprised about this now?”

“You have a monster’s appetite, babe.”

Red reached for his fries but hesitated to peak up at Grillby who hadn’t moved on to the next task at the bar. There was a moment of awkward pause where you waited to see if Grillby would say anything. It looked like there was something on his mind, but instead of saying anything Grillby just reached for Red’s empty plate and moved on with it.

“I think I said something ‘ta piss him off. You don’t think he’s mad I called you a monster. You’re good with that, ain’t cha?”

“Totally,” you say between sips of your drink. “But I think you’re reading too much into it. Don’t you think it would be weird if he wasn’t a bit pissed off with the guy who keeps unscrewing the salt shaker caps and switching his condiments out on him.”

“Harmless pranks.”

You leveled him with a flat look. “Sure.”

“Harmless, babe, harmless, I swear.”

“I’ve been pissed at people over less.”

You caught sight of Grillby preparing a patty melt and waited until he was finished serving it up before calling out to him, asking about his thoughts concerning a trade school for Fuku.

“You said she liked baking, why not go to a culinary school? It’d be faster and right up her alley.”

“…Trade school?”

“It’s a bit like an apprenticeship like what the monster folks have. Basically it’s a school that just teaches a special trade, like hair and make up, cooking or baking, electrician work …ahh, I know there are others but I’m not the best person to ask. I didn’t exactly finish school myself.”

“Did you want to?” Red asked, interjecting.

Grillby watched on and you felt a bit shy to admit your shortcomings. You had a high school level education… that had some pretty significant holes, considering who was in charge of overseeing your education.

You weren’t dumb, you knew that, it was just… hard to feel smart when no one cared how many
different knots you knew how to tie, or how to write twelve different types of codes with cyphers or how to find a person’s weak side. It was all survival education and none of those credits transferred.

Your own brush with community college had been…less than stellar.

“Not…really,” you admitted to Red, answering his question from before. “It’s not in the cards for me right now and I feel better not being stuck in a classroom.” Imagining it made the hair on the back of your neck stand up in anxious fear. “It’s just the kids who will be using the school I think.”

“If that’s how you feel, ain’t no reason to do things differently. It’s not for everyone. Mostly, people just seem to use it to get a job.”

“Get a good job,” you sighed, thinking with envy of Stretch’s employment to the energy plant where he was making a six figure salary thanks to his expertise. “I’ve had plenty of odd jobs just fine without a degree.”

“…Are you looking for additional employment?” Grillby asked, sounding curious.

“Not…actively. But yeah, with the kids in school all morning I guess I could use my time a bit more wisely. I’m not working on renovating my place as much, too.”

“You could work here,” Grillby suggested without the usual pause before his words. Red blinked, just as surprised as you.

“Here? You need the help?” you asked, glancing around and noticing the lazy bustle of regulars and visitors.

“Just…to wait tables, and bus them…maybe wash the dishes …so I don’t need to run the dishwasher several times a day.”

“Makes sense,” you hummed, thinking of all the water Grillby went out of his way to avoid. It was something you understood from experience but also something you knew you could avoid. You lived life with one foot on either side of your split disposition; reaping the benefits of both just like you were designed to do. Once upon a time that design had been formulated to combat and fight toe to toe with the monster species, but now…you were taking that curse and making it your own.

You offered Grillby your best smile and felt Red shift on the barstool beside you, leaning forward to watch for your expression. “I’ll think it over, but that…sounds like something I should be able to swing.”

After getting dropped off by Red, driving down to pick up the kids from school, and checking over their homework, you sat down to dinner and ate…a good deal less than usual. You were smooth about it and no one seemed to notice it as something worth speaking up over. You had a feeling Rus noticed, but doubted he was planning on saying anything about it.

An hour later you had thrown it all back up and found the fever you had been fighting breaking out across your body. It had been dragging you down and making you slow all day. It seemed Tron would be the only human survivor of this stupid cold that was going through the house.
'Stupid public school is a breeding ground for colds like these,' you mentally moaned.

You took another shower but halfway through it you stepped on the drain plug and let the tub fill up under you so that you could sit in the water, slipping in until it was just under your nose. You cut off the water and sat in your bath, too tired to know if this was a good or bad idea. There were echoes of nightmares just behind your eyelids. You had been ill before, plenty of times, but mostly to build up a resistance to toxins and poisons. You knew how to brace for suffering and use the surge of your anger to ride out the pain until it was gone, but this was different than Hightower's willful experimentation.

When was the last time you got sick with an actual cold?

You sat in the tub long enough to feel the bath water change from warm to cool before reaching for the plug to let it all drain out. The surface of the water slipped over your shoulders and breasts and down to where your elbows and hips rested against the sides of the tub, but you didn’t move until it was completely drained. Turning over and standing felt like it took too much effort.

You dried off a few minutes later and dressed for bed, feeling slow and lethargic. You would need to text Black about getting the kids up in the morning, just in case you couldn’t wake up in time to drag them out of bed. Ah, but first you needed to brush your teeth because of the vomit, and then take medicine? No, wasn’t that order wrong? Well, whatever. Your toothbrush was closer.

You had the brush in your mouth when you heard the first few knocks. A few seconds later there were more knocks and then nothing. Normally you’d shout out that you were coming but it was late, you were tired, and your head didn’t like the sounds your heart was making in your chest. Everything was too loud.

You spit then left your toothbrush on the edge of the sink and stumbled out, taking the stairs down to the main living space. The front door sounded with more knocks and you heard a pair of voices on the other side.

“I already did that.”

“You don’t know if she’s able to hear you. She could be running water for all you know.”

“Sh-should we just go in then?”

“Unacceptable! That’s an invasion of privacy.”

“What if she fell or is hurt though!”

There was quiet and then the knocking started up again, more forceful than before. You jiggled the doorknob, getting it loose before you swung the door back and saw Rus standing with his hands held nervously to his chest while Edge stood, poised with his fist in the air like he was prepared to knock again.

What an odd pair.

Edge’s eyes lights went straight to your face and you saw the moment when he realized what he was looking at. “You!” he surged forward and grabbed at your face, one hand free from his gloves to feel your forehead and then your cheek. “A fever! Brother was right.”

“Did it get worse?” Rus worried. He crossed the threshold into your home and reached for you too, grabbing at your elbow.
“I just took a bath, that’s why I’m so flushed I think,” you breezily laughed. It would be easier if they didn’t worry so much.

“Incorrect. Do not insult my intelligence, especially when I have a literal finger on your pulse, missy,” snapped Edge, sounding upset with your condition.

He touched at your neck before turning his hand around and brushing his knuckles against your veins. You had seen in the mirror how your coloring had dimmed with the fever and nausea. You probably looked worse in their sight since they weren’t used to seeing such changes in a human.

“I’m fine. This is normal for a human.”

“Normal doesn’t mean it shouldn’t be taken care of or brushed off so casually,” Rus interjected. “You weren’t so blasé with the kids when they got sick.”

“That’s different ‘cause they’re kids. I’m an adult, my body can handle it better. I’ll be fine.”

Rus’ eye lights didn’t waver as he held your stare, determined to keep you in his sights as he watches for your reaction, trusting it more than your words. “But you’re still in pain, aren’t you?”

“I’ll be fine, I just need sleep.”

“Not with this wet hair, you don’t. Have you taken medicine yet? What about your blankets? You probably don’t have enough if it’s what it was last week. It’s getting colder at night.”

You pulled up a hand and let the flames leak out of your fingertips and inhaled, feeling the fire in your lungs that grew with every breath. Rus surged, reaching for your hand and slapping his over your fingers, curling his phalanges over the baby flames. You blinked at his hasty action, not expecting it.

“You shouldn’t be using your magic when you’re unstable,” he explained in a rush, looking worried. “It—for monsters we—it is harder t-to control but maybe it ain’t for humans…”

“Better safe than sorry,” Edge said.

You felt Edge’s hand on your shoulder, turning you back inside and behind you Rus pushed the door shut with the back of his boot, latching it shut with blue magic. They led you together, pushing and pulling you up the stairs to the loft and then to your bed. Edge slipped away only to reemerge with a hairdryer. He plugged it into the wall outlet closest to your bed.

Rus guided you down until you were sitting among your pillows with your back to Edge so that he could get at your hair and blow dry it with the heat. In spite of the fever you were cold through and through, empty and tired, so the heat from the dryer made you feel like a cat that wanted to curl up on the laptop keyboard. You think you made a sound of contentment or something close since Rus snickered in front of you and even Edge chuckled.

Rus reached for your hands and took them into his, folding your fingers through his—flesh between bones. The way his touches would drag lazily over your finger bones, your knuckles, and then under your wrist, all served to lull you closer to something called sleep.

The dryer clicked off and Edge ran his hand through your hair once more to fluff it out over your shoulders. You heard him fold up the hair dryer behind you.

“Call your brother and let him know she’ll be recovering tomorrow morning and then tuck her in. I’m going to find some medicine.”
“I’m a little sick, not helpless. I can—mphh.”

You had started to stand but Rus tugged you back, pulling you until you toppled into his arms, face buried in the fluff of his hood. You could feel his arms around you as he pulled you down into the bed, under the comforter.

“Russsss,” you groaned, glaring up playfully from beneath your lashes.

“Gotta tuck you in,” he chuckled, tugging you down before pulling back the comforter to better cover you. You let him, enjoying the warmth too much to fight. He pulled out his phone and sent off a quick text before getting up to find some extra blankets.

“Is this all you have?” he asked a minute later with the throw from your downstairs couch. It wasn’t much of a blanket but it kept you happy during your movie marathons.

“It’s enough, I’m plenty warm.”

“I’m a skeleton and even I can tell it’s not,” Rus grumbled, narrowing his eye lights. You’re shivering.”

“That’s ‘cause of the fever.”

“You—you’re still cold then. Here, move over,” Rus said, sounding almost annoyed.

He unfolded the throw and spread it out over you before slipping in under the comforter and snuggling up to you, tugging off his jacket to wrap you up in before pulling you into his arms.

A minute later you felt the bed behind you dip as Edge reached for you, helping you sit up so that you could drink the liquid medicine he found for you. It tasted bad, but you figured that meant it would work.

“I’m really…fine. This is human normal. I can get by just fine on my own. I’ll…probably be fine in the morning,” you said around a yawn.

“Stop saying you’re fine when you’re not. You’re trembling like a wet kitten still,” Rus huffed.

You shivered and he pulled you back towards him while Edge helped you under the covers again, tucking you in before following after you.

“You’re insufferable. Just let someone take care of you for a change, why don’t you?” Edge groused from the pillow next to yours.

You felt Rus fold himself around you from behind you while you lay facing Edge. It was an interesting combination, all things considered, but it wasn’t bad. Edge was authoritative and took the lead easily while Rus was as observant as he was subservient. The pair complemented one another more than some other skeleton combinations.

At least they got along well enough.

“Sorry,” you mumbled into your pillow.

Behind you Rus nuzzled against your neck, parting the fluff of your freshly dried hair with his chin. “Ya don’t need ta apologize for anything, kitten.”

“It’s not your fault you caught a cold, don’t say you’re sorry when you really mean ‘thank you.’ Honestly, you’re worse than Red.”
You yawned again but reached out with your hand to grab for Edge’s wrist, pulling it close enough that you could hold one of his hands in both of yours. “Thank you, both of you. I appreciate it that you’re taking care of me. It’s…nice.”

“Have you ever had a brother or someone take care of you before?” Rus asked, sounding sleepy behind your shoulder.

You thought of Raven and all the other children who were fed the same promise that never came true. Their faces were starting to blur in your memory, but Raven’s would stay with you forever. “Not… in a really long time. Growing up there was always a doctor right there watching us and monitoring our condition. Sometimes we got sick, yeah, but…that’s normal and we got used to it. It wasn’t a big deal.”

Rus was quiet for a moment more before he opened his mouth to speak. “I think the kids liked it when you fussed over them. You made them feel safe. You make them feel taken care of. That’s… important.”

You felt Edge squeeze your hands back. “You should get some sleep. Rest up now. We’ll be here in the morning when you wake up,” he said before moving over to kiss at your forehead. “So, sleep.”

You felt crummy and cold from the fever, but you were tired enough to ignore all that as sleep built up behind your eyes. Gone were the horrors, now replaced with soft comfort. Edge nestled closer to your side in bed and Rus held you safely as sleep came to claim you.

You ignored the suspicion deep in your brain, that sounded like fear, that there was something still very much wrong with you, something that had nothing to do with fevers or colds-something you could only ignore with help. Rus’ arms around you and Edge’s hands over yours were enough to force those fears down.

Whatever came next, you would weather it together.

In the morning they were both still close when you woke. Rus stayed snuggled to your side while Edge helped himself to your kitchen where he could make something good for your breakfast.

Rus’ phone lit up with all the texts Black was sending to his brother asking about ‘their’ human’s condition.

Your fever broke in the night and you still felt sluggish and crummy, but you made it through the day with only one extra nap before you could say the cold had run its course and you were back to normal…just in time for the season’s festivities.

Chapter End Notes

I feel like Rus and Edge would make a good tag team. Also, Red is way too much fun to write. He's such a chaotic character and I love his relationship with Grillby.
When you stood outside in the morning it was usually cold, but after a late brunch with Blue andStretch, you stood out on the sidewalk of Heritage Street and felt the chill for what it was.

“Harvest season is in. We’re in the full swing of it,” the woman behind the counter of the eatery explained. “Festival should be soon too. Eh, what’s the day now, Peach?”

A monster girl with silver freckles and a deer’s face poked her head out to read off the calendar for the store owner. When she chittered it wasn’t something you could understand but the owner seemed to comprehend it. How long had they known each other?

“Eh, that means the festival starts only four days from now! Should be some flyers about it somewhere,” the owner explained before handing over the receipt for your meals. When the paper passed into your hands the woman smiled coyly and the deer girl snickered from behind the back counter.

You had told the boys you were going to use the ladies room, and you had, but your real reason for getting up had been to grab the tab for your table and pay it before either brother could offer. Stretch had been acting a bit annoying about his new job, complaining comically about how boring it was, and how much money it paid, and how pleasant everyone was. Treating the both of them would take him down a peg and bruise his pride a bit. He’d get you back for it later on, but…that was the nature of such things. You weren’t unwilling to put up with his mischief.

On your way back to the table on the terrace you saw a stack of flyers next to the newspaper stand advertising the festival Black and Russ had been talking about for the past few weeks. It would be a good idea to take the kids to it, you all figured.

Taking the flyer back to your table you settled into your seat and reached for your drink, chewing on the straw before taking a pull. Stretch’s lazy eye lights, so dark they barely stood out in his sockets, fixated on you.

“What did you get on your way back?” Blue asked, setting down his phone. The screen had been left open to a dozen new emails from all his side jobs. It was so rare to catch him with a free hour these days, much less two.

“You hear about the ‘Blackberry Harvest Festival’ yet?” you asked, turning around the flyer to show off the bright colors of a setting sun skyscape behind a ferris wheel outline.

“Of course! I’m helping assemble it,” Blue laughed. “They said they’ve never seen it go up so fast, and it’s all thanks to the monster help this year.”

“I’m not surprised. That sounds like something you’d be perfect for helping out with.” You absently tapped the straw against your lips, playing with it before setting your drink down. “But are you planning on attending or just helping out? Don’t tell me you’re working there during the festivities.”
“Ju-just a booth or two,” Blue chuckled, flushing a pretty azure color across his skull. “But I can take breaks, and-and I have one day off I think.” Blue leaned forward in his seat. “If you… wouldn’t be too tired of it after taking the kids there with Black and Russ, I’d love to-to do some stuff there…together.”

“Then save some time for me, I’ll meet you for some games or a ride or two. Anything in mind for what you wanna do. You’ve never been to one of these before, have you? Or was there something similar in the underground?”

“Not like this. We had festivals and potlucks and gatherings, but the rides and structures above ground are just huge and over the top. I’ve never seen anything like it underground,” said Blue.

“One day we have to take you to a theme park,” Stretch said, sparing a smile for his brother. “If you pick one out we can go next time you’re free.”

“A theme park! Those have the roller coaster rides, don’t they?” Blue exclaimed, eyes spinning into stars with excitement.

“Yeah, I saw you were watching go-pro videos on the internet about it,” Stretch said, eye lights darting your way. “But I’m sure the videos don’t do any justice to the experience?”

“Why are you looking at me like that? I’ve never been to one.” You reached for your drink again, sucking up what was left at the bottom.

“Why not?” Blue asked, sounding concerned. “They’re not unappealing to you, are they?”

You refused to look at Stretch while you chewed on your straw and thought back to your bare apartment and the tight budget you had to live off of when you first separated from Hightower and his Embassy home. A trip to a theme park would have broken you and set you back too far to ever enjoy.

“I’m sure it would be a fun place to visit. It just seemed like a waste of money at the time.”

“You still think that?” Stretch asked, sounding casual.

“Taking the day off now wouldn’t be a problem, so I guess not.” A thrill ran through your heart when you considered it. “It… would be possible.”

“We should all three go to a park then,” Blue exclaimed with stars in his eyes, “before it gets too cold. Something called Hallow’s Eve is coming up next month and that changes the pricing for some of these places I heard.”

You glanced out at the trees and caught sight of the gold and crimson stains curling up the edges of some of their tallest leaves. It would be a few more weeks before the world unfolded in those crisp autumn colors, but somehow the season had snuck up on you.

What would Halloween be like this time? What would the holidays be like? Did all the boys want to do Thanksgiving together? Who would host? What about Gyftmas?

It felt like the first time in a long time you were looking forward to the staples of the seasons instead of dreading them. The clear markers that indicated the passing of another year were now going to be things you could enjoy. It felt so surreal and you were suddenly violently jealous of people who had lived their whole lives loving the holidays.

“Cool, well, since you were so sneaky and just had to go off and pay for brunch, I’ll cover the cost
of our tickets,” Stretch interjected, already pulling up his phone to flip through his calendar, checking Blue’s availability. “You like Florida alright? Apparently they have a big one people think is decent for first timers.”

“Wow, so it’s official?” you asked, leaning over Black’s shoulder to read the letter he hastily stuff under his desk calendar, blushing a deep purple color. It was a rare treat to manage sneaking up on Black, so you were probably smiling too wide or something to get him to stare at you like that.

“WHA-WHAT DID YOU SEE?” he all but squeaked, forgetting to pull the magic out of his words in his surprise.

“IT looked like the town of Blackberry wants to honor you for all your efforts in supporting the resettlement of monster folks. You’d be the official Mr. Blackberry King,” you teased.

The way he flushed at your words never got old. You thought he’d develop some sort of resistance or immunity to it by now, but he was still just as easy to ruffle. The only person who you could get to color faster was probably his brother.

“No such thing! It’s just a-just a formality, an empty ceremony to waste time on. Blackberry isn’t even a city so there’s no key to give either. Honestly, I didn’t do anything more than the mascot or his brother. I-I’d much rather just remain anonymous and enjoy the festival with my family.”

Your soul fluttered happily in your chest when he spoke of his family. You knew by now, and had accepted the truth of it, that when Black said ‘family’ it included you.

He had said it explicitly, more than once.

“ I think you deserve it.”

“Hardly! It is an empty honor as I have done nothing significant to earn such gratitude. My financial choices were for my own benefit alone. I am no-not nice . I am a malevolent instrument of fear and terror with a bloody past and a bloodier reputation for unspeakable violence.”

Peter ran into the room and stopped short. “Daddy, where are my flip flops?”

“They’re put away where they should be. It’s cold outside. Socks and shoes or no outdoor play.”

“Not fair!”

“Shoes are by the door. Your socks are in the sock drawer.”

“But-”

“Safe play or no play.”

Peter ran out, groaning dramatically and you had to hide the smile on your face behind your hand. When you looked back Black had pulled himself up and crossed his arms behind his back, adopting his favorite resting pose.

“See? No mercy.”
“Sure, sure, whatever you say, daddy."

You weren’t sure why your teasing was as effective as it was, but when you winked back over your shoulder at Black it made him shiver and turn his whole skull a new color. The eye lights in his sockets went fuzzy and wavered too. It was enough to get you to laugh and run out before Black could use his blue magic to push you away.

Ha!

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The week passed easily and before you knew it, you were getting ready for the Friday afternoon kick off. It was a three day event, lasting the entire weekend before packing up to move on to the next town, but people were saying with the boom in population there might be justification to extend the days and keep the festivities going even longer, ‘like the ones in the big farmer cities.’

Even though so many different crops and foods can be harvested year round, it’s mostly just the corn and maze that marks the harvest season for the locals. You had learned that people partied hard before going to work and lots of families had relatives that came to stay for the next three months to help out. Many of them were in town in time for the festival.

“It’s almost like being back in the city,” you mused from your driver’s side seat, eyes fixed on the man directing traffic for parking.

Rus sat in the passenger’s seat of your car with the kids in the back, squished in between one carseat and two boosters. No wonder Tron had elected to leave with Stretch earlier.

Rus had his phone out and was furiously typing some manifesto-length comment with the most nonchalant expression. If you hadn’t been driving you would have just stopped to watch him and maybe even laugh at how funny it seemed. His phalanges were literal blurs over the oversized phone.

Out of all the skeleton brothers, he had adapted the best to the smartphone. Back in the underground all they had to repurpose were the broken junk phones with actual keypads and tiny screens that could only read numbers. Sans had been topside for years and he still texted like he was using a Nikon brick some days.

He glanced up after finishing his mini story text message and noticed the number of cars ahead of you. You could see his surprise in the way his eye lights flashed bright and then shrunk in his sockets; one of his more obvious tells.

“That is a lot. Is the whole town here?” he asked.

“Pretty much, and then some. I guess it’s a good draw for those in the neighboring towns and the city. It’s a weekend day so plenty of people can afford to make the trip out.” Something occurred to you as you idled in line, waiting to park. “Have you ever been in such a large crowd?”

Rus looked your way and tried to grin. “Underground…maybe? Not with humans though. It’ll be new.”

“What was it like underground?” you ask, hesitating only when you see the looks he shoots back
over his shoulder to where the kids sat, complaining amongst themselves at how long it was taking just to park.

He met your eyes and managed a smile. “Different.”

You didn’t doubt it.

Eventually you got slotting into a spot by a youth in a security vest and parked. The kids cheered loud enough to make you stop and look back at each of them pointedly, warning them without words until they were quiet again; still wriggling in their seats, but quiet.

Rus followed you out and helped untangle Phil from his carseat only to plop the youngest of the bunch up on his shoulders to ride around, far taller than anyone else his age had a right to be. Peter whined about how unfair it was until you pointed out how Phil couldn’t go wherever he wanted, and that there was a bounce house obstacle course he had been dying to try out.

You crossed the parking lot and funneled into the crowd at the front, producing your paper tickets and getting paper wristbands instead that advertised some of the different businesses funding the festival. Wendy was the only one that got one with Grillby’s on it and she was unwilling to trade so you hurried to distract Peter with talk about the first games he wanted to play.

You followed him to the ‘Arcade Alley’ with Wendy holding onto your hand, but before you could get far you felt Rus reach for your free hand and grab it tight. Something in his touch made you turn to him and study him closely. You could see the beads of magic on the base of his skull and feel the tremors in his hand.

Different, was all he had said, but you knew there was more to it than that.

“Peter, grab me a map from the stack there, honey. Let’s pull off to the side and make a plan of attack,” you called out, stopping the young boy in his tracks.

“Battle strategy, excellent!” he cried, impersonating Black’s manner of speaking. It was enough to make Rus sputter a chuckle.

You took the map and ushered everyone over to an alcove Rus could put his back to while you unfolded the paper at Wendy and Peter’s level. While they circled the games they wanted to try the most you watched Rus.

His eye lights were frantically moving from one human body to the next, scanning each, watching as much as he could and trying to analyze it all before the scene in front of him shifted and moved once more. It was a lot, and you didn’t doubt he was running into some sensory overload after so long on a quiet farm with only his family and friends. He was a fairly social skeleton, hungry for attention and physical touch even, but he was also a very anxious skeleton.

You hadn’t let go of his hand so you tugged it a little and drew his eye lights to your face. “I’m here,” you said before whispering, “I’m not going to let anything happen to you or the kids, trust me.”

His hand in yours shivered. “You too.”

“Hmm?”

He leaned in closer. “Nothing sh-should happen to you either.”

“I’m heartier than that, babe,” you chuckled, smiling confidently. “I’ll always be fine.”
“…stupid,” Rus chuckled, blushing lightly while looking away in bashful delight when you added a playful wink. “Y-you can’t promise that.”

“Watch me.”

“How are you so confident?” he huffed with a playful eye-light roll.

“I beat Sans up when we first met. You should ask him about it sometime.”

“Oh no, I saw the vids, that’s all on the Embassy database for any halfway decent hacker to help himself to, I know all about that.”

You paused, processing his words. “Oh.” The words still weren’t registering. “You…saw that?”

“Yeah, you put up a real good fight,” he teased and you flushed darker at his tone. “I think you did a whole lot of damage to his ego with all those brutal attacks of yours.”

“If I wanted to he’d have been floor wax, okay.”

“You never want it though.”

You almost pulled away from Rus, unsettled by the even confidence in his words. There was no reservation or hesitation as he picked you apart. He looked at you and it was like he could see right through you, past all your layers down to your scars and horrors.

Maybe he could .

Rus reached out with his free hand and pointed to your chest where your soul would emerge if he called it forward. “I’ve seen you, I know better. You don’t have any honest violence left in you.”

What’s honest violence?

But the question was only a thought and before you could open your mouth to speak you were interrupted.

“Here, here, now!” Peter called, interrupting your conversation with Rus by throwing up the map between you two. A couple of the booths had been circled and then crossed out and then circled again in darker lines. “Let’s go!”

You just barely managed to grab him by the back of his overalls and pick him up off the ground before he could run off out of sight. Wendy stuck her tongue out at her brother when he kicked wildly to be put down.

Overalls were great.

“We’ll go together, speedy, so cool your jets or else I’m cutting back on your food budget.”

Peter complied and Russ laughed but held onto your hand as you subverted most of the crowd and found a back path into the Arcade Alley where booth after booth stood out in vivid color, trying to attract customers.

Peter, predictably, wanted to try out all the shooting games until Wendy beat him at one and then he wanted to try something new. You guided them to a number of different booths until they saw the face painting one and all sat down to get done up. You teased Rus about it but he backed out, saying it wasn’t fair if you didn’t get it either.
“I’ve already got some art,” you explained waving your forearm with the sleeve of your sweater pushed up enough to show off the white flowers.

Rus reached out to trace the design from one petal to the next, ending at the base of the peony’s stem. “I remember when you said you got this design. You thought they were pretty. Is that…the only reason?”

You shrugged. “There was more thought behind it at the time, but nothing worth explaining now. It’s enough. I like it and have no regrets.”

“It is pretty,” Rus finally concluded, letting his hand drop as his eye lights fixated on your face.

The kids finish up in time to complain about being hungry so you leave the games behind and follow the smell of deep fried foods and sugar. Of course each one wanted something different that you had to wait in line for, but thankfully you managed to make some pretty decent time through the different lines, noticing that there’s a monster with several octopus like arms serving baskets of fast food eight times faster than the human beside him.

You start to look for a place to sit, seeing a clustering of park tables and benches, but Rus tugs you towards the edge of the booths and you find a patch of grass under the lights to sit and eat with your backs to a solid surface.

Wendy eats what she can but passes off the rest of her chicken tenders to you complaining about being too full from all the chili-surprise fries that came with the order. You’re only too happy to finish off all of the leftovers. You can never find the end to your hunger, no matter how well fed your skeletons kept you.

“Rides after this would be…not good?” Rus guessed, glancing up to the skyline where the ferris wheel cut an impressive sight against the last traces of light. The white twinkle lights were on and everything seemed to have a sign that glowed or lit up to wash the world in neon colors and carnival hues.

“There are other things we can do, what about souvenirs?” you asked, reaching for your drink.

“I want a lightsaber!” Peter cheered.

“Me too!” Wendy exclaimed.

“Not…something more girly?” Rus asked, glancing in confusion down at the dubbed ‘princess’ of their home who loved all things pink and pretty.

“Lightsabers are for girls too!” she exclaimed before pretending to swing one at her brother.

“Cool, let’s do that and then get in line for some rides. Our food will be settled by then,” you decided, knowing the kids were still too small to ride anything that would give them trouble later on.

You found a seller of miniature lightsabers for the kids and a glowing toy for Phil. Russ bought a flower crown for himself that had small fiber optic lights inside the buds that made it glow different colors. “Now we match,” was the explanation he gave you.

It made you laugh until he presented you with a small bouquet of light roses, his gift to you. “You spoil me,” you sighed before accepting the gift.

“Not possible, but I’ll try.”
You find the line for the ferris wheel as long as expected and before you're halfway some of the first fireworks of the night begin to shoot off. Rus flinched at first when he heard the sound, grabbing for you and Phil immediately, but then when the lights exploded he realized what he was seeing and his awe won over his fear. Different colors burst across the dark sky, highlighting the backdrop of shadows clouds and smoke left in the sky. Every color reflected back on Rus’ face, enhancing his expression.

“Never seen fireworks?” a new voice interjected.

Rus flinched at Stretch’s proximity when the orange clad skeleton showed up via a shortcut just behind them in line. He had his hands stuffed into the pockets of his jeans and a half finished honey stick between his teeth even though you could still smell the smoke on his clothes.

“You…what were you doing? I texted you hours ago,” Russ sighed.

“Yeah…sorry I’m late, I was busy not wanting to come,” Stretch yawned. “Next time just text Edge, he’d come.”

“What were you really busy with?” you asked, flicking the end of his honey stick.

Stretch glanced your way and the corners of his smile stretched a little, making his expression softer for you. He pulled out from his pocket a rock candy still wrapped in crinkle plastic and tied up with a bow. He tapped it against your lips and you reached for it before he could hit you with it again.

“It's a flavor you like,” Stretch said instead of explaining.

The line inched forward and you moved with it. You pulled the plastic off and popped the end of the candy into your mouth to enjoy. It had been a while since you last needed the candy, but it was a nice treat even if it wasn’t necessary. Stretch must have noticed.

“Is Blue…doing okay on his own?” Rus asked, watching the line inch up.

“Blue isn’t alone, he has plenty of co-workers and makes friends faster than you or me. He’s fine. I’m here, aren’t I?”

“Not that I don’t enjoy that, but…” you popped the candy free and waved it in front of your face, “what are you doing here, Stretch?”

“You need a kiddy break or something,” he sighed, looking to Rus. “I don’t know. It was too many words so I didn’t read it all. Seriously, it was like a novel.”

“You like novels.”

“Yeah, interesting ones.”

The people ahead of you moved up and you could see the gate, meaning you were close enough to get a seat before the rotation ended. In the sky overhead more fireworks went off.

“Are you free or not?” Rus asked, sounding exasperated.

“Yeah, yeah, sure. One rotation though. I guess I owe you that much.”

“Owe him for what?” you ask even as the last couple ahead of you moves up and into a seat.

“Next,” the attendant calls.
Stretch patted at your shoulder before moving past you and Rus, taking the kids with him as he went up into the carriage big enough for four. Maxed out, the door shut behind him and he waved to you with Peter and Wendy while Phil seemed too distracted by the fireworks to look away from the sky.

“Oh, that’s what you meant by a kiddy break,” you mused aloud, watching their carriage roll away as a new one came down and emptied out.

Rus tugged you up with him as the attendant ushered you inside and closed the door behind you. Instead of sitting across from you Russ turned you down onto the bench beside him, squeezing you in. Once inside you could feel some of the tension ease out of him. He deflated like a balloon on your shoulder.

“That bad?” you asked.

“It-well, it could be better I suppose. I’m just not used to these crowds above ground is all. I don’t think I’ll be able to come here again tomorrow night or Sunday in any sober state of mind,” he confessed. “Sorry. I’m not very useful.”

“Everyone has things they can’t do or things that are hard for them. You shouldn’t feel like you need to apologize for that,” you huffed in exasperation. Rus apologized too much. “Don’t apologize to me, please.”

Rus looked down and you watched the color spread across his face. “I thought I’d be…I’d be better at it, a-and having you and the kids here helped I think. I didn’t worry so much ‘cause you just kept distracting me, but I’m still a little broken at the core I think.”

“You’re not broken, Papyrus,” you state firmly.

He jolts at the use of his real name but it’s another moment before he speaks up. “Just…Rus is fine if it’s you.”

“You’re not broken,” you repeat again, this time softer. “You’re not, so don’t believe that.”

He shivered against your side. “I wanted to show you a good time-a better time, but I was just one more thing for you to take care of.”

“What are you talking about? I’m having a great time here with you and the kids.” You reached for his face when he started to turn away and directed it your way. “Hey, look at me. I’m not lying so you better believe me, I’m having fun with you. I like hanging out with you.”

He watched you for a moment longer, not saying anything, until a burst of color washed his face in shades of gold and red followed by the boom of another firework exploding.

“It was different…underground,” he began. “You asked ab-about the crowds and how they were different. Back then I wasn’t any better off but Sans gave me his badge to wear on my collar and that helped plenty, but…but still monsters came up and tried starting stuff. There was so much of it, so much backstabbing, it was kill or be killed most days.”

Rus exhaled his words, speaking like he was desperate to get his confession out into the air between them. You sat beside him and listened as more blue and white colors filled the cabin between you, shading you in hues of aqua and teal.

“I was mean and that’s how I survived. Sometimes I’d go out and there would be crowds. In those crowds I sometimes got hurt, or ended up hurting others before they could do it to me.” His body
shook like the memory was something that could physically move him.

Maybe it was.

His voice cracked but he pushed on. “I can’t be like that up here, I can’t be mean. This is a different world with different rules and stakes so high I can’t afford to make a mistake. I can’t scare anyone away ‘cause there’s no one to scare no matter how badly I expect it and hell if that don’t rattle me more than a set of bared fangs does. I-I-its not the same.”

“Is that a bad thing?” you ask in a quiet voice, already knowing the answer.

“No.” He bent towards you again. “I have more than I deserve here with you and my family.”

You could feel your heart breaking for him at the way his voice almost broke with each confession. He was such a good guy but he didn’t see it or didn’t want to believe it because of where he came from.

“You deserve this. You have enough love and kindness in your heart for all the reciprocated kindness that might come your way. You deserve all the good things in this world, Rus. Don’t think otherwise.”

You pulled him over and wrapped your arms around his shoulders, keeping him in your hug as more rainbow colored lights burst and sparkled in the sky behind you, coloring the cabin. You pretended not to notice the dampness growing on your shoulder under his eye sockets.

Outside the sky colored in a rainbow of different lights as firework after firework went off, casting its light over the two of you inside your cabin, nearly oblivious to the rest of the world while you rested against one another.

Not long after that you finished the ride, you found Phil already asleep and the other two nearly dozing as they waited, quiet and willing on the side of the ride along with Stretch. That was your cue to turn in for the night and Stretch did you one more favor by shortcutting the kids back to the house to put to bed, leaving you and Russ to drive back with three empty car seats in the back.

As you drove Rus ended up dozing lightly in his seat, head siding down to rest on your shoulder as you made your subtle turns off one road and onto another in the dark. You didn’t mind it so you let him rest against you as you drove to the soft sounds of your turned down radio and the soft headlights that cast their light out into the dark you navigated.

When the monster run station switched over to a new song you recognized the first notes instantly, even before a single word was sung. The lazy notes danced into the car through the speakers and you couldn’t help but add your voice to Doris Day’s croning when she came on.

‘Stars shining bright above you. Night breezes seem to whisper “I love you.” Birds singing in the sycamore trees… dream a little dream of me…’

You parked and turned the car off, settling the both of you into the still of night. Rus stirred on your shoulder and you reached up with one hand to brush your knuckles across his cheekbone and the touch helped him settle.

Not thinking anything more of it you helped him to his room. Thankfully skeletons didn’t weigh much of anything, even the tall ones. You hummed to yourself as you left him standing upright next to the wet bar ’where the nighcaps are’ to get ready for sleep in your barn.

As you brushed your teeth and watched yourself in the mirror you wondered absently what life
must have been like for each set of brothers before coming to your world. Each one of them came from a different underground, and none of them sounded especially pleasant. Even the swap brothers had a hard time of it considering they were still trapped underground and just waiting for the mythical human to fall and set them free.

No wonder none of them seemed especially eager to return to their world.

If some sort of freak accident had pulled you out of your dimension would you be missed? You didn’t have the mother/father sort of family that could miss you, and four years ago you were positive you could end up in a ditch and never be missed.

But now…

You heard the floorboards creak outside your bathroom and hurried to finish up brushing your teeth. You spit and rinsed before opening the door to see a less frazzled looking Rus looming in his sleeping shirt and long pajama bottoms. He looked ready for bed.

“You still up,” he grumbled, voice gravely and deep like it always was after he woke up. His eye lights were extra hazy with exhaustion.

“Rus, you alright, sweetie?” you reached up and cupped the side of his face when his eye lights started to shift in their sockets. “Couldn’t sleep?”

He turned into the hand touching him and made a sound that rolled, rumbled, and made something inside you flutter with anticipation. You called his name again but he didn’t open his sockets.

You were watching his face so you never noticed his hand reaching for your waist to pull close, or the curve of his heel hooking behind yours. You nearly fell but he picked you up easily and carried you over to your bed. You called his name again but gave up to wrap your arms around his neck when he still didn’t respond.

He was careful as he approached your bed, pulling back the covers and then climbing in on his knees with you still in your arms before turning around and settling in with his back to the headboard and pillows piled up. You had way more pillows than you needed, but as was often the case, you shared your bed with your friends and they were all (every single one of them) pillow hogs. Something about skeletons and pillows just worked like peanut butter and jelly.

Rus settled in and you removed one of your hands from around his neck to tug up the comforter so it covered the both of you. Under the weight of it he finally seemed to settle.

“im not gonna let ya go tonight, sorry,” he whispered.

His breath was heavy and carried the smell of his alcohol. You doubted it was enough to get him drunk, but you were willing to believe it was enough to get him buzzed and loose. You hadn’t thought the two of you had been parted long enough for him to find the bottom of a bottle, but then you remembered the wet bar right outside his room, fully stocked and easily accessible. His nightcap had turned into something else.

“It wouldn’t be the first time.”

“….i was drunk then, you can’t blame me for those.”

“People and monsters all get more honest when they’re drunk, so yeah I can, but I wouldn’t. You know I wouldn’t.” You snuggled in closer and sighed in contentment atop his shoulder. “Besides, I’d be crazy to complain about this.”
“...ya don’t mind?”

“Never.”

That seemed to appease him enough to settle into the pillows and shift so that he was laying on his side with you still in his arms.

“sorry about today then.”

You didn’t mind that there was magic seeping back into his words, since there seemed to be something heavy settling on his mind that needed to be addressed first. “Babe, you don’t have a single thing to apologize for. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

Rus’ arms around you tightened and his eye lights went fuzzy as he watched you. When he spoke his voice was back and devoid of magic. “Its not so much about what I did, as it is about what I didn’t do. I didn’t...I didn’t protect you or the kids. You were there and I was worse than a dead weight fer ya.”

You opened your mouth to remind him you were able to protect all of you on your own, that he didn’t need to protect anyone, but clicked your teeth shut when you realized this wasn’t about validation. There was real hurt in his confession.

How many times had you gone to bed only to lay awake and sink into all the terrible thoughts your brain could fill itself with at once. You shouldn’t have left him alone.

It would be so easy to say he was perfect the way he was, that he didn’t need to change, but those sort of words would only end up hurting him.

“You want to be better, how? Explain what that means to me. Tell me what you’re thinking. What bothered you so much about today?”

Rus’ voice was a rumble when he eventually decided to answer. “You remember what I said while we were in the ferris wheel?”

“About what it was like underground?” you reached up and hooked a finger under the collar he wore around his neck, sometimes visible, sometimes tucked away. He didn’t always wear it around the house, but when he left it was always on him still.

“Yeah, you never saw that side of me. See, bro is the strong one out of the two of us, but I’m not stupid, so I help him out when I can. One of those ways is by being observant. I-eh heh, it's ah, one of the things I’m good out regardless of the technology I have to work with. I notice things others miss, and I can usually figure out what those things mean. It helped get my bro promoted cause we could find–cuz-ah...heh...well, there were plenty other reasons too, but it...helped us where we were.”

“Rus,” you called his name softly and it shook him.

He shut his eye sockets and then forced them open again to look at you. “I found the kids for the barrier. I had-I had the technology for it and I could just short cut over before the canine unit could sniff ‘em out and then-then me and my bro got the credit for the soul before Alphys or any of the other mutts could bark up a complaint.”

You felt the weight of his confession settle in your heart and knew this wasn’t something Rus could admit any other time. It was an aged trauma he had been bandaging for so long, now he was letting the emotional wound breath. You could feel him shaking.
“Is that why you gave up your ability to teleport-to shortcut when you took in the kids?” you asked.

Rus nodded. “Yeah, mostly. It…ah, well, that and I was just messing it up royally. I couldn’t stick
the landings anymore and I just flubbed around while I was inside the void, like I didn’t want to get
out of it once I went in. I couldn’t use it well once we were topside and bro never blamed me for it,
he just…he just took that too.”

“He cares about you and no matter what you think, he doesn’t blame you.”

Rus laughed bitterly. “I think it’d be easier on him if he did. He was born to be a martyr.”

“He loves you, there is a difference.”

Russ watched you and swallowed before finding the next words. “He…if you ask him he’d tell you
it was necessary, that it was his job or whatever it was he needed to do, cause that’s how he is. He
can compartmentalize and just work his way through things that bother him, but I saw…I noticed.
He didn’t like the work none and it was getting harder and harder to hand the humans over.”

“I’m sure that must have been hard on you both and I’m sorry you have to live with that guilt.”

Rus smirked down at you and it was a self depreciating sort of look. “You’re not gonna tell us we
didn’t have a choice though, are you?”

“That would be too easy and unfair. You had a choice, and you did what you thought was best for
you, but you had that choice. I’m not going to justify it for you now and I don’t think you want me
to, either.”

Rus laughed and it shook his body the same way his sobs did. “If I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes
I’d have sworn your soul traits were integrity or justice.” He took a breath even though he didn’t
need to and closed his eye sockets. “You’re right. We had that choice, and we made it. Now we
have another choice and we’re making it.” You felt one of his hands tangle with your hair. “You
and these kids, we’re- I’m not gonna let this opportunity go to waste.”

“I know you won’t.”

His hand continued to trace lines through your hair, scratching the base of your skull every now
and then. “I’m gonna get better,” he admitted after a while. “Wait for me?”

“Papyrus, I’m not going anywhere.”

“Promise?”

“Easily. No matter what. I’m not going anywhere and I’m not out of reach.”

Rus shifted further under the covers, tugging you along with him. You shifted and wiggled until
your back was to his and he happily obliged by throwing his arm and leg over you to pull you
closer and snuggle up against.

When he buried his skull in the back of your neck, teeth brushing past the curls of loose hair, you
felt his breath and the rumble of humming that came next. There were no words but you recognized
the tune without hesitation.
A couple things worth noting:
Blue's Love Language is Acts of Service.
After Black Stretch is the most sugar daddy-ish of the skellies.
Rus texts novels or one letter replies, there is no in between.
This chapter fought me so much and it's been a taxing endeavor to get to this point, but Rus needed his focal chapter before other things happen.

Thank you so much for the kind comments and wonderful feedback. I'm delighted to know my story did something positive for you. :)
You weren’t sure how it happened.

You remembered putting Wendy to bed, telling her a story instead of a song, and then you were here, out in the middle of the field barefoot, toes damp and dirty from trekking through the grasses, up to the trees around the pond. You had to have walked out on your own, all the evidence made you believe that, but… you couldn’t… remember it.

Overhead the sky was vast, more open then you remembered it ever being and littered with stars. There was little else in the sky, no clouds, no moon, nothing but the far off darkness and the further off pinpricks of clustering lights.

You took another step and then sat down, leaning up against a tree’s rough trunk. Your body felt drained, more so than usual. You knew you were tired but the weariness that lived inside you wasn’t just a physical condition, it was something that gnawed on your heart and made you into a shadow of yourself.

In the dark and under the stars you remembered a little bit more about your dream, and the things you had been walking away from in your sleep. Could you hear the wind knocking the glass bottle wind chimes together or was that the dream still?

There had been a darkness far thicker than the one above you. A darkness without stars or sound, a world untouched and untamed, without gravity or density or sight… a place where you died and lived again.

You hadn’t realized you were crying until you felt it on your chin, falling off to land on the front of your nightshirt. Your body was reacting to the memories even if your mind was numb.

You hadn’t dreamed of the void in so long, not since before that skeleton monster called Win ripped out your eye and the technology that suppressed mental images and sensations related to trauma.

There had always been someone there beside you to help you through the night as unfair as that sounded. The only reason tonight was different was because you fell asleep at the desk in Wendy’s room after her bedtime story. You hadn’t meant to but… that must have been how you ended outside and so far away from the houses and buildings.

You feel the tingle and taste it in the back of your mouth. There’s a tang of something sour and you tense, senses sharpening dramatically for the present danger. You hear a rustle in the grass far back behind you, and then the sound comes from the opposite side of the lake, and then on the other side of your resting tree! You almost turn to check when finally the magic solidifies in the form of Black, shortcutting his way straight to you.

He steps forward, calling your name before breaking out into a jog to reach you. In the dark, the purple red color of his eye lights stand out all the more, like neon lights on a black background. You felt him reach for you and almost jerked back, more on reflex than anything. It was enough to make him hesitate.

He called your name again. “Do you know where you are?”
The answer came to you, sluggishly. “Yeah. Outside the house…by the …pond?”

Black nodded slowly, moving to stand in front of you with his hands partially raised. “Do you know who I am?”

“You’re Black.”

His posture seemed to deflate. “Yes, good, that’s correct. I’m glad you were able to recognize me. What were you doing out here by yourself? Do you know what time it is?”

“Late.”

“Without a doubt!”

You closed your eyes again and took another breath. “I just went on a walk.”

“Without your shoes?”

“…Forgot them.”

Black huffed. “A likely story. I didn’t peg you for the thoughtless type.”

Then he reached out for your face, with movements slow enough to watch and intercept if necessary. When he touched your cheek you felt him trace the path your tears had cut and remembered crying.

“Also,” he began in a far softer voice that not even the last of the June Bugs or dragonflies could hear, “I don’t take you for the sort of person to cry over just anything.”

“There’s a lot of dust and dirt out here,” you whispered back, watching him watch you. The way his neon bright eye lights burned in his sockets made you think that he was going to call you out on your paper thin excuse for the lie it was, but then his expression went soft.

“Yes, I suppose there is a lot of that out here. I think you need to get back inside,” he said.

He held out his free hand and you reached for it after another moment of hesitation. He lifted you up and you felt how sturdy he really was as he was unwilling to let you stumble. You looked the way you had come, seeing the barn and the farmhouse in the distance and marveled once more at how far you’d wandered in your sleep.

But before you could worry about making the same trip back in your bare and bleeding feet there was darkness and then a bright light from half a dozen lightbulbs over the sink and mirror. You blinked and recognized Black’s bathroom for what it was.

“Why?” you asked simply.

He huffed and then guided you to the standing shower with the tile bench. He sat you down and then went into one of the cabinets to pull out a first aid kit. That was when you noticed the mess you had trekked in behind you, mud and soil and bloodstains colored your footprints into the shower.

Oh!

“Sorry, I made a mess. Here, I can-”
“-Sit down,” Black snapped in an unusually stern tone that was the type reserved for when he needed to be firm with Wendy (in spite of her cuteness). You fell back onto the bench and he sighed, looking miffed with you before reaching for the detachable shower head. “Honestly, can’t you let someone take care of you without feeling guilty for it? People care for their precious ones because they want to.”

He knelt down at your ankles and grabbed your heel to hold it in place before turning on the shower with blue magic. The water came out and washed off the mud and blood, staining his knees in the process as he knelt in his trousers on the tile. You wanted to tug free or insist on doing it yourself, but when he finished with the first foot he grabbed the other one with the same strong grip that wouldn’t let you go.

“You’re getting dirty,” you lamely stated, watching the runoff stain his pants.

“You think I care about that right now?” he huffed. You thought you saw his eye lights flash with crimson color, the way they often did when his emotions ran up.

“Sorry.”

“Don’t apologize. I don’t want to hear you say ‘sorry’ to me or anyone. Instead just say ‘thank you.’ I’m doing this because it’s you, because I want to.”

Once finished, he let the shower head go free to dangle on its own while he popped open the first aid kit’s plastic lid. He removed some cotton balls and the disinfectant but winced when he looked at the scabs under your toes.

“It won’t hurt,” you lied easily.

“It always hurts. Peter cries whenever I have to clean his cuts.”

You felt a small smile tug at your lips when you remembered the brave face he would put on for you before going to cry in front of Russ or Blue. He was far more sensitive to physical pain compared to Wendy who went stone still and cried without making a sound whenever she was hurt. You remembered their reactions with bittersweet fondness. Compared to the care you received after an injury when you were that age…

“It won’t hurt because it’s you, because it’s someone who cares about me that’s doing it,” you finally explain. You wiggle your toes in encouragement. “Even if it stings a little, I won’t cry from this. Thank you, Black.”

He stared up at you from where he knelt at your knees and he must have seen the truth in your expression. “If you understand then it’s fine.”

Black soaked the cotton swabs and cleaned your cuts and blisters before dressing them appropriately. You flinched a little the first time but schooled your reactions far better for the other times. It didn’t take him long to finish bandaging you up. He completed his work in comfortable silence but before he could finish you spoke up.

“Are you going to ask me about it?”

“You don’t owe me an explanation for anything. I’m sure you have your fair share of demons haunting you and I can say from experience, they’re not the easiest to… talk about.” His hands stilled over your foot and then you felt him gently stroke the inside of your ankle, trailing down to your heel. “But I would be happy to listen if you needed someone to.”
It was hard to find the words at first but you did. “That part of my life is over. It’s done. I’m not going back to those awful places and I’m not scared of them when I’m awake, but they’re still there in my dreams. I don’t want to remember things that only wear me down but I can’t… help it. They’re just always there, waiting for me. What did I do wrong? Why am I still like this?”

He grabbed at your heel a little tighter, but not tight enough to be uncomfortable. “Some might say it’s your brain, trying to protect you. Those were times in your life when you were in danger. The greatest of all your instincts is the one to survive, and in order to do that we must learn from such dangers and traumas. But sometimes it’s a…sometimes that doesn’t always work out. I wish I had a better answer for you. I wish I could convince your soul that it’s safe here, that you’re safe here.”

He tilted his face down and leaned in so that his forehead touched your knee and rested there. “I wish I knew how to cure you from your nightmares and take away the pain.”

You could feel the honesty and the anguish in his words. The world he and his brother came from was long behind them, but it still had its claws in the both of them. Russ’ anxiety had been so bad he had become unstable enough with his ability to shortcut, forcing Black to take on that power in exchange for his natural healing capabilities. You knew that Russ still had nightmares, that he clung to his friends and family physically as a means of grounding himself in a safe moment of reality.

And Black, for all his strength and supposed malevolence, you knew he suffered hauntings all on his own. You hadn’t seen them, but you remembered the way his soul felt after that first forceful encounter. He was full of a great fear that only grew with the size of his family. More than his own safety, Black was a monster who feared for his family’s safety with near crippling anxiety during his worst nights, though he would never admit to it.

“Thank you.”

Black looked up and smiled, though it looked weary. “You’re welcome, my dear.”

“Honestly, I know what you said, but I’m really sorry I made you have to worry and go out to retrieve me like that. I’ve…not done that before.”

“Is that because you usually have…partners to watch over you at night?”

You flushed, feeling the heat spread across your face and ears. “N-no it’s, that’s just because it’s more comfortable and there-it helps with the…the nightmares if I’m next to someone.”

“Ah, that would make sense then. Here, can you stand?” he asked, backing up and holding onto one of your hands.

You used his offer support and hobbled out of the shower space, feeling only a little sore from the freshly treated cuts. You were sure in the morning they’d be fine in the right sort of shoes.

Before you could get far, the void was around you again, too fast to feel and fear, and then you were stumbling just outside of Rus’ bedroom door where you could hear him snoring lightly.

“What are we doing here?”

On the other side of the door you heard the snores cut off.

“My brother is more than adequate for the task at hand. He may look like a lazy-body, and he is all that, but he is a safe and comforting presence I am sure you could…benefit from. He wouldn’t mind.”
“Wouldn’t mind…Black, are you telling me I should sleep with your brother?”

He flushed enough to catch in the dim light from the basement appliances that cast a green glow over everything. “I-if it would help with the nightmares I think there’s nothing wrong in falling asleep next to someone you trust.”

He tried to look away, but you grabbed for his hand and he flinched from the contact. “Just Rus?”

His blush deepened and spread further across his skull. You could see in the dark how his eye lights wobbled in their sockets, threatening to turn into shapes you almost recognized. You still weren’t sure if they were spades or upside down hearts.

He jumped when Rus’ bedroom door swung open and soft light filtered into the hallway. Rus stood there with his nightshirt hanging off one shoulder and a sloppy smile for the both of you. “You guys gonna stand outside all night or you gonna come in? C’mon, I left the bed warm for us.”

Black didn’t fight it when you pulled him along after you, or when you tugged him up onto the mattress once his shoes were toed off. Rus slid up easily behind you, wrapping you up in his familiar embrace while you pulled Black down. You tugged him along so that he faced you and could watch you as he fell asleep. Even in the dark his blush stood out.

“Thank you,” you whispered to him in a soft voice. Behind you Rus mumbled something into your back that Black must have understood.

“You’re we-welcome, of course,” he whispered back before burying his face in the pillow to hide how his crimson violet eye lights spun in slow circles for you.

In the morning you wake up and Black is already gone, having left a hot tea and a set of clothes on the nightstand for you to change into. The price tags were still attached in fat silk loops and gold safety pins, so you could recognize the store they came from. You remembered it being a favorite of his. Knowing Black, he had left first thing in the morning to pick out the outfit for you, brand new and still smelling like the store’s perfume.

Predictably, Rus is still curled up around you. You groan when you notice the time, but thankfully it’s Saturday and the kids don’t need to be at school, and you don’t need to be awake to get them fed. They could fend for themselves well enough that you never forgot how they had all been runaways at one time.

You pull away from Rus, managing the task with pride considering how unyielding his grip could be. Honestly, he was almost as bad as Red.

Your feet had been bandaged and taken care of, but you still smelled a little like sweat and you felt gross from your walk last night, so you knew you needed the shower.

Thankfully Rus had a working shower next to his room, even though he never used it. Black liked to stay clean enough that he at least got some use out of the shower, but Russ was so lazy you bet he counted getting hosed down by the kids during a water fight last month as his most recent cleaning experience.

You freshened up and dressed in the pretty new outfit left for you, only to emerge and find Black there, waiting in front of the doorway with something in his hands.

“You forgot this.”
You glanced down and saw the gold chain and ruby stone of your favorite necklace. Black had helped you take it off before bed and had set it down on the nightstand himself, so of course he would remember it.

“Good morning to you too,” you greeted before gathering your hair up into a wet, but messy bun that held well enough. “Would you put it on for me?”

He huffed like the request was troublesome, but when you turned with the stray hairs held up off your neck he moved to loop the chain around your neck and latch it. “Good morning to you. Did you…sleep better last night?”

“Infinitely. Thank you.”

Black’s hands stayed on the latch, hanging onto the chain even though it was safely secured, as if to keep you from turning around and facing him when he spoke. “I…know there are things that still haunt you, but…you’re here now, with people who keep you safe and…and people who care about you. You don’t have to be afraid.”

You could feel your ears burn a little in embarrassment but you stopped yourself before you could apologize. “I know. Sometimes… I can’t help it.”

“I know. But we’ll be here to remind you when that happens. No one expects anyone to be better after a lifetime of brutality in a couple of months, love.”

You giggled at the nickname and turned around. Black’s hands fell to his sides, near limp. You opened your mouth to thank him but he surged forward before you could say anything.

“And it’s not something you have to thank us for, it’s a privilege to-to be considered close enough to help you like this. Don’t thank us for something so…pleasant.”

“Oh, so it was pleasant sleeping with me.”

Black flushed but looked away and hiked his shoulders. You laughed and he recognized the teasing for what it was.

“Still, thank you for the clothes at least.”

“That required little effort on my part,” he huffed.

“I’m sure, still, I really like this outfit. You have great taste.”

“Of course.” He preened from the complement, predictably.

From the bed Russ mumbled something and then moaned tiredly into the pillow before kicking at his blankets. He pushed the pillow you had been using off the bed before sitting up and looking around the room. When he found you his shoulders dropped.

“What time is it?”

“Time for you to get up and be productive, you lazy pile of bones,” Black roared.

You laughed when Russ flustered and whined about his big brother calling him lewd names in front of you.

Upstairs you hear the doorbell so you take to the stairs first. Before you can reach the front hallway Black is already there, scowling at Blue who stood so innocently on the doorstep. His starlight blue
eyes spun in excitement when he spotted you past Black’s shoulder.

“So you were here! I was starting to get worried when you didn’t answer your phone.” Blue waved you dead phone and then pushed past Black. “I found it in the Barn. Did you forget to charge it then lose it again?”

You grimaced to yourself. “I had every intention of taking care of my important technology but then I forgot about my important technology.”

“A likely story,” Blue laughed before handing the phone over to you. “I had been trying to text or call you to see if you were still free for brunch. Brother is still at work but I have a rare few hours to kill so I thought we could try that new juice bar. But, if you haven’t had breakfast yet then maybe we could eat first?”

“Yeah, I just got up. I was going to greet the kids first, before I made plans or anything.”

The only thing you had on your calendar for today was dinner at Grillby’s, since you didn’t work Saturdays or Sunday, (you only ate there as a patron on the weekends). Sans and Red would probably tag along this time as well, but you doubted Stretch would be able to make it if his work went late. Mr. Money bags was working even on the weekends it seemed.

“Let’s go say hi then and you can decide what you want to do when you’re ready,” Blue cheered, ignoring Black behind him.

“That sounds like a good use of your time,” Black interjected, standing straighter. “Nothing much will be going on around here and it is a Saturday. You never do anything for yourself on the weekends it seems.”

“I literally go out to eat every Saturday, Black,” you laughed.

“That’s one thing.”

“It still counts.”

“It is the minimum. Blue, please make sure she does something outside this house that’s not eating at that grease trap with the other lazy bones.”

Blue startled at Black’s crude language but you just snickered.

Peter and Tron were building Minecraft worlds together in the bonus room upstairs while Wendy was watching cartoons with Phil. You said your hellos and goodbyes, content with how plugged in and entertained each one was.

Since school started they had been making an effort to do things and watch shows that the other children in their classes talked about. You were weary about that, but it seemed to be more of a positive thing since the kids were genuinely enjoying the new content and talked about it amongst themselves enough.

Satisfied you left with Blue, not at all surprised to see his motorcycle parked out front. It was the same one Red and Edge had helped him in fixing up and the same one he had driven up into town with you on the back. You hadn’t been on it since the night you borrowed it to drive Sans to where Edge and Red had been stuck, though you knew Blue utilized it often.

You slipped on behind Blue, fixing the helmet before looping your arm around his waist. You smelled the broken-in leather of his jacket and the memory associated with that smell was strong
enough for you to feel fuzzy on the inside.

“It’s strange, but I feel like it’s been a while since I felt like this,” you confessed before turning your head to the side and resting it on Blue’s back. You breathed in a little deeper, soaking in the scent as much as you could.

“Felt like what?”

“I don’t know. Like we’re starting out brand new all over again. That feeling from back when we still had the bus. It’s strange, isn’t it?”

“What’s so strange about it?”

Maybe it had been a silly thing to confess, since it didn’t make sense. You saw Blue all the time. You had snuggled up next to him and slept between him and Stretch a couple of days ago. It wasn’t accurate to say you missed him, but there was a sense of something unnamed that beat inside your chest.

“That was months ago. So much time has passed since then.”

Blue pat at where your hands hung onto him and you pulled yourself closer. He turned the key into the ignition and you felt the bike kick to life underneath you. When Blue answered you he had to yell to be heard over the rumbling.

“Yeah, but it’s been a while since it was just the two of us. I love seeing you taken care of by the rest of the guys and knowing you’re safe, but it’s really nice when it’s just me getting this with you.”

That was another true fact.

“Yeah,” you admitted softly before speaking up. “So…is that new ‘juice bar’ another Starbucks or is it really a juice place?”

“Just because I like their specialty drinks doesn’t mean I think they’re a juice bar!”

You laugh and Blue turned the bike to the road and pulled out, smiling in spite of his outburst.

When you leave for Grillby’s you decide to walk and end up being a little later than intended. It wouldn’t be the first time you arrived last, but it was still rare enough that when you stepped in both Red and Stretch glanced up from their drinks while Sans turned around in his seat. They weren’t at the bar this time, but they were still easy enough to find.

“You walked, sweetheart?” Red asked, grinning easily when you pulled out a seat next to his to sit down in. “I would have picked ya up if I’d of known.”

“It’s a nice day. I don’t mind walking.”

Your feet hadn’t hurt enough to keep you off them. A few bruises and blisters were nothing or maybe that was just you being a little self destructive. You dropped your backpack purse onto the back of the last empty chair and slid in.

“We ordered for ya but Grillby said he’d wait to see you to get started. Didn’t want to serve up a
burger cold,” Sans explained.

You waited for the pun at the end of his sentence but he reached for his drink instead. You noticed he had switched from ketchup to tap beer and the same was true for Red, but Stretch’s drink of course was still water. Out of the three of them he was the lightest of all the lightweights. The only other one worse was Rus.

“Glad you could join us this time, Stretch,” you said. “How’s work?”

“It’s *working* out just fine, you could say,” he snickered. You relaxed a little, used to the sound of his jokes and giggles.

“ Heard you had quite the night, Sleeping Beauty.” Red interjected. “Sleepwalking?”

“Black told you that?”

“Nah, Rus squealed to this guy over here.” Red explained.

Stretch grinned. “Rus don’t look it but he’s the ‘I have to run my mouth or I’ll die’ type with some things.” He then pulled up his phone and showed the screen lit up from the app messenger. There were several novel sized texts from ‘Monster Candy’ about his night.

“Oh yeah, that sounds like him,” you said.

The way Rus gossiped was different from the way Edge gossiped. Edge was worse than a invalid grandmother with a window. He had so much dirt from the townspeople about who was doing what and seeing who and getting into debt with. It was one of the reasons he liked his pulp fiction paperbacks so much.

“Next time why don’t you walk into my dreams, baby doll,” Red joked.

“I was just restless. It’s not like it’s a habit and I haven’t done it before.”

“Huh, never? Why’d humans usually walk in their sleep?” Stretch asked.

“Stress?” Sans supplied.

“Restlessness?” Stretch added.

“Bathroom,” you cut in.

Stretch nodded absently. “I forget you flesh bag types need to do that.”

Red snapped his phalanges and then adopted a look of exclamation. “Shoot, sweetheart, that makes me think back to a couple of nights when I woke up from you trying to get outta bed. I just figured it was for the bathroom but when I asked ‘ya bout it you were asleep and gave it up too easily.”

“Look,” you groaned while reaching for San’s beer to drink from while you waited for one of your own. “It’s not a big deal. Humans do it all the time. The kids get up and do it from time to time too.”

“How are they doing?” Sans asked, leaning onto one arm and supporting the side of his skull as he watched you finish off what was left of his beer.

The flow of conversation lulled and picked up and switched from one topic to the next. Grillby came over not long after seeing you come in and he had your regular ready with an extra heavy
boat of fries. He made the rest of the skeletons get up and approach the bar to get their drafts refilled but brought your first one over to you himself.

"It must be nice being the candle stick’s favorite,\" Red teased when it came time for you and Sans to pay your ‘on the house’ bill.

"Wouldn’t know what you’re talking about,\" Sans hummed good naturally, chewing on the end of a soggy fry that still dripped ketchup.

Good naturally Sans pulled out a thin fold of bills and left them on the table to cover both Stretch and Red’s meals. Red glared suspiciously and Stretch frowned, wallet already out and ready.

“What’s the supposed ta be for?\” Red all but growled.

“Stealing a march.”

“Stealing a what-”

But Red’s question got cut off in the blink of darkness as Sans tipped you back into the void and then out again. You were standing on a hill not far from his house, next to the rock outcropping that he liked to set up his telescope on. It wasn’t dark enough for star gazing yet, but the fireflies and night bugs were already buzzing.

“Sans?”

He sweat a little at your stale tone and flat expression. He knew you weren’t a fan of surprise shortcuts. “Sorry, sweetie, but I wanted to ask you something where we wouldn’t be overheard and figured if the other two were here you might feel outnumbered or uncomfortable.”

“Why here then?”

“Stretch will look for you at your place and Red will check mine. They might find this place here eventually, but not for a while.”

You crossed your arms and leaned back. “Okay then, so are you going to explain why you had to drag me here, alone? It must be something reeeeeeeed important to have risked a stunt like that.”

Sans sweat a bit more. “Ah, aww don’t sound like that. It’s nothing too scary. I was just…the sleepwalking thing. You do that too when you’re with Paps and me.”

You uncrossed your arms and let them hang at your sides, feeling limp down to your fingertips. “Sans, I already said it wasn’t a big deal though.”

“Nah, just cause that’s plenty true for most humans, don’t mean it is going to be true for you. Can you say you’re like most humans?”

You don’t say anything to that.

“I just…I had this feeling I wanted to tell you something someone told me a while back when the reset nonsense got real bad.”

“Someone…you mean Grillby?\” He was the only other one who knew about the resets and anyone who knew both Sans and the fire elemental could see that between the two of them Sans took the experiences a little rougher.

His voice went soft. “It’s something that you sleep with every night. And it’s going to keep
haunting you until you face it.”

_In the Dark._

_The darkness can touch you._

_It’s cold._

_So cold._

_You’re going to freeze to death._

_And that’s where the true horror lives._

_The thing you needed to forget—you needed to forget it otherwise it would live in your mind!_

“You…sure that didn’t come from a fortune cookie?”

“Not this time, cupcake.”

You felt the way your nails bit into the flesh of your palms and the sting helped to ground you. “There is no facing it. All of that is behind me now.” You swallowed and tried again. “I’m happy now. I’m so damn happy. I’ve never been this happy before in my life. I wake up every day and I look forward to what’s going to happen. It doesn’t make sense to be afraid.”

“You got a lot more to lose now, cupcake. I get them too.”

You feel the panic in you, tight as a fist, let go and smooth out. Sans looked at you dead in the eye and you remember all the stories he told you, whispered like shameful confessions behind a screen in the dark. All the histories he had to make peace with, while none of them were real.

“What do you do about it?” you ask.

“Wake up?” He shuffles from one foot to the other and then elaborates. “That’s how I face it. It's not an all or nothing war at the end of the world sort of effort, but it’s a little battle every morning that has to be fought. And…and you’re not alone, so you don’t have to face it on your own or pretend it ain’t there, least not all on your own.”

It’s enough.

You deflate and Sans reaches for you, cradling your elbows. You turn your wrists over to hold him back and just stand there in the dark under the stars.

“I want to believe that.”

“Trust me, cupcake, you’re going to be just fine. You kicked my ass god enough that I know there’s not much that can stand up to you.”

His easy demeanor almost makes you chuckle. “Sans…you’re a skeleton. You don’t have an ass.”
So here is a question for MC, how long can she run away from these nightmares? We shall see!

I loved writing all the hurt/comfort interactions with the boys and I can't pick a favorite. I mean, Black is tender AF and Sans is a sly tart while Blue is doing his absolute best.

Also, a few chapters back Sans was doing some shady texting at the end of a chapter. It was him setting up a chat with all the others who remember the resets, (minus Rus because he's still too nervous to go out for himself). The weekly dine-in at Gillby's is the result.

The last official chapter of the arc "Hold Me Tight, Or Don't" wraps it up next week. Stay tuned for what comes next.
Blue was impressed with his ability to pin down his brother. Since settling down, (and since the job especially), Stretch had grown notoriously elusive and Blue had allowed it at first…but now wasn’t one of the days when he felt like abiding by his younger brother’s secret keeping and aversion tactics.

Blue turned the lights on and Stretch jerked awake, rolling off the couch in his clumsy panic.

“YOU HAVE A BED AND A BEDROOM,” Blue said, voice booming with magic.

Stretch slowly pulled himself up. “yeah, guess i do.”

“YOU’VE BEEN BUSY, BROTHER. I WAS WONDERING WHY YOU WERE UNABLE TO MAKE OUR DINNERS ALL LAST WEEK UNTIL THE OTHERS INVITED YOU TO THE GREASE TRAP.”

“its tradition and i’ve been missing the last few. but blue what is this about?”

“YOU ARE VERY OBSERVANT, BROTHER, EVEN MORE SO THAN I, BUT YOU ARE STILL MY BROTHER AND MY BABY BROTHER AT THAT, ONE I RAISED FROM A BABY BONES MYSELF! SO, WHILE I MAY NOT HAVE YOUR TALENTS FOR OBSERVATIONS, I CAN STILL READ YOU LIKE A BOOK.”

Stretch had begun to sweat.

“…o-oh?”

“YOU ARE GOING TO TELL ME ALL ABOUT YOUR MEETING WITH RED AND THE COMEDIAN -AS IT PERTAINS TO MY INTERESTS.”

“bro, that’s not-”

“DON’T THINK THAT JUST BECAUSE I AM NOT ONE OF THE UN-RESETTABLES I CAN’T BE A USEFUL SOURCE OF INFORMATION IN TACKLING YOUR PROBLEMS. DID YOU EVER STOP TO CONSIDER AN OUTSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE MIGHT BE USEFUL? HMMM?”

“it’s a little bit more complicated than just that. we didn’t think it a good idea to let this get out, you know.”
“WHAT EXACTLY?”

“magic stuff?”

Blue crossed his arms and Stretch began to panic.

“re-re-repressed memory stuff! rus said she was sleepwalking and red noticed it too, but i figured it out since i saw her like that once before.”

“WHEN?”

Stretch rubbed at the back of his skull and explained how you had changed the first time after implanting memories into the minds of those men who harassed Edge and Red’s hometown. After you had done the deed Stretch had noticed your shift in behavior and it wasn’t so different from how you were when you slept. It was getting harder and harder to keep the nightmares at bay, even with one or two other bodies in bed holding you back. Something about your memories was persistent and traumatic. Something that had started intensifying within the last week.

Blue kept his thoughts to himself, listening without interrupting all the way until the end.

After he had finished, Stretch asked a question of his own.

“is that the reason you took her out to the juice bar?”

“I DIDN’T KNOW THAT WAS THE REASON FOR HER UNREST. I JUST… WANTED TO MAKE HER DAY A LITTLE BETTER. I…DON’T KNOW HOW TO DEAL WITH A HUMAN’S TRAUMA.”

“…that was why me and the guys were talking about it.”

The implication made Blue frown. “BECAUSE YOU ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO ARE AN AUTHORITY ON THE TOPIC?”

“hey, we thought three heads was better than one but then it got kinda crowded.”

“OF COURSE IT WOULD FEEL LIKE THAT, SINCE YOU’RE ALL ALTERNATIVES OF THE SAME SKELETON WITH THE SAME CHARACTERISTICS, AND LIMITED BY THAT SHARED MINDSET. INVITING SOMEONE IN FROM THE OUTSIDE WOULDN’T BE STUPID.

Stretch hung his head. “wasn’t my call to make, sorry bro.”

“YOU HAD A VOICE.” Blue sniffly nodded and then relaxed his stance, looking away from his brother like that would ease some of Stretch’s guilt. “NEVERTHELESS, I DO NOT BLAME YOU.”

“so, we good?”

“GOOD?”

“…are you still mad at me?”

Blue huffed and dropped his shoulders. “I WAS NEVER MAD AT YOU. YOU ARE MY BABY BROTHER. DISAPPOINTED ISN’T THE SAME AS MAD.”

“no, but sometimes it feels worse.”
“THEN I WON’T CHASTISE YOU FURTHER. YOU SEEM TO HAVE LEARNED YOUR LESSON. IN THE FUTURE, IF IT IS A MATTER THAT CONCERNS OUR HUMAN IT CONCERNS ME. PLEASE KEEP THAT IN MIND EVEN IF YOU DON’T THINK THERE IS ANYTHING I CAN DO TO HELP. YOU MIGHT BE SURPRISED,” Blue exclaimed, striking a dynamic pose. He looked like a superhero missing his cape.

Stretch rubbed at the back of his skull, flushing in childish embarrassment. “you got it, bro. next time for sure.”

The timer on Blue’s phone went off and with a huff he dropped out of his pose to scoop up his cell from the nearby table and open the timer app to stop the sound of a mechanical robot transforming- a sound from an anime he was fond of.

He frowned at the time and then dropped the phone into the back pocket of his pants. It was time for work and the notification couldn’t have come at a better time. Stretch would need some processing time to go through everything they had talked about and internalize it. Without that, Blue might as well have been talking to a cup with a hole at the bottom.

“I AM NEEDED AT THE CINEMA, BUT WE WILL HAVE DINNER TONIGHT. REST UP UNTIL THEN.”

Stretch saluted playfully. “you got it bro. knock ‘em dead.”

“AS A TICKET COUNTER PERSONAL THE ONLY THING WE KNOCK DEAD ARE OUR POOR CUSTOMER SERVICE RATINGS ON YELP.”

Stretch chuckled, knowing well and good just how dedicated his brother was to a flawless customer service rating wherever he worked. ‘If you can do a job perfectly why wouldn’t you?’

“cool, cool, do you need a shortcut there?”

“NO NEED, I HAVE MY BIKE!”

Blue’s grin stretched impressively wide and his eyes spun into stars in delight. Before Stretch could say anything more, Blue was bounding out the door, laughing in glee as he prepared for the drive down to the town’s historic styled cinema. Stretch watched his brother go, waving from the window as Blue peeled out of the driveway and turned off down the road.

After all that…it was probably best for a nap since he had a double shift tomorrow.

He just needed to make a phone call first.

It was too early to leave to get the kids, even if you did want to be the first in line at the pick up, but you figured you could do some shopping first before heading over to the school. It made plenty of sense considering how close the two places were.

It took twenty minutes from driveway to door to make it to the Bi-Low, and another twenty before you had everything you needed.

But…that was odd considering how few items you picked up.
You didn’t even have a cart, just a basket half filled with a few items.

There had been…something bothering you the whole time you were inside the store. You could feel it on the back of your neck and tongue. There was a tingle in your mouth you didn’t want to recognize.

It was only when the cashier scans the rock candies do you realize you’ve bought them. You pay with the card and take your things back to the car, walking faster than you need to. You dump the rest of your items into the trunk then tear into the rock candy, fingers fumbling, as you pull out the sugar treat and bite hard on the end.

Your mouth fills with strawberry sweetness and you calm. Turning around you sweep your good eye over your surroundings, catching nothing out of place. Then you sit on the edge of the trunk and close your eye to better access your mental map.

The world went black and the neon lines lit up, showing you where you were, where the buildings around you were, the largest objects, and all the people you knew the names of. You zoomed out a little more, holding your breath and telling yourself you were being paranoid for no reason. You were safe. You were happy. There wasn’t going to be-

**FiveG - Thrive**

**FiveH- Tank**

**TwoK Esperanza (Espera)**

They were…too close to be a coincidence.

The sour tingle in the back of your mouth was evidence enough of that.

But it was only the three of them. You would be okay. Espera, the one with the title TwoK was way weaker than you. Tank and Thrive were…oh, they might be a problem together.

Who was free?

You scrambled for your phone and tried calling Edge, Red, Black…. All busy at work. Papyrus and Sans were out of town for a conference. You couldn’t bother Rus with this, Blue was also at work and Stretch wasn’t answering either.

And that was fine.

People got busy, it happened.

A second later Edge called you back, but you knew he was probably stepping away from whatever he was doing at work to take his free time for you.

You picked up and heard him call your name. “Is everything alright?”

You take a breath before replying. “Yeah, so far so good. I’m in the Bi-Low lot and I can sense three kids from the Embassy nearby and I think they know I’m here. I tried calling the others but-”

“Stay there, don’t move. We’ll come get you. Did Red not answer his damn phone?”

“He’s in the city selling right now, it’s probably off. It’s fine. They’re not on my level and I’m pretty confident in being able to talk them down but I can’t let-I can’t pick the kids up so I was
wondering if I got tied up, someone else could come down and do me a solid. They’ll be out soon
but I don’t want to mix up my past life with them.”

Does he know you’re lying?

Edge was quiet for a moment before answering. “Don’t do anything stupid, please. We’ll be there
soon.”

“You got it.”

The call ended and you checked your map again, only to flinch in fear when you realized the dots
were moving closer to you on the map. You dropped your phone into your back pocket but tossed
your purse into the trunk before closing it and jogging to the edge of the parking lot, away from
your car, away from the store, away from anything that could catch fire.

You passed through some trees and then those fell away for a dirt and gravel lot that stretched and
stretched.

Not the perfect place to hide.

Perfect place to let loose.

“Done hiding?” a voice behind you called out, feminine and rough.

You turned on your heel and dropped your phone into the dirt behind you, recorder on. “I don’t
know, you done running after me, Thrive?”

The girl grinned and you could see the way years had changed her. She had been all but a youth the
last time the two of your sparred, but she was a woman now, strong and tall with pride in her eyes
and teeth bright as pearls when she smiled. Her dark, cloud like hair was free around her face and
the piercing through her left brow still flashed in the sunlight.

“Thought we’d be chasing you for years. Kinda sloppy if you only lasted four months.”

Behind her Tank, the taller broader brother with the same dark hair and proud eyes stopped behind
her. Further back Esperanza lagged behind, nowhere near as physically fit as the two siblings.

Years ago you remembered standing next to the three of them, glancing sideways at how your
brother and Thrive shared their own private glances that promised something you had never
understood. Before the monsters surfaced Raven took chances for Thrive he wouldn’t for anything
or anyone else. Before the crisis of identity Thrive had been closer to you than a sister.

But now?

“What are you doing here?” you shouted out. “I can’t be worth that much time and effort. So what?
I couldn’t do a simple job for the old man. Not like anyone else could either.” You twirled the rock
candy around in your mouth, sucking harshly.

“You selling yourself short?” Thrive taunted.

“I doubt the Embassy would make this worth your work.”

“You must have heard we’re not with the Embassy. Any organization like that might tolerate us
and Hightower for our insight but it would never condone our actions. We are our own group
now.”
“And those actions are…”

Thrive smirked. “You’re going to play dumb with me now?” Beside her Tank stood straight but didn’t speak.

“You… wanna take me back? That doesn’t sound smart. I was pretty much useless to you when I did believe in your cause. It’s a whole new story now.”

“Believe me we know, but chasing after your brother isn’t yielding us anything as long as he’s able to shortcut his way out of any conflict. It’s about time we made him come to us.” Her smirk lessened. “But you know this isn’t…personal, right?”

You remember the girl in front of you taking your brother’s face in her hands and pulling it down to kiss so softly you swore you could hear the way their hearts beat as one. You can't say you knew what love even was, but you wished you could believe in it for their sake.

“Not personal?” you echoed dully. “How is it not? Raven was-”

“He’s a traitor to everything we believed in!” Thrive snapped, eyes wild. “Just like you. He just lied a hell of a lot better about it. So shut up and just-” the ground under you rumbled, “come with us!”

You jumped back in time to avoid the vine the burst up out of the ground. You fell into the dirt and rolled, feeling the flames behind your empty eye lid flicker to light as the scars under your floral tattoo began to open and vent fire. You sprang out of your crouch and spit out your rock candy to breath fire at the vine. Once it caught you left it to writhe to death and charged at Esperanza, easily the weakest of the three.

Tank met you head on and you burned hotter. He could block your punches but they still burned. As tall and thick as he was, he wasn’t any faster than Papyrus and you had tangoed with worse. Edge was a beast when he got serious and in comparison, Tank was slow.

Something hit you from behind and you staggered.

Ooooooor maybe he wasn’t that slow.

You tasted magic in the back of your mouth and grinned, realizing what he had done.

You matched his speed, pouring your own magic into the muscle tissues and sinews, making them faster than they could ever hope to be otherwise.

You reached for Tank and caught him this time. Forehead to nose, you hear the wet crack as cartilage crumples under bone. He screamed but recovered quickly, swinging angry. You caught a glimpse of horn poking out of his scalp, petite but defined along the ridges of his skull; two points.

You matched Tank blow for blow but dodged wildly when Thrive came up behind you. Between the two of them you had to pull out something else, so you made fire between your hands and then threw it like a javelin their way. It exploded upon impact but Tank’s magic kept him safe while Thrive had pulled up a shield of what looked like plant bark.

“This isn’t really fair is it?” you taunted with a new javelin between your hands. “You know I could take on five of you, right?”

The second javelin exploded just like the first but you surged forward right behind it and swiped at Tank’s magic made shield, cutting through it with the magic of your hand like it was weaker than
wet paper. You breathed fire onto his chest and it threw him back. You could smell the way his skin and hair burned.

Thrive screamed at you, cursing. She grabbed your arm and her nails scratched your skin, but you flared fire magic through your body, burning away any poison she might have tried to introduce into your bloodstream.

Up close she swiped again and turned into a blow, only to reel out of it with a thorny whip in her hand that snapped right in your nose. Without your magic it would have skinned off half your face. You exhaled more fire and she retreated, but not before dropping something that bloomed and smoked.

It was your turn to retreat, jumping back and getting as far away from the green and yellow clouds that smelled like candied oranges. The only other person those poisons wouldn’t harm apart from herself was her brother.

You scanned the field for Esperanza and saw her hanging back, looking worried with a data pad in her hands. She had never been one for combat support.

“You’re the one who needs back up here,” Thrive called out from beyond the smoke. “There’s only one way this can end and you know it.”

“There are plenty of ways I can end this,” you shouted back, flaring more fire from your hands.

“You might outclass us, but your LeVel is still stuck at one for a reason.”

You turned, watching the edges of the toxin cloud for shadows that betrayed movement. You refused to listen to her words. She didn’t have a point.

“Are you really planning on killing us?” Thrive laughed as another smoke bomb went off, leaking noxious purple smoke. “Knock us out maybe, but we’d wake up and come after you again, you know.”

Instead of a javelin you made your hands leak coiled fire that cracked when you snapped it in the air. A whip of fire in each hand, you turned towards the voice, tracking with your map.

“You’re so pitifully outclassed that’s what you came up with? I’m shaking in my boots over here,” you taunted. For good measure you snapped the whips, one right after the other.

“Go ahead, underestimate us,” Tank called out, speaking for the first time. “See where that gets you.”

You saw on the map how the both of them backed up as more and more flowers along the way released their toxins. You coughed and snapped at the air, pulling away from it. You needed to get away from the clouds. It was getting harder to breath.

You dropped you whips and channeled the fire elsewhere, into you back and then out. You felt the flames lick greedily at the air and then the feathers manifested. You beat two of the four wings first and then all of them. Feathers grew from the vents in your arms and then around your ankles. You felt them mix in with your hair too. Like your brother could, you manifested wings out of your magic and rocketed away from the ground-

-And straight into something metal.

You fell back to earth, sucker punched.
You fell gasping, tears in your eyes from the shock of it all. Something sparkled as it broke from the chain around your neck and hit the dirt but you didn’t notice.

Your magic fell away for a moment and you struggled to manage it again. But in that split moment several more metal arms grabbed at you and held you down. You pulled and flared with fire, but then one of the androids had his hand over your nose and mouth. A vent in his wrist gasses you and it wasn’t fair how fast you fell into sleep.

The last thing you taste is the magic in the back of your throat from the androids that Esperanza had controlled.

You shouldn’t have underestimated them.

You have no idea how much time passed.

You wake up and then wish you hadn’t.

There was something in you, something heavy and thick and sickening as candied oranges.

You blink and manage to see by enough light to realize what it is. Thrive’s plants are growing inside you, crawling out through the vents on your arms and breaking the skin in other places. Small white flowers bud between your fingers and there are more you can’t see under your collarbone.

Then you see where you are.

“This isn’t the embassy.”

Hightower looks up from his seat and regards you with a bored look. “You think they would let me do what I wanted forever. Even they have their limits.”

You tried to turn your head, to call up your magic, but the plants living inside of you now feast on your reserves and leave you drained dry. You’re as good as neutered. You try again, knowing it's useless, and some of the flowers along your arm bloom pink.

“They’re lovely, aren’t they?”

“Where the fuck are we, Hightower? You don’t have any right to keep me here like this against my will.”

“Hence why we are no longer with the Embassy you dull girl,” he sighed, sounding like he was tired from talking to a child. “Don’t you recognize the off site location.”

“They all looked the same.”

Hightower stood from his chair and pocketed his phone.

Behind him the room stretched on and on, narrow but long. One of the longer sides of the wall was see-through, exposing the cellmate to a hallway’s worth of curious onlookers. They had said this was supposed to be the place where they kept the captured monsters, after they surfaced and
brought war with them.

‘Aren’t we supposed to kill our enemies?’

‘We will need to keep some alive to better learn their weaknesses and how they work.’

You recognized it well.

Across the hall there is another cell-no two, that look inhabited. A black fire elemental in a bartender’s uniform slouches against the wall and your heart skips out of time.

“What the hell?” you whispered in shocked anger.

The Grillby from another world doesn’t look up. He can’t hear you, just like how you can’t hear anything on the other side of the see-through plastic.

“He’s a criminal we brought to justice. One of the few we managed to nab,” Hightower explained in slow words. “Came from a brutal world and would likely bring that cruelty to ours in due time, don’t you think.”

“You’re sick, Hightower.”

“You’ve always hated me, but that’s no reason to be so dumb.”

You flared your magic and more flowers bloomed, breaking through the skin of your wrists, your neck, and under your shirt. You seethe in anger, barely able to move from the poison still in your body.

“Thank your brother for this. He was the one who brought them here. Yet he didn’t care enough to lift a finger in aid when we captured them. His kindness isn’t as fool-hearty as yours.”

“You’re all so stupid, none of this makes sense. There is no war but the war you make here,” you yelled, feeling hot all over.

“I would hardly call it a war like this.”

“You dumb fucker!”

Hightower clicked his tongue in disapproval. “Language, child.”

You hadn’t been a child in a long while, but that didn’t matter to a man who never noticed you past your usefulness to him in the first place. You were worse to useless to him now, you were a hindrance to his plans, whatever they were.

Did he really want another war with monsters? To what end? The glory wasn’t worth it. Did he want more child soldiers? For what? He was just rolling the dice on making another hindrance like you. He didn’t make any sense and it irked you to be caught in the confusion of it all when all you wanted to do was burn and rage.

“You’re not going to prosper this way,” you snarled. “There is no good ending for you like this.”

“Blame your brother for it. He was the one who started all this nonsense in the first place. I’m seeking to correct the imbalance.”

Hightower approached the door and you tried to get up, onto your feet, but you struggled too much. The plants growing inside of you didn’t help much either. He didn’t stop or look back but took his
time getting to the door. Once there he slipped out and touched a panel on the wall to ease the opening shut from the top down.

He was leaving you!

“Get back here,” you screamed before the door could shut all the way. “You can’t do this to us. You can’t!”

You made it to your feet but stumbled fast and loose, banging the see through wall enough to make it vibrate. Hightower watched, unimpressed as you lifted your fist and banged again and again.

On the other side of the hallway the black flamed Grillby watched from where he slouched but he didn’t move. In the cell next to his one of the two figures in the back looked like they were getting up to draw closer, prompting a secondary figure to rise up further back.

You didn’t doubt the wall was all but soundproof but you banged and screamed regardless, screwing your voice as the magic turned into thistles.

“Hightower! Get back here! I’m really going to kill you this time,” you screamed. You flared what you could of your magic and the blossoms spilled out of your empty eye socket and between your fingers, but you continued to bang.

You had places to be. You had people who would worry about you. You told Edge you were going to be fine and you messed up! You shouldn’t have messed up that bad but you did. You outclassed them and they won when you had so much more to lose!

You smelled the noxious smell from the plants breaking through your face but you swore you could still see straight. Your legs gave out and you watched all the way down as Sans and Papyrus approached their cell’s see through wall, but something was wrong about the both of them. Hightower had done something, Sans was hurt with a hole in his head and Papyrus’s face looked broken in. His teeth…

“Hightower!” You screamed one last time before the rose thorns tore into your throat and left you gagging.

Chapter End Notes

The final chapter in 'Hold Me Tight, Or Don't' for (hopefully) some obvious reasons. :D I think I said something about story arcs changing whenever a time skip happens or when a new character shows up, (or a pair of new characters).

The fluff train has derailed and won't start up again for a little while. We're back on track with plot.
Edge was nothing but panic from bone to bone. He hadn’t stayed long to explain, but he hadn’t needed to. Once his coworkers saw the worried expression and heard his panic they had waved off his early absence and he had made a beeline for the car. Red wasn’t picking up but he was only one of his may, many problems.

“If you have a cell phone you should use it,” he huffed in frustration as the next call to Stretch fell through. The last one who could use shortcuts was Black.

Edge was a good quarter of the way to the Bi-Lo when someone finally picked up.

“He-hello?” Rus answered hesitantly. “Edge?”

“No one is answering their damn phones. Where is your brother. I need him.”

“He’s out back trimming lumber, he-I don’t think he could hear his phone over the saw. Wa-what’s the matter?”

Before he can make sense of it Edge blurts out you name and the fidgeting sounds on the other end go still. “She called me and said she was being followed. I told her to wait for help but I can’t shortcut there on my own and no one who can is answering their damn phone. Get your brother, now!”

“w-w-ait-what?!” Rus asked in a panic even though Edge could hear him moving in the background, getting up and climbing out of that basement no doubt. “are you sure-what about the kids?”

“Someone will need to pick them up, naturally.”

“oh, i-i can I can help with that i just-” There was the crunch of gravel as Rus reached the outside and then more running before the far off sound of power tools running.

Edge left his phone on speaker and took the turns more carefully, forcing himself to slow down to safer speeds. He refused to get into an accident if only because it will keep him from reaching you faster.

“sans!” Rus screamed, voice heavy with magic. The power tool sounds cut off and Edge heard Black curse and complain about being called that name in this world or something along those lines, it was hard to hear if they were to far away from the phone. However, the complaining didn’t last long. It must have been the look on Rus’ face or something nonverbal, because Black shut up real fast.

“What happened?”

“She’s…” The voices cut out but Edge paid more attention to the road. He could see the town up ahead. He was closer now, over halfway.

“You said the Bi-Lo, right?” That was Black’s voice, closer to the phone and loud enough to indicate his question was more for Edge than his brother.
“That’s what she said last.”

Black cursed on the other end. “She tried calling me too! There’s a message here asking me to pick up the kids from school. Damn, and at this time too they’re-”

“Then pop over to the Bi-Low, drop off your brother, and blink over to do what you need to do. Rus is observant. He’ll be able to help out if,” Edge almost choked on the rest of his sentence, “if we need those types of skills.”

“I can shortcut to the grocery store itself with my brother. How far out are you?”

Edge glanced at the clock on his dash and then out the window. “I’m five minutes out.”

“Rus won’t be alone long, then.”

Edge let the phone go dead and accelerated through an amber light before it could turn red. He knew his way around town enough to take a few necessary risks, and before four minutes were past he was pulling into the parking lot hot, seeing your car from the road. Rus was there, leaning down and looking at something.

“What is it?” Edge asked.

Rus stood with a spare key and opened the trunk for Edge to see. “She left it here. She set it down neatly too, and then locked the door behind her. She wasn’t dragged off.”

“That doesn’t surprise me,” Edge growled, sparing a look for their surroundings. It wasn’t busy but it was populated enough for a kidnapping to be noticeable.

Rus observed the area a little more closely before picking a direction to walk in, behind the store and away from the roads. Edge followed wordlessly as they headed into the tree line. A few paces in he could see on the other side of the small woodlands an open lot of dust and dirt. Before they were out from between the trees Edge could smell the burning.

“What is that?” he asked out loud before he could stop himself. He didn’t need an answer. He already knew.

“Fire…was used here,” Rus answered, voice faded and distant. He stopped at the edge of the woods and looked out at the open lot, expression distant. “They fought here.”

“We don’t know if it was a fight though.”

Rus ducked his head and inhaled deeply. “No, we do. More than one magic was used here. The stones are burned in places too, look.”

Edge had excellent vision, but it was nothing compared to Rus’ phenomenal eyesight. Edge had to leave the trees behind him and cross half of the first field before he found the evidence Rus had pointed out. There were black streaks of soot, the burned remains of stray weeds, and plenty of messy shoe marks in the dirt to investigate.

“Shit,” Edge whispered in fear.

He felt cold in a way that didn’t make sense. It was chilly, but Edge had endured worse and felt better. There was something in the horror of his revelation that chilled him deeply in a way he couldn’t put to words other than to say it happened in his soul. He felt… cold. Empty. Something was gone that had once been a part of him.
He heard his shivering before he felt it. Edge looked down and saw his hands shaking, bones rattling against bones as his anxieties mounted and it was just like back there—back underground. He felt it like he felt the familiar curve of a broken in pair of boots.

This sensation was what came when he first learned how to lose someone. He hadn’t reacted so poorly since…since the first time. He blinked when he thought he saw the cave walls in front of him, when he thought he smelled the mildew of stagnate water pools, the blood and bodies of his comrades and subordinates…

Shit!

Where were you?

He was not going to go back to the beginning in some stupid panic haze when he needed to concentrate and focus on finding you. He was good about that.

Rus…less so.

The thinner skeleton slouched even more than normal and stared off into the distance, holding his elbows. His eyesights were bright in contrast to their usual dimness, at there was a slack expression on his face.

Edge almost said something but his phone buzzed in his pocket and he cursed when he saw who it was before accepting the call.

“What is the point of a phone if I can’t reach you through it!?” Edge bellowed, angrier than he had a right to be with his brother.

While Edge huffed angrily Red sounded like he was trying to get his bearings. “…Boss? What’s going on with you? I’m at work but you and the tiny tyrant keep sending me messages-”

“She’s gone.”

“-wh-what?”

Edge choked his words and squeezed the magic out of them before speaking again. “She’s gone. There was a fight behind the Bi-Low and-”

Crack

Edge looked back in time to see Rus pull a familiar looking cell phone from the overturned rubble. It came apart in pieces. Edge could only hope you had fared better than your technology.

“The Bi-Low, shit, hang on, Imma be right there. Give me a sec.”

Edge let the call end as he crossed the distance to reach Rus. He stopped when Rus offered up the phone to see better. “not much left, is there?”

“Can it give you any clues to where she might have gone?” Edge asked.

“i’ll check it out, but more importantly, the security cameras for the parking lot might have picked something else up. i’ll get those and-”

Pop

Red materialized violently, coming out of the void messily and nearly missing the landing as he
tottered to catch his balance. “Where is she? Wha happened?” Red rushed to say, wobbling.

“We don’t know yet,” Edge admitted.

With his brother next to him Edge felt a little saner. It grounded him to know that there was someone next to him. If he was alone he might just fall apart, but if his brother was beside him and relying upon him, Edge could keep it together.

Red looked first to his brother and then to Rus who still cradled the broken phone close to his chest. His eyes scanned the dust and dirt past both of them, no doubt spotting the scorch marks left from someone’s fires.

*Your* fires.

The evidence of a struggle was all around them, impossible to miss.

Red rubbed at his face with both of his hands. “I just saw it too, she tried calling me earlier. It wasn’t too long ago. What could have happened in that time?”

“She said it was the ones who left the organization, the renegades,” Edge explained. “Rus, if you get those security feeds we can cross reference the photos, can’t we?”

“Something like that.”

“How long would that take?” Red asked. “And will it tell us where they took her?”

Edge grimaced, hating how easy it was to read Rus’ expression to Red’s question. No. They were too far out. Nothing would be caught on video here. You had probably picked the spot yourself to avoid involving bystanders or to give yourself the advantage of more room. From training Edge knew you benefited more from the openness of the terrain when you used magic. But he also knew you were a good fighter, even outnumbered…so….

“Where does that leave us?” Red asked in a voice too thin and high to be normal.

“Keep looking for clues. Spread out, see what you can find,” Edge said. “Rus can get to work on tracking video footage of the surrounding area. Maybe something got picked up.”

“I actually might need help with that,” Rus said, looking to Red. “Can you shortcut me back to my room and cover one of the monitors? The more eyes we have looking…”

“Shit, yeah, yeah-I-I can do that,” Red quickly responded.

Like his words, Red fumbled over to where Rus stood and grabbed at his arm before they blinked out together. Edge could only hope their trip was smoother than his brother’s verbal delivery.

With the others gone Edge stood alone in the quiet of the empty field, feeling the weight of his loss double down on his soul.

*Your* absence had teeth.

Like a soldier Edge forced himself to pace, tracking the burn marks and prints left in the dirt. He counted two other prints across from yours, and then a third set removed from the mess; most likely a support member or long rang fighter.

The scuffle in stones and soil told him that you had done well. It didn’t look like you had been overpowered on the ground. There were dead plants scattered in between the rubble and when he
examined one it smelled strongly of something that might be toxic to humans. Did that mean you had run from the gasses? No, your prints didn’t point to that. Your tracks ended in the center and then…nothing.

He heard a pop behind him and turned, expecting to see his brother, but instead Black stood blinking at his surroundings.

“You’ve been here before?” Edge asked, drawing the shorter skeleton’s attention.

“Yes…I…own this parcel of land technically. It’s not slotted for development so…ah, this would be an ideal location for a brawl,” Black answered in a distracted tone as his eye lights flared neon shades of purple as he scanned his surroundings. When his sights landed on Edge he stiffened and folded his hands behind his back and barked out. “Status!”

Edge sneered, recognizing the tone and wording he would use on his own underlings. It was distasteful to have Black boss him around like some sort of lesser, but he could deal with the slight if it meant getting Black’s help faster.

Priorities.

“There was a sustained fight over three fourths of the terrain. Two close range assailants and one long range, possibly support. Tracks and burn markings suggest she was holding her own against the two before toxins were used.” Edge gestured to the patch of land behind him. “The trail ends here. Her phone was recovered in pieces about there where you’re standing. Your brother has it.”

“Where are the exit tracks for the other two fighters she was engaged with?”

Edge pointed to the tracks and found more of those noxious bulbs, dead and withered in between the gravel and dirt, most likely to cover their retreat. Black followed out to the tree line and then broke off to trace it back to the last place those tracks overlapped with yours while Edge went on into the woods.

A minute later Edge heard a sound and jogged back, stopping dead in his tracks when he saw Black, knelt in the dirt with something glittering in between his fingers. Edge stilled as he watched the professional demeanor of a ‘tiny tyrant’ who had cut his teeth in a cruel underground melt into grief. The anger from before fell away as Edge forced himself to watch the way Black lost his composure over a tiny red gem on a broken chain. It made Black’s hands shake and his voice pitch. The necklace didn’t tell them anything new but it was still devastating to see. To Black it must have looked like a shard of your soul he had to dig up out of the dirt or… or the last thing left after a dusting.

Humans didn’t die the same as monsters. When a monster died it dusted, and after that there was no body to hold or miss. Wind and the elements would take care of the remains before long and plenty of monsters in history had dusted without anyone there to witness their ending.

If you died there would be a body.

Right?

The pair gleaned as much as they could from the rubble before leaving. Black offered to shortcut Edge back before hearing about the car being left behind. Edge drove himself back up to the farmhouse and Black followed close behind in your car, unloading the groceries and even carrying
your purse in with him like it was some mechanical routine he always saw to.

Inside there were the sounds of children running upstairs and for a moment Black paused in the kitchen, staring up at the ceiling like it was something he could see through.

“What do I tell them?” he asked, sounding tired.

Edge wanted to feel better about seeing the other skeleton so defeated, but he couldn’t find it in his soul to glean any measure of joy from the situation. The situation was horrible and everyone was going to suffer for it.

“Tell them what we’re doing. We’re looking for her and trying our best to bring her home,” Edge answered. “Blueberry should be with them. They’ll be fine.”

“Yes, I left him with them…he’ll want to know what’s going on. He only knows that she needed help picking up the kids.”

Edge made a face. “He doesn’t know she’s missing? You—who is going to tell him?”

Instead of answering right away Black rubbed at his face. “We’ll explain it when he comes down, maybe when Stretch comes over to help Tron with his homework.”

“Two birds with one stone.”

“Precisely,” Black sighed.

“Then who is going to tell the Classics? They’re not even in town. There’s no way they would know.”

“There’s no rush. We can mention it once we have more evidence to offer up.”

“We?” Edge echoed in petty disbelief.

Black shrugged, but it was less mocking than some of his usual body taunts. “You were the first on the scene. It’s only fair.”

Edge held back a groan. As much as he loathed having to talk with the originals, he couldn’t deny that they were the most experienced with the Embassy programs and the people who you had previously worked for. They might have connections that end up being exactly what they needed.

Edge didn’t have long to worry about that uncomfortable conversation for long, as the stairs echoed with lightning fast footfalls and then in the next moment Blue was sliding into the kitchen on socks the way Peter had taught him how to.

“You’re back!” he exclaimed, tone chipper. “Do you need help unloading anything?”

“We are fine. Is Stretch still at work?” Edge answered when Black didn’t.

Blue checked his phone for the time before replacing it in his back pocket. “He’s got a shift that goes till late tonight, so he won’t be home for another couple hours. Why, did you need him for something?”

“No, but having him here would alleviate some of the tension of this conversation,” Black interjected. He moved to set down your purse on the table and that’s when Blue realized your absence.
“What…is going on?” Blue asked lowly, eye lights fixed on the purse like metal on a magnet. Black didn’t speak up first so Edge took the plunge. “You got a call earlier, didn’t you? I managed to speak with her before she sent out those texts. Apparently while at the grocery store she ran into some people from her past. I drove down as quickly as possible but the result was—”

Blue’s eye lights shrank into pin pricks but never wavered off the purse. “Where is she?”

“We got there as soon as we—”

“WHERE?” Blue breathed, interrupting Edge’s answer with a single broken word.

“She is missing,” Black answered sternly. “She was taken or chased off but at this moment we do not know. We’re working to track her down now.”

Blue took a half step back. In the room no one moved and the silence stretched between all three, thick and heavy enough to be something near physical. Black held himself with his arms crossed behind his back, his posture stiff, and his eye lights unfocused while Blue processed everything he had just heard. There was a dull look on his skull while Edge watched on.

Edge knew better than to think Blue wasn’t running every terrible senario over in his head right now, and worrying about each one.

“We have—you have to go look,” Blue explained, snapping out of his daze long enough to turn and start heading for the door to the garage.

Edge grabbed the smaller skeleton by the shoulder, stopping him. “Not a good idea until we know where to look.”

“What about where she was last seen. There might be some clues!”

“We just came from there,” Black explained.

“When?”

“Just now,” Black answered without flinching. “When I asked you to watch the kids here it was because I needed to go there.”

Blue flushed angrily, glaring sharply back over his shoulder at his counterpart version. “You knew but you didn’t tell me until just now? You knew?! Why didn’t you tell me? I could have helped in the search.”

“We were covered,” Edge sighed.

“You—you don’t know that for sure. Maybe there was something you missed. I could have done something more!”

“You did do something, you watched the children.”

“But why didn’t you tell me then?!”

“There was no merit to sending you off to worry early and needlessly. We already had enough eyes scanning the field, we found her phone and several other useful tracks but nothing else,” Black bit out, sounding harsher and crueler than he had in a long while.

“You mean…” Blue’s voice was angry but thin, “there was no reason to call me there because I
would have been useless?"

“‘You have your uses, Blue, don’t misconstrue my words.’

Blue glared first at Black and then up at Edge. ‘But isn’t that what you mean? That there was no use telling me until just now because I wouldn’t have been useful to you there? That’s what you’re saying!’

“You’re upset,” Edge said, deflating at the sight.

Poor Blue had a right to rage, even though neither he nor Black regretted their decision to leave him in the dark a little longer. There was logic to their decision, but the world wasn’t made just for logic. Blue’s soul was crying out in pain, loud enough that Edge suspected even the other brothers down in the basement would be able to hear it.

“I’m not as useless as you think I am! Tell me where, now!”

Edge didn’t need to clarify what Blue was asking for. “The lot behind the Bi-Low store. You’ll recognize it when you see it.”

Blue barreled past Edge, going straight for the garage. A minute later the roar of his motorcycle echoed before he let loose and tore off onto the main road. From the window they could watch him, a silver and blue streak through the evening light.

“He’s not going to find anything we didn’t,” Black huffed.

“Let him have his moment to grieve. He hasn’t processed it all just yet and he’ll need his own time to sort things out,” Edge explained.

He recognized a bit too much of his brother and himself in the way Blue raged. It had been hard for the two of them to adjust and learn to vent their angers more productively. Blue was always so positive, it must have really rattled him to see him react so strongly.

“Now, an update on the phone restoration would be nice,” Black sighed.

Edge looked back to watch the shorter skeleton head off down the stairs to Rus’ living quarters and lab. Red was down there too, but no one was upstairs watching the kids. That was something everyone else seemed better at than him so Edge sat down at the kitchen table and started a draft to the Classic and Original. **Classic** was the one you called Sans and **Original** was Papyrus, but Edge and his brother were the only ones who used those nicknames.

Original would drop everything and rush over, only to make a mess of whatever he left behind. Classic was…well he had more tact than that, as loathed as Edge was to admit it. He really didn’t like the smirky bastard marshmallow and likely never would. He could make nice and play pretend, but he knew the jerk felt the same way about him.

Still….

He picked up on the fourth ring like the lazy bones he was.

“Hello. You lose a bet?”

Edge ground his molars but forced his voice to work. “I didn’t think you would answer. Weren’t you busy?”
“Not too busy to see what the Edgelord himself is calling for.” In the background there were muffled, far off voices—most likely those from the conference he was in attendance for. “So… what’s got you so rattled?”

“She didn’t call you then?”

Sans’ line went quiet.

Edge took that as his cue to explain.

“She’s missing. Someone from the old Embassy ran into her and we found signs of a struggle and her phone. We thought you should know.”

Edge hung up and tossed his phone onto the kitchen table, too tired to hold himself together anymore. He crossed his arms, elbows on the table edge, and bowed his head between his hiked shoulders. Everything seemed so much colder and he wasn’t sure how he was going to deal with it if they didn’t bring you back soon.

This wasn’t the underground and he wasn’t who he used to be. No amount of cruelty was going to save you tonight. All he could do was wait on the others and hope they had more luck.

All he had were hopes and dreams.

Chapter End Notes

These poor boys.
The thorns didn’t scratch as much anymore. You had managed to figure out a trick or two in pulling back your magic and calcifying its exterior so that the pants inside you couldn’t feed on it. The upside to that was the flowers and plants rotted and died off you, flaking like old skin. The downside, you were unable to touch your magic so long as you wanted to keep those plants dead.

Still, without your magic there wasn’t much hope of getting free, much less of bringing the others with you, and there was no way you were springing free without them.

But then to what end?

Hightower and his mini army were still going to be constant thorns in your side, chasing you down and doing worse than what they already had. First they had come for you, but then it would be the boys, or the kids…

How many people stood between you and your happiness?

It was depressing to even think about. You couldn’t even confidently make a move for fear of retaliation on the outside world. You weren’t the best at hiding. You weren’t your brother.
You rolled off the bed and reached for something to throw, but the only thing you have is your pillow, so you grab that and hurl it at the glass wall in frustration. No one is surprised when the pillow bounces harmlessly off. Across the way the black flamed Grillby watches you, silent as ever, and the injured Papyrus tracked your movements with his smaller than usual eye lights. You wonder if he has trouble seeing.

Bastards. They could help with something like that. Why didn’t they?

You knew the answer.

“You’re looking better.”

You stiffen at the voice and turn to watch Julie, your old nurse, walk up with an android flanking her on either side. One carried a box with food trays slid into it and the other watched on with artificial eyes that never stopped scanning. The woman looked haggard and you hoped she was.

“You are the last person I would have expected to see here,” you hissed.

When they stopped outside your door you backed up to the bed, waiting for them to pull up the panel they could walk through. Julie took one tray and walked in while the others waiting outside.

Julie managed a smile. “Please don’t try anything. My ability to visit you again depends on your behavior.”

“What makes you think I want you to visit me?” you asked.

“The fact that you’re going stir crazy with no one to talk to. You’ve been down here a couple of days already.”

You file that information away for later, knowing that you had been unconscious for most of it and unable to accurately measure the passage of time. How long had you been missing? What were the others doing? How long would they keep trying to find you?

“Why are you really here?” you asked, bowing your head and folding your hands in front of you, submissive enough for Julie to approach and set down the tray with food. “I thought you were better than the rest of them.”

“If I wasn’t here who else would stand in this role?” She put the tray down and dared a step closer. “I do what I can. It is my way.”

You feel her hand on your shoulder and you stare up through the bangs and dark lashes to watch her. “I’m not staying here, Julie. You know that, and you know that Hightower is a fool to think he can keep me here.”

“He’s always been a fool, honey.” Julie leaned in closer to whisper. “But its important that you’re here.”

You felt your heart skip and sputter in your chest as she pulled away and started to leave. She was almost at the door when you stood.

“Wait, what about my health?”

Julie stopped and the androids watched you, most likely recording everything.

“Yes?” Julie asked.
“I…I feel sick. I…have shakes and I can’t sleep well. It was bad before I was brought in too.”

Julie watched you for a moment longer before replying. “That…is troubling. I will see about scheduling a checkup at some later time. What were your symptoms?”

You floundered for a moment, glancing past her shoulder to where the other monsters watched on. “It was…it was from before even coming in here, but it has to do with my magic being out of wack. I feel sick from it. Ever since I lost my eye…” you touched the shut lid that hid from view an empty socket. “A normal doctor wouldn’t do my any good so I didn’t bother with it but…I’ll see you…”

Julie glanced sideways at the android who wasn’t carrying anything. “We’re not cruel here, but I’ll see what I am allowed to do.”

“You don’t think Hightower wants to know?”

Julie inclined her head. “I’ll see what I can do.”

The panel slid shut behind her and you sat on your bed, watching as she distributed the trays of food to both the Grillby and skeleton brothers before being escorted away.

Oddly enough…

This time you could hear sounds from both of the cells. Grillby didn’t talk much, (no surprise there) but you could hear the clink of his spoon or fork on the metal tray while in the other cell, Papyrus was boisterous enough with his voice to have it carry across the hall and be heard by you. Julie must have done something to the sound proofing. Did she do something to the audio recording devices? What about the cameras?

You remembered this site and location. It was one of the older ones, and only specific wings had the fancy updates while the rest was left to the cold war era technologies. If something happened to your wing they’d have to move you there…

“-THINK YOU CAN.”

You looked up, drawn out of your thoughts by the louder than normal voice. Papyrus was looking at you, smiling and waving.

“SEE, BROTHER! I TOLD YOU THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO HEAR US NOW. IT’S DIFFERENT. HELLO, HUMAN, YOU CAN HEAR ME NOW, CAN’T YOU?”

“I can hear you just fine, Papyrus,” you sighed, feeling a measure of warmth flicker in your soul from the familiarity of this stranger. He wasn’t your Papyrus, but he was still Papyrus.

“YOU KNOW MY NAME!”

“Something like that. It might be hard or me to explain how I know that. How much do you know about the world you’re in right now?”


“That sucks. This world is topside, yeah, but isn’t not the same as the world you came from. This is an alternative version of your world, and as such there are alternative versions of you and your
brother already existing in this world. I know them, so that’s why it feels like I know you. I’m
good friends with this world’s Papyrus.”

“FRIEND!” Papyrus gasped in what you hoped was delight.

Before Papyrus could say more a hand on his shoulder tugged him back. Behind him, Sans stood
up and approached the wall. Once out of the shadows the full visual horror of his appearance was
there for you to see. The hole, the scars, the empty eye socket, the angry red color of his remaining
eye light.

He looked just like your Sans, more than even Red, but he was big, larger around as well as taller
with a whole hell of a lot more scars. He looked like something spat out of the blender and you
suspected the dried red stains on his shirt weren’t from ketchup.

Beside him Papyrus didn’t say a word while Sans stared you down. Even Grillby in the next cell
over seemed tense as he waited for what would happen next.

You didn’t look away from Sans as he assessed you.

“alternative world you say?” when he finally speaks his voice is angrier, rougher version of the
one that came from your Sans. “explain.”

So you do.

You don’t leave out the part about being a child soldier. You explain what humans had been doing
in secret and talked about the nature of the bunker you were all trapped in. You spoke about the
day the barrier came down, about how the monsters found a way to live peacefully with the
humans. You told him about the other kids, about you and your brother Raven, about the distance
between you. You told them about the job Hightower had set you out on, and about the monsters
he sent you with.

Papyrus interjected a few times to ask questions, mostly about the other skeletons, while Sans
listened and watched, unmoving and unspeaking until the very end of it.

You finished with a shrug and an excuse. “But I’m not sure what it is Hightower wants from my
brother aside from his powers. To what end he plans on using them its’ not clear.”

“YOUR NAME.”

You blink, caught off guard. “What?”

Papyrus flushed briefly before shaking his head. “Y-YOUR NAME. YOU NEVER TOLD US IT
EVEN THOUGH YOU KNOW OUR NAMES. I COULD ALWAYS STIL CALL YOU HUMAN
BUT THE OTHERS SAID IT WAS DISRESPECTFUL.”

It was an easy question compared to all the weight that came with explaining everything else. You
were happy to share your name with Papyrus, and happier to see his delight grow as a result of it.
“You can call me that or you can keep calling me human. I don’t care.”

Surprisingly enough it was Sans who spoke up. “if you got a name you should use it, no sense in
holding it back.”

So you told them. You heard Papyrus repeat it and then smile. Behind him, Sans echoed the name
over and over and over and over, looking away like he was concentrating on a puzzle he couldn’t
solve.
Papyrus called your name again and this time it was to get your attention, so you look up.

“WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO DO WITH US NOW, OR WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO DO WITH YOU? IT’S BEEN DAYS BUT THERE IS NO CHANGE. NO ONE VISITS US AND OUR MEALS ARE ALL DELIVERED WITH ROBOTS—“

“androids.”

“WITH ANDROIDS INSTEAD OF PEOPLE. I TRY ASKING BUT I GET NO RESPONSE. DO YOU KNOW WHY WE ARE HERE?”

Behind him Sans scoffed. “bro you know why we’re here.”

In his cell beside the brothers, the black flame Grillby stiffened.

“But, this is a new world. Even if we are topside and above ground that shouldn’t…it…” Papyrus looked from his brother to you and you could tell his expression was one of hurt and confusion, even in the dim lighting.

“Don’t feel too bad about it, these people don’t care for justice and aren’t holding you because you’re criminals or saints. It’s because you’re monsters and they need enemies—so you’re the easy scapegoat.”

Sans’ chuckle is dark and sarcastic to match his mocking expression. “oh that’s rich, pal, you don’t even know what you’re talking about or what we’ve done.”

“It doesn’t matter right now,” you say, even though you feel a roll in your gut when he stares at you with one dead socket and a manic grin. You couldn’t help but worry.

“He’s a criminal we brought to justice. One of the few we managed to nab,” Hightower explained in slow words. “Came from a brutal world and would likely bring that cruelty to ours in due time, don’t you think.”

Hightower was a sick racist but he seemed too pleased with some warped sense of justice flavoring his tone when he told you that the other day. According to human standards the monsters in the cells across from you had done some terrible things…

But they were still Sans, and Papyrus, and Grillby.

And the world they had come from had been a terrible one—that much you knew.

“Will you tell me about it?” you asked in a soft, voice.

There is silence in the space between you and Sans scoffs, reaching up to tug on the edge of his good socket, like he needed to feel it was still there, buzzing with magic. Papyrus dropped his face and couldn’t lift it again.

“I-I AM SORRY HUMAN, BUT THAT IS A-”

“They ate people.”

You glanced up at the black flame Grillby as Sans and Papyrus turned to stare at the wall separating them from Grillby. They couldn’t see him, but they heard him perfectly. Sans looked pissed while Papyrus’ expression crumpled. You got the feeling Sans’ rage was more for the emotional hurt his brother had to endure and less for the fact that his secret was out.
“Please,” you called out again, edging closer to your wall. You can’t go any further but you press your hands to the glass. “Please, you can talk to me.”

“You might as well. They’re going to tell her on their own sooner or later,” Grillby growled. His voice sounded more like gravel than what you were used to hearing from the fire elemental, but you suspected that had something to do with the fact that this Grillby was speaking so much at all while yours was far more reserved. “Just tell them what it was like in your world.”

“You weren’t there?” you asked, looking to Grillby.

The fire elemental looked your way and then shook his head. “They called it the SwapFell world. You ever hear of the Tiny Tyrant and the Mutt?”

Your brain tripped back to Black and Rus with a painful throb. “Oh!”

Grillby hummed and nodded. “I guess that answers that. If they know you’re missing they’ll spill blood for you-don’t know if they’ll find you but…last I heard the two of them had been doing…well.”

“Yeah,” you whispered. “Really well.”

Grillby nodded, looking down. “That’s good then.”

You kept your hands against the glass but pushed against it more than before, desperate to get closer to the skeleton brothers. “Please, I don’t mean to offend you, but I know your world was a desperate one. Please, I don’t want to judge.”

Sans had already retreated to the furthest corner of the cell and was crouched down in the darkness. You could see the glow from his single red eye light but little else. Papyrus was shuffling backwards and it hurt to see your friends—or skeletons you already thought of as your friends, pulling away from you when there was nothing you could do. You couldn’t use your magic, you couldn’t start an encounter, you couldn’t reach out and touch them… You felt so helpless.

“I AM SORRY, BUT MAYBE ANOTHER TIME WE CAN SPEAK OF MORE PLEASANT THINGS,” Papyrus called back weakly.

Shit, you messed up. You shouldn’t have tried to press the issue. You shouldn’t have asked. You wished you could take it back but knew better.

“Next time, yeah, but please, don’t…go,” you lamely replied.

Papyrus managed a weak smile. “THERE IS NO SUCH OPTION FOR US, NEW FRIEND.”

Papyrus looked like he wanted to pull away but he stayed by the wall, close enough to hear you and respond. You almost felt guilty for trying to talk with him further. He sounded upset but he couldn’t leave, even if he wanted to. He was trapped.

What was the best thing you could do for him?

“You wanna hear a story?”

He perked up. “A TRUE STORY?”

You tapped the glass and though back to all the bedtimes with Wendy and the kids. “Nah, just a made up one.”
“A…PLEASANT ONE?”

“I’ve got those.”

“THEN,” Papyrus turned back around to face you fully and straightened up. “I THINK I COULD GO FOR A PLEASANT SORT OF STORY.”

The black flame Grillby turned away and it looked like he was resting, but you didn’t mind. You were thinking back for a good enough story to share.

“Once when the land was still young there was a girl who loved her foolish father very much…”

Papyrus sat and listened in rapt attention as you told the story of a girl who’s father was tricked into losing all the land and money meant for his children. In their poverty they spurned him and left as soon as they could, all save his youngest. In the days of her childhood she struggled greatly, but her kindness and compassion were her greatest allies in the world of wild and wicked wonders.

Time after time she helped a creature in distress and was promised a favor she never bothered to remember. From the king of the catfish to the lord of the birds, no creature was too small or insignificant for her help.

When news comes to their hut in the woods of an enactment that has fallen over the youngest seventh son to the king, she is a maid who has helped as many souls as there are stars in the sky. Naturally, she sets out save this soul too, not knowing of the consequences or rewards.

“What happened to the prince?” Papyrus asked, already hooked on the story.

“A sorceress had fallen in love with him and did not want to see him grow old and age, for all things that grow old and age will die, but she was immortal and despised death.”

“She didn’t want to marry the prince for herself?”

“No, just to keep him young forever. So, to prevent others from trying to break her curse, she spirited the prince from his bedchambers to her hall under the mountain. When the daughter reached the castle the king was in despair to learn of his son’s abduction, for no one had seen it happen. No one…but the mice who lived in the palace walls and dark places underground.”

Papyrus gasped, remembering the part of the story when the girl had helped the field mice. He listened intently as the story tumbled on, practically telling itself. Every kindness done came back to bless the girl as the mice told her where to go, the birds flew her there, the fish, the fawn, and the snake all finished trials for her. Finally she stood before the sorceress with the rights to the prince won, but the enchantment still held him, bound in eternal slumber.

“The enchantress whispered words of temptation in the girl’s ear, promising twice what the king had offered, wealth and riches for her poor father that could never be taken away. She promised him an older prince to marry in another kingdom, if only she left the boy behind,” you said.

“She wouldn’t do that. She didn’t even try to help in the first place because she wanted money, she just heard someone needed the help.”

“Very wise, Papyrus, that’s exactly how it happened. She took the slumbering prince back with her, and set him up in his own chambers where she watched over him for a year and a day, reading and caring for the prince who could do nothing but dream.”

Papyrus’ expression crumpled, even as he listened.
“In that year and a day, in the moments that weren’t spent helping others, she knit for him a shroud of back horse hair. By the time it was finished, she had aged a year while he had not, so she did not hesitate to throw the shroud over the prince and trap his curse in it. The curse struggled and the girl took it like a catch of fish in her nets, and wrangled it from the prince until it was separate from him. Then the black bear that waited under her window stood up to open his mouth and eat the curse like fresh dinner. When she turned back the prince was rousing from his slumber.”

“AND DID THEY LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER?” Papyrus asked, nearly surging forward.

It sounded far too cliché, and when you told it you often changed the ending to be ‘they were good friends for the rest of their days’ or ‘she was knighted official helper to the kingdom and awarded riches to last a lifetime while he married a princess’ because those endings sounded more practical, but… Papyrus face was open and pleading in spite of the cracks and scars and disjointed pattern of teeth. He looked like someone from a horror movie, the kind of monster main characters ran from, and your heart hurt to know he had suffered so.

He deserved a happily ever after.

“Yes,” you quietly admitted. “He fell in love with her in a look and she realized her love for him just as well, so the two of them married and they lived… happily ever after.”

Papyrus’ smile stretched. “I LOVED IT. I’VE NEVER HEARD THAT ONE BEFORE.”

“I made it up. Next time time I’ll tell you more.”

“MORE?”

“If you want to hear them.”

“I WOULDN’T MIND THAT AT ALL.”

With nothing else to do you asked him about the stories he liked, only to be surprised when he admitted to loving the fairytales he could find whenever the materials containing one fell down from the surface. He adored the stories with knights the best, going on about their gallant deeds like they were things to be admired. You knew a couple stories with knights in them and offered to share them next time, after you practiced them over in your head a bit.

And Papyrus never spoke about what sort of world he came from, throughout the rest of the conversation, but you gleamed details in between his words that helped you create a patchwork idea of what you thought their world might be like.

Dinner came and you were grateful to see that there was enough food for all of you. At least whoever it was in charge of managing this location wasn’t skimping on the meals. Instead of Julia or another human a pair of androids, (maybe the same ones from the morning) made the delivery. While one was inside setting up your food the other approached you and ran a device with a rolling component over your head before flipping it around to prick at your finger for a drop of blood with the sharp end.

“That all necessary?” you snapped.

Neither android responded.

You didn’t respond with anything more but sat idle on your bed while they exited. You didn’t make a show of watching when they dropped off food for Grillby and then the skeleton brothers. None of them were examined in any such way and you wondered if that meant Hightower was
planning to leave them alone so that he could focus on other things. Starting a file on three new monsters was more work compared to just updating yours.

But work didn’t mean anything to the old man. What mattered was what sort of benefit that knowledge would give him. What did he have to gain from updating your file? What about the other monsters, did he care about them?"

“YOU SHOULD EAT,” Papyrus called worriedly across the hall.

You glanced up to see him and his brother eating their monster food rations with hunched postures, as if protecting their food from others. Was it just you or did their bones seem less healthy? Were they malnourished?

“Thanks, I will,” you say before hopping off the bed to collect your meal.

“keep your energy up, kiddo,” Sans said.

“You’ll need it,” Grillby added from his cell.

It was many hours later, after you had fallen asleep on you cot, when someone came to get you. The same two androids as before but with a third human that had a familiar face you couldn’t place. They tugged you out past the cells where the monsters sleep, unaware.

You followed them through the long, dark hallway, lit only by the emergency lights. Before you were there you thought your recognized the layout. It was similar to the one under the Embassy.

Inside you there were still the plants, waiting to suck up your magic and feast on it, and they stirred once you entered to room and saw Thrive there, along with Esperanza.

Esperanza waved off the androids and they stepped back, leaving you in the middle of the new, blank room with plenty of space between you and the two other girls.

“Even without my magic, I’m confident in my ability to take you both down,” you mocked, “Especially now that it’s something I want.”

“Can it,” Thrive snapped “We didn’t call you here to talk smack.”

“And since when have I ever been the person who does what they are told?” you sneered.

“You’re dumb but you’re not hopeless,” Thrive laughed with a sneer of her own. “You should still know what’s best for you after all this time.”

“Punching you in the face sounds pretty good to me.”

Esperanza rolled her eyes before moving off to stand to the side with her androids. You didn’t doubt she had more than just the two hiding out somewhere nearby. A surprise attack wouldn’t get you very far considering how resilient Androids were to magical and physical attacks.

“You’re such a bitch when you want to be. A dumb bitch.” Thrive threw her hands up and shook her head. “I can’t stand you right now. Wake up and spell the fertilizer already. You’re an idiot. You think you’re doing the right thing?
“I’m holding myself back from removing your teeth with my fist, whore,” you snapped.

“Monster fucker.”

“Ha, try again, but this time, show some effort, ya dollar store reject.”

Thrive’s lip curled and her nose wrinkled. “You seriously-ughh! You have any idea who those two did? They ate children. They killed and ate the children who fell into their underground like wild animals. You wanna defend them now, oh so holy, enlightened one?”

“ Heard that story already, but it sounded too much like something humans did a couple times in the past. I might have failed a lot of school but I remember my ‘brutal histories’ well enough. You ever figure out why these monsters ate humans or did you jump so fast onto the judgment train you forgot to check your ticket?”

“Children! You fucking id-children!” Thrive sputtered with wild eyes. “They were kids and they ate them. We raised the kids here, you and me. We-you sang them to sleep and told them stories with me. We did that. They killed and ate them. How can you not recognize that?”

“Me? What about you?”

Thrive’s face smoothed out and her eyes narrowed. “What about me?”

You felt like vibrating at the memory of it. You didn’t care how you were shouting anymore. There was no point to keeping your voice in check.

“You don’t remember what it was like in the beginning, once we had our magic? We’d exhaust ourselves and they would watch to see how long we could go without ‘sustenance’ just so they could record for their data our limits. They starved us for their answers and you felt it! You felt the hunger that pinched you up inside and gnawed on you like teeth.”

And you realize that’s exactly what must have happened to Papyrus and Sans from that other world as you shout about it to Thrive. It explained so much, like their deformities and malnourished appearances as well as their behaviors.

“I AM SORRY, BUT MAYBE ANOTHER TIME WE CAN SPEAK OF MORE PLEASANT THINGS,” Papyrus called back weakly.

Oh man….

“I can’t forgive them for it,” Thrive hissed, voice tight and eyes hard. “Those were kids and they ripped them up and ate them for food like one damn side dish. If it was up to me they wouldn’t be alive.”

“But it’s not up to you, is it?”

“That’s enough,” Esperanza interjected, speaking up. “You’ve squabbled enough, now we ask and you answer.”

“By all means, ask,” you scoffed, rolling your eyes.

“Where is your brother?” Esperanza asked.

Unlike with Thrive, Esperanza was a head shorter, skinnier by far, and fair colored with blue eyes that never seemed anything but dull. It was so easy to get heated with a person like Thrive who
would shout back, curse, and swear as good as you, but Esperanza never had that sort of energy to her. Maybe it had something to do with her magic levels being so much lower, (she was only a 2 while Thrive was a 4 and you were a 7, after all.) Whatever the reason, when Esperanza stared you down the bite left your words.

“Not here.”

Thrive rubbed at her face, snarling in anger. “Use the damn map and find out, skank.”

“It doesn’t go that far, you know that.” You shook your arms to emphasize the floral tattoo on your forearms. “Plus, someone made damn good sure I couldn’t use magic.”

“I’d let you use it for this.”

“I don’t trust you,” you scoffed.

Thrive raised her hands, fingers curled and nails poised to dig in frustration. She screamed and then dropped her arms when Esperanza stepped in between you two.

“That’s enough for tonight,” the blond began in a tired tone, ”I’ll have those two take you back to your cell. You’ll be more willing to consider the offer in the morning.”

“Bitch.” Thrive added.

“Don’t hold your breath,” you snap, eyes focused more on Thrive.

Behind you the two androids approach and one even grabs for your arm. You yank free but don’t pout up a fight more than that. You would walk back to your cell without struggling… this time. You weren’t strong enough yet.

They led you back to your cell in the dim light and pushed you in roughly enough to make you stumble. When you turned back around the guide lights in the hall were already off and the only thing you could see in the dark was a single red eye, dilated and fixed on you until that too went out.

Chapter End Notes

I’m very happy (sorta) to be at this point where I can now write the horror brothers. I love them and I’m excited to be at this point.

End Notes

Behold my self indulgent, wish fulfillment, monster romance story. Reader in this fic started out being as a 'blank' reader insert, but I couldn't keep it that way. I just wanted to write something and have fun with it, so I poured a lot of my self indulgent
wishes into this fic. I blame my partner in crime Jaylene for leading me down this path. I just wanted to write fluffy things and emotional hurt/comfort but I wouldn't have gotten so far without her encouragement. (So if you end up enjoying it blame/thank her.)

If you have any questions feel free to ask, otherwise, read, enjoy, and lurk to your heart's content. Hope you have fun. You can find me on tumblr but it's all sorta just random stuff:

http://vesperlionheart.tumblr.com/

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!